

Isabella I

The Queen Who Saved Spain

Annotated for Highschool Students

William Thomas Walsh

Christ the King Books

ISABELLA OF SPAIN

BY

WILLIAM THOMAS WALSH

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Walsh wants to explain his method in the next few paragraphs. He thinks modern authors have a bias since they over-analyze other historical periods as if OUR time is the only time men have fully understood things. He also thinks that modern authors try to explain away noble characters by revealing that their motives were REALLY ignoble, or that they were not really good people. He tries to avoid these problems, while at the same time meeting historical characters “where they are” – that is, he tries to understand why they did things a certain why.

This book attempts to tell the amazing story of Queen Isabel of Castile as it appeared to her contemporaries, against the blood-spattered background of her own times. It is a tale so dramatic, so fascinating, that it needs no embellishing or piecing out with the wisdom—or folly—of another age. To probe¹ the inner cosmos of men and women long dead by the light of a pseudo-science², to strip away with pitiless irony all noble or generous appearances, to pry open with an air of personal infallibility the very secret hinges of the door to that ultimate sanctuary of the human conscience which is inviolable³ even to father confessors—that is an office for which I have neither the taste nor the talent; and if I have fallen unawares into any such pitfalls of the devils of megalomania⁴, I beg forgiveness in advance. Under the naive⁵ rhetoric of the fifteenth-century chroniclers there is ample material for what Joseph Conrad called rendering the vibration of life and Michelet called the resurrection of the flesh, without resorting to subjective interpretation. And it has seemed all the more imperative⁶ to follow the sources objectively and let them speak for themselves as far as possible, because, strange as it may

¹ **probe:** 1.) to search into and explore very thoroughly; subject to a penetrating investigation 2.) to examine with a probe

² **pseudo-science:** a system of theories, assumptions, and methods erroneously regarded as scientific

³ **inviolable:** 1.) secure from violation or profanation 2.) secure from assault or trespass

⁴ **megalomania:** 1.) a mania for great or grandiose performance 2.) a delusional mental illness that is marked by feelings of personal omnipotence and grandeur

⁵ **naïve:** 1.) marked by unaffected simplicity; artless, ingenuous; 2.) deficient in worldly wisdom or informed judgment

⁶ **imperative:** not to be avoided or evaded; necessary

appear, the life of Columbus's patron and America's godmother [that is, Isabella] has never been told completely and coherently in our language.

The problems with the already-existing biographies of Isabella

For nearly a century the “official” biography has been Prescott's *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella*. He was a careful and patient scholar to whom we owe a debt of no small size. Yet he was incapable of understanding the spirit of fifteenth-century Spain, because with all his erudition⁷ he could never wholly forget the prejudices of an early nineteenth-century Bostonian. And modern research has opened up treasures of source-material unknown to him. Llorente, whom he followed with blind confidence on the Inquisition, has been proved not only wildly inaccurate but deliberately dishonest, and is distrusted by all reliable historians; many of the original documents unearthed by Lea⁸ and the extremely valuable ones published by Padre Fidel Fita in the *Bulletin of the Royal Academy of History at Madrid* were not available until half a century or more after Prescott wrote. The Columbian investigations of Harriette, Thacher and others have almost completed the portrait of a Discoverer who is human rather than legendary. The studies of Senor Amador de los Rios, Dr. Meyer Kayserling and M. Isidore Loeb have shed new light upon the history of the Spanish Jews. Bergenroth's decoding of the Spanish state papers, many of them still in cipher⁹ when Prescott wrote, has provided a new approach to Isabel's relations with France, England, and the Holy Roman Empire.

Nearly all the biographies of Isabel in the English language, and some in French, have followed the conclusions of Prescott and have adopted his attitude, even when they have made use of later material. When not openly hostile, they have generally

⁷ **erudition:** extensive knowledge acquired chiefly from books: profound, recondite, or bookish learning

⁸ [Author's note] Dr. Lea is so violently prejudiced that his conclusions are untrustworthy and his methods sometimes reprehensible, but he is an indefatigable hunter of facts and documents. His *Inquisition of the Middle Ages* and *History of the Inquisition of Spain* are useful, provided the student takes the trouble to verify his references.

⁹ **cipher:** 1) code 2) combination of symbolic letters

approached the fifteenth century with an air of condescension¹⁰—the worst possible attitude for an historian, for condescension is not a window, but a wall. Even to begin to understand a person (the representative of an age), you must have enough sympathy to imagine yourself standing in his place, holding the same beliefs, having the same information, feeling the same emotions. You can never achieve more than a caricature of him if you keep reminding yourself that he is a medieval ignoramus with faults and passions that you imagine you do not share. You will understand him better if you say at the outset, "Let us see what he believed about himself and the world, and assume as a working hypothesis that it is true: would I, in his place, have done differently?" Humility is the mother of all virtues, even in the writing of history.

Again, to understand a woman crusader who changed the course of civilization and the aspect of the entire world, as Isabel did, it is essential to begin by visualizing the European stage on which she appeared. When she was born, there was no such nation as Spain. She was European, Christian in consciousness, rather than Spanish.

All the chroniclers of the time—Bernaldez, Pulgar, and a generation later, Zurita—keep the reader informed of what is going on not only in Spain, but in all parts of Europe, as an English or American newspaper records the happenings of the world. Colmenares, writing a history of the city of Segovia, takes notice of the fall of Constantinople. For Christendom, the whole European culture was an entity more real to the average man than the limits of the country he lived in. Yet some of the modern biographies of Isabel manage to convey the impression that Italy and France were as remote in her scheme of things as Java¹¹ is in ours. Only by recapturing her concept of a unified Christian civilization can we begin to comprehend the world she was born in.

The tremendous threat of Islam to all of Europe, including Spain

It was a dying world. The west was like some old ship eaten by intestine fires and ready to founder¹² under the waves of a

¹⁰ **condescension:** 1.) patronizing attitude or behavior 2.) voluntary descent from one's rank or dignity in relations with an inferior

¹¹ Java: a populous island of Indonesia in the Indian Ocean

¹² **founder:** sink or submerge

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Chapter 1

ISABEL—HER EDUCATION—LIFE AT ARÉVALO

Note to the reader: The first four chapters of this wonderful biography can be a bit difficult to read, as they are somewhat depressing and give many names. These important chapters show us the extremely sad state of Spain before Isabella became queen. We will see the tremendous moral corruption – including the king himself. We will see the tremendous power that corrupt men held over Spain’s government, including many Jews who had pretended to convert to Catholicism. We will read a bit about the menacing power of the Moslems, who still held Southern Spain, and who were always invading and threatening the Catholic portions of Spain.

Thus, we ask your patience during these first four chapters; after that, this biography becomes glorious; we will then see how God made this spectacular woman a queen who would go on to turn Spain around, including sending Columbus off on his voyages. But skipping these first four chapters will cause the reader to not truly understand the greatness of Isabella. Do not become anxious if you do not understand every family lineage and so on.

Isabel’s lineage

ISABEL was born to the purple³¹ in no ordinary sense. She was more than the daughter of King Juan II of Castile and his second wife, Dona Isabel, of Portugal. Under the pink and white of her skin pulsed the blood of crusaders and conquerors, the blood of Alfred the Great, of William the Conqueror, of the iron Plantagenet Henry II and the fiery Eleanor of Aquitaine, of Edward I and Edward III of England, of Philip the Bold of France, of Alfonso the Wise of Castile. She was descended on both sides from Louis IX of France and his cousin Fernando III of Castile, both kings, both crusaders and both canonized saints. She derived Lancastrian³² blood through both parents from John of Gaunt, brother of the Black Prince. Yet her arrival in a chaotic world on the twenty-second of April, 1451, caused hardly a stir even in the little town of Madrigal. Her father, who was at Segovia, announced the event by proclamation: “I, the King . . . make known to you that by the grace of Our Lord this Thursday just past, the Queen, Dona Isabel, my dear and well-beloved wife, was delivered of a daughter; the which I tell you that you may give thanks to God.” The Infanta was baptized a few days later in the Church of Saint Nicholas, with no especial pomp or display. When the voices of her sponsors rumbled

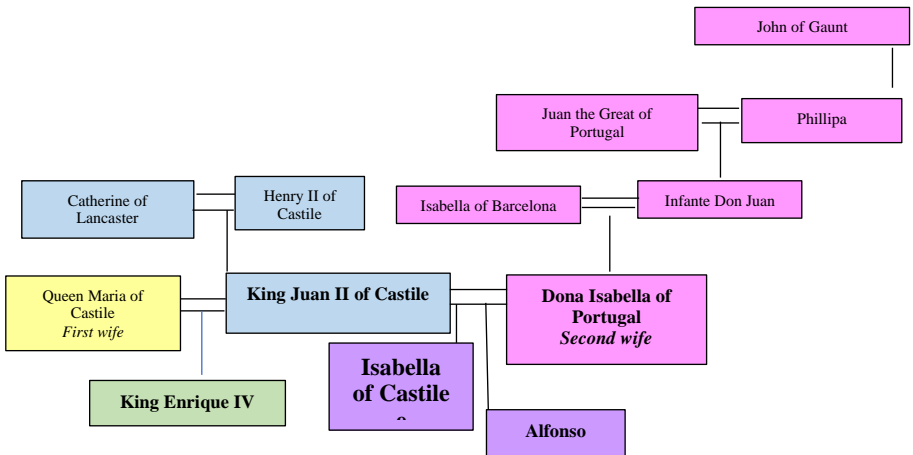
³¹ **born to the purple:** idiom that means born into a royal family

³² **Lancastrian:** of the English royal house of Lancaster

among the arches and arabesques³³ of the old church, renouncing Satan and all his works on her behalf, there was no prophet at hand to cry out that one of the most remarkable women in all history had been born.

During the long and painful confinement³⁴ of her mother, there were certain symptoms of poisoning which, although they yielded to antidotes, left the Queen a victim of a chronic nervous depression. In an epoch³⁵ when the illnesses of the great were often ascribed to the malice of their foes, it was inevitable³⁶ that people should whisper the name of Don Alvaro de Luna, Constable of Castile and Grand Master of the Order of Santiago, especially as that gifted and charming gentleman had long been suspected of having murdered the King's first wife, Dona Maria of Aragon, and her sister, the Dowager Queen Leonor of Portugal.

Isabella's Family Tree



³³ **arabesque:** an ornament or style that employs flower, foliage, or fruit and sometimes animal and figural outlines to produce an intricate pattern of interlaced lines

³⁴ **confinement:** this can refer to the end of a pregnancy before labor, childbirth, and the period of recuperation afterwards.

³⁵ **epoch:** 1a.) an event or a time marked by an event that begins a new period or development 1b.) a memorable event or date 2a.) an extended period of time usually characterized by a distinctive development or by a memorable series of events 2b.) a division of geologic time less than a period and greater than an age 3.) an instant of time or a date selected as a point of reference (as in astronomy)

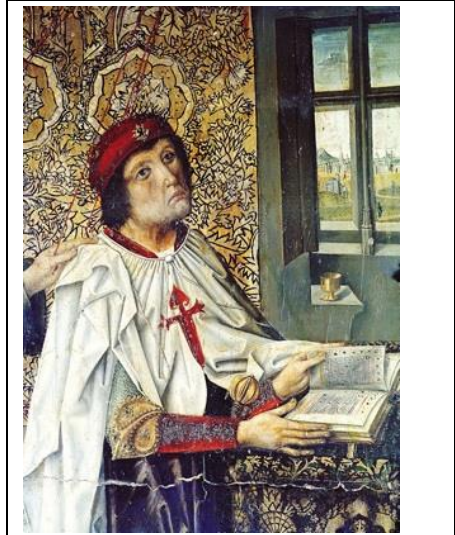
³⁶ **inevitable:** unavoidable

Don Alvaro de Luna and his intrigues

Lean, dark and sinister,³⁷ exquisite in silk and jewels, handsome even in his late middle age, this nephew of the anti-Pope Benedict had been absolute master, for a long generation, of King Juan and of all Castile. He

looted the Crown to make himself fabulously rich, he corrupted the Church by naming unworthy friends for benefices³⁸, he alienated the nobles by his insolence and arrogance, he infuriated the populace by giving high offices and privileges to Jews and Moors, he sowed discord in Aragon, Navarre, France and Italy for his own ends, and he led a life so dissolute that many blamed him for all the moral decay that made the Court notorious. It was in his time, said the chronicler Palencia, that Castile saw the beginning of certain *infames tratos obscenos*, “infamous obscene³⁹ customs which have since increased so shamefully.” Intimate friend as well as prime minister, he dominated the King

completely. He told him what to wear, what to eat, and even when to enter the bedroom of Queen Maria. Various interpretations were attached to the royal complacency. Many suspected the Constable of sorcery. Some said that he was protecting the weak-willed King from his own immoderation; others questioned the legitimacy of Don Enrique, the heir to the throne. But the gossip troubled the King not at all, so long as he was spared the



Don Alvaro managed to get himself painted in the Cathedral of Toledo

Maestro de los Luna, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

³⁷ **sinister:** 1.) singularly evil or productive of evil 2.) accompanied by or leading to disaster

³⁸ **benefice:** 1.) an ecclesiastical office to which the revenue from an endowment is attached 2.) a feudal estate in lands; fief

³⁹ **obscene:** disgusting either to the sense or to morality and virtue

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Juana went ahead and married Enrique, even though she knew that he would not be able to procreate children. Enrique made the disgusting suggestion to Juana that she have a child by adulterating with one of his cronies in the court. That would give Enrique an heir, and nobody would have to know he was not the father. When she refused this gravely sinful offer, he became furious and treated her poorly.

Whatever may have been the motive of Juana in consenting to marry the mere wreckage of a man, she could hardly have been prepared for the pain and humiliation of the next few months. Her husband desired an heir and, according to Palencia, he demanded that the Queen should have a child by one of his intimates.⁸⁷ Juana's instincts being sound, she refused.

Enrique attempted to punish her. He neglected her, he gave her no money, he made her virtually a prisoner, he snubbed her in public. Juana still resisted. The King then sought, and in this he may have been advised by that smiling Marrano⁸⁸ with the perfumed beard, the Marqués, to arouse her jealousy by paying court to one of her ladies-in-waiting, Dona Guiomar de Castro. With principles more elastic than those of her royal mistress, Guiomar made the most of her elevation, even to the extent of patronizing the Queen in the presence of the Court. That was more than Portuguese pride could endure. Juana's fan, smartly slapped across Guiomar's face, left white marks that on the next day were red. Immediately two factions were formed, the party of Her Majesty, and the party of the Lady Guiomar. The Queen in great anguish wrote to her royal brother all she had suffered, but it does not appear that Alfonso V allowed any solicitude⁸⁹ for her honor to come between him and his Castilian policy. However, the Marqués of Villena let it be known that he was a partisan of the Queen. At his insistence Enrique packed Lady Guiomar off to the country, with the gift of a beautiful estate.

⁸⁷ [Author's note] Enrique's two principal chroniclers were Castillo, his chaplain, who recorded chiefly his virtues, and Palencia, who despised him and evidently took pleasure in exposing his vices. Many Spanish historians, including Zurita, commend the veracity of Palencia. One of his latest champions is Senor A. Paz y Melia, who makes out a plausible case in *El Cronista Alonso de Palencia*, Madrid, 1914.

⁸⁸ **Marrano:** Jews of the synagogue sometimes called the converted Jews Marranos, from the Hebrew Maranatha, "the Lord is coming," in derision of their belief, or feigned belief, in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

⁸⁹ **solicitude:** care or concern for someone or something

The Spanish clergy react and condemn the king's scandals

Enrique in self-defense posed as the lover of the corrupt Catalina de Sandoval. He even pretended to be jealous of her lover and had him beheaded. But the scandal was already well known; and a storm was rising. The chief opposition came from the Catholic nobles and those of the clergy who were not Enrique's creatures. At Toledo Cathedral the Dean, Don Francisco de Toledo, denounced⁹⁰ him from the pulpit. Don Alfonso Carrillo, Archbishop of Toledo and primate⁹¹ of Spain, reproved the King first in private and then in public for his evil life and the scandals of his Court and government. Enrique's reply to the Archbishop was to attack the ecclesiastical immunities, to ridicule Church documents and ceremonies and to curtail Carrillo's jurisdiction. In the past this method had been known to silence the criticisms of a certain type of churchman. But in Carrillo Enrique had a different kind of man to deal with; one whom his worst enemies, and he had many, had never accused of lack of courage; and the Archbishop now returned to the attack with all the thunderous gravity and majesty for which he was noted.

It was Enrique's move. It amused him to find that he could kill two birds with one stone. He had grown tired of his affair with the Countess de Sandoval, and was looking for some pretext to get rid of her. The happy thought occurred to him that he might at the same time annoy the Archbishop of Toledo. With a stroke of his pen, he removed from office the pious and efficient abbess of the convent of San Pedro de las Duenas in Toledo, and bestowed the office on the Countess. The convent, he explained, needed to be reformed! Catalina proceeded to reform the community by destroying its discipline and teaching the young nuns the vices she had made notorious in the palace.

A rebellion brews

The cynics of the King's table found it all very diverting⁹². The court wag,⁹³ Don Gonzalo de Guzman, said in a company of nobles, "There are three things that I will not lower myself to take up: the pompous drawl of the Marqués of Villena, the gravity of the Archbishop of Toledo, and the virility of Don Enrique." Others, who had the interests of the Church and the State at heart, saw no humor in the situation. One of these was the

⁹⁰ **denounce:** to pronounce especially publicly to be blameworthy or evil

⁹¹ **primate:** bishop possessing superior authority, not only over the bishops of his own province but over several provinces

⁹² **diverting:** providing amusement or entertainment

⁹³ **wag:** a witty, amusing person who makes jokes

Archbishop himself. Another was Don Fadrique Enriquez, the Admiral of Castile.

Don Fadrique, a diminutive⁹⁴ but very forceful and important gentleman, one of the great land-owners of Castile, had lately increased his prestige by marrying his daughter Juana to King Juan of Aragon. He now began conspiring with other powerful nobles against the hated Marqués and the despised King. With this revolutionary Junta⁹⁵ the Archbishop of Toledo allied himself.

Enrique saw that he had gone too far. His natural impulse would have been to make his peace with the conspirators; but the Marqués of Villena, fearing the influence of the Admiral and the Archbishop, suggested another alternative more profitable to him and more flattering to the King. Why not divert the public gaze from these petty domestic difficulties by a glorious Crusade against the Moors? Nothing was more likely to arouse the national, the racial and the religious emotions of the Castilians. Their ancestors had won back the soil foot by foot from the Infidel; even now from the south came daily stories of Moorish raids into Christian territory, of cattle driven off, of men killed and women ravished. Enrique had long been detested for his partiality for these enemies of the commonwealth, and particularly for his rebuke to the Duke of Medina Sidonia for taking Gibraltar from the Arabs. Here was his opportunity to regain the public esteem and at the same time to divide or win over the conspirators. The Archbishop of Toledo could hardly refuse to support a popular war that he himself had long advocated. Enrique may have found the idea amusing. He appointed as regents in his absence the Archbishops of Toledo and Count Haro, a Christian gentleman of character and ability. A bull of crusade was obtained from Pope Pius II, indulgences were offered under the usual conditions, a fund of 4,000,000 maravedis was raised for expenses, and 30,000 troops assembled at Cordoba in 1458.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ [Author's note] Pulgar, *Claros varones de Castilla*.

⁹⁵ **Junta**: political or military group in power

⁹⁶ [Editor's note]: Walsh had 1557 written.

The success of Enrique's "crusade"



The Andalusia region which forms Southern Spain, with the city of Granada and the Sierra Nevada

Map data © 2023 Google, Inst. Geogr. Nacional with our annotations

History does not record a more pusillanimous⁹⁷ crusade than this. Enrique led his eager host through Andalusia, crossed the Sierra Nevada, and invaded the wide blossoming *vega* surrounding Granada. But it soon became plain that his purpose was not war, but a holiday. He marched up to fortified towns and marched away again without a blow. Some of his cavaliers having been killed in skirmishes with straggling Moors, he forbade skirmishes in future. When some young soldiers set fire to wheat-fields and cut down fruit trees, as was customary in these wars, he whipped them with his own hand, and had their ears cut off. It was a sin, said he, to destroy food. The Moors seemed to attach no great importance to the crusade, for they never came out in force from their walled towns to offer battle; and the suspicion grew in the Christian army that Enrique had assured them they had nothing to fear. From time to time he met groups of them secretly, sat on the ground with them, and, to the great scandal of the chronicler who reports it, ate their honey, raisins, figs and butter without the slightest dread of being poisoned. A king who was a true crusader could hardly have taken that risk. It was his daily custom, too, to retire to an orchard and solace himself with Moorish music. Like

⁹⁷ **pusillanimous:** lacking courage; cowardly

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he joins the rebels. With him goes his disreputable brother, Don Pedro Giron, Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava.

The Rebellion

We interrupt the reading here for an important note about revolt. It is the consistent teaching of the Church that all authority comes from God, that His authority rests on the leaders of the government, and that this authority cannot be thrown off by the people through revolt and rebellion. This can be shown by many arguments from Sacred Scripture, Divine Tradition, and the long history of the Church, including many statements from the popes. Here are a few quotes.

In his encyclical *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, Pope Pius IX quotes his predecessor Pope Leo XIII: “If, however, it should ever happen that public power is exercised by rulers rashly and beyond measure [just as the Founding Fathers claimed about King George III], the doctrine of the Catholic Church does not permit rising up against those rulers on one’s own terms, lest quiet and order be more and more disturbed, or lest society receive greater harm therefrom...Whenever matters have come to such a pass that no other hope of a solution is evident, [the Catholic Church] teaches that a remedy is to be hastened through the merits of Christian patience, and by urgent prayers to God.”

The same pope also writes, “All authority comes from God. Whoever resists authority resists the ordering made by God Himself, consequently achieving his own condemnation; disobeying authority is always sinful except when an order is given which is opposed to the laws of God and the Church. --*Qui Pluribus*, November 9, 1846, §22

Again, in his famous 1862 encyclical *Quanta Cura / Syllabus of Errors*, he also condemns the following statement as a grave error (that is, you have to read this statement as being false): “It is lawful to refuse obedience to legitimate princes, and even to rebel against them.”

As for just one example from Sacred Scripture, there is the story of David. After killing Goliath, David became very popular, and was eventually anointed to be the next king of Israel. The current king, Saul, began to be jealous of, and then to hate David. King Saul tried to murder him several times. During these murderous attempts, David had multiple opportunities to strike back and easily kill King Saul, but he would not so much as lay a hand on him, or even think of revolting from the king whom the Lord anointed. It is a beautiful story (1st Kings, Chapters 13-18). David would not rebel even when his very life was in danger. Keep these principles in mind when you read about the rebels, and how Isabella reacted. King Enrique IV was a terrible king and overall a bad person, but he was still the King of Spain. Also remember the ages of Alfonso and Isabella—Alfonso was only 11, and Isabella was about 13!

Assembling their forces at Burgos in the north, the leaders of the Junta appeal to public opinion in a series of memorable *representaciones*¹⁴³ openly addressed to the King. Certain writers of later ages will misrepresent this document, seeing in it nothing but the

¹⁴³ **representaciones:** representations

peevish expression of the greed of Villena, the vanity of Carrillo, and the jealousy of Don Beltran's other enemies, and failing to discern what gives it such grave importance: the fact that it voices the outraged faith and moral indignation of a whole people. The rebels, whether sincerely or for political purposes, are undoubtedly speaking for the democracy of Spain. The *representaciones* are like a mirror in which Enrique may be seen as he appears to the first people in Europe to exercise the right of representative and elective government. The signatures of many of the greatest lords and prelates of Castile are affixed to the charges.

The King is censured¹⁴⁴ in plain terms for his unchristian opinions and conduct, and his blasphemous and infidel associates, to whose influence are attributed “the abomination and corruption of sins so heinous¹⁴⁵ that they are not fit to be named, for they corrupt the very atmosphere, and are a foul blot upon human nature”; sins “so notorious that their not being punished makes one fear the ruin of the realms; and many other sins and injustices and tyrannies have increased in your reign, that did not exist in the past.” The noblemen declare that that King has allowed in his court open “gibes and blasphemies about holy places and the sacraments.... especially the Sacrament of the Body of our good and very mighty Lord.... This is a heavy burden on your conscience, by whose example countless souls have gone and will go to perdition.” He has destroyed the prosperity of the Christian laboring classes by allowing Moors and Jews to exploit them. His profligacy¹⁴⁶ has so debased the currency that prices have soared beyond all reason, and merchants cannot dispose of their goods at the fairs. His officials practice extortion¹⁴⁷ and bribery on a huge scale, while hideous crimes go unpunished, and robber barons capture citizens and hold them for ransom. He has made a mockery of justice and government by his vicious appointments. He has corrupted the Church by casting good bishops out of their sees and replacing them by hypocrites and politicians.

Then comes a paragraph in which it is not difficult to see a trace of the subtle hand of the Marqués of Villena:

“The thing that makes our hearts bleed is to see Your Highness in the Power of the Count of Ledesma [Don Bertran.]”

¹⁴⁴ **censure:** to formally reprimand (someone) : to express official censure of (someone)

¹⁴⁵ **heinous:** hatefully or shockingly evil

¹⁴⁶ **profligacy:** reckless extravagance

¹⁴⁷ **extortion:** an act of obtaining something from a person by force, intimidation, or undue or illegal power

And perhaps it is the plain-speaking Archbishop of Toledo, he who has denounced Don Beltran as a monster, who is responsible for the next bombshell:

“Dona Juana, the one called the Princess, is not your daughter.”

Finally, the grave charge is made that Don Beltran “has used the King's authority to gain possession of the illustrious *senores Infantes* Don Alfonso and Dona Isabel; to the great injury of your royal dignity and the shame of the inhabitants of these kingdoms, for they fear lest certain persons under the influence of the will of the said Count procure the death of the said *Infantes*, so that the succession of these kingdoms may devolve upon the said Dona Juana.”

In conclusion the barons “beg and require” that no marriage shall be forced upon the Princess Isabel without the consent of the three estates of the realm, assembled in a Cortes, in accordance with the will of her father King Juan, “and as reason dictates.”

The Grand Mastership of Santiago must be restored to Prince Alfonso. Prince Alfonso must be recognized as heir to the throne in place of *La Beltraneja*. When Enrique received those *representaciones* at Valladolid, he ran immediately to the Queen and the Count, and enacted a scene, while Don Beltran



Juana la Beltraneja

António de Holanda, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

swore, and Juana listened in contemptuous silence. The King was lost, he was betrayed, he would be killed, he must surrender. The next moment he was for cutting off the heads of all the rebels. He thought of fleeing to Portugal. He thought of giving battle. Why could no one advise him? Where was Villena? Why had he ever let him go away?

The king's reaction and the subsequent compromises

His paroxysm over, he listened to reason and became confident again. The Queen was certain that her child would be a boy. His birth would rob the conspirators of the issue they had raised over *La Beltraneja*.

It was not to be. Juana's son was born prematurely, dead, and *La Beltraneja* was again the center of the conflict. Enrique, in a new panic assembled his council and asked for advice.

In the opinion of some, the King still had the whip hand, if only he acted firmly and promptly. Belief in the sacredness of royal authority was stronger in Castile than in Aragon. And if Villena was jealous of Beltran, who was more envied than Villena? His enemies would be the King's friends... At length the aged Bishop of Cuenca, who had been a counsellor of King Juan II, declared that there were no two sides to the question they were wasting time upon; a king who hoped to preserve his royal authority could have no dealings with rebels who defied him, except to offer them battle.

Enrique's flabby mouth curled into a sneer. "Those who need not fight nor lay hands on their swords," he said, "are always free with the lives of others."

A moment of eloquent silence. The King, it appeared, would purchase peace at any price. There was nothing more to be said. The old Bishop rose, his eyes aflame, his voice trembling with bridled¹⁴⁸ anger.

"Henceforth," he cried, "you will be called the most unworthy King Spain has ever known; and you will repent of it, Senor, when it is too late!"

Enrique sent a hysterical appeal to the Marqués of Villena. That dexterous gentleman, after quickly weighing the pros and cons, informed his fellow-conspirators that it would be unwise, dishonorable, disloyal, not to say impious, to take the field against the lawful king until all peaceful means had been employed, and he volunteered, if they would delegate him, to obtain from Enrique the best possible terms for all of them. With some reluctance, they agreed, knowing that if anyone could manage the King, it was Villena. A series of conversations followed between the King and the Marqués. The upshot was an agreement known as the Concord of Medina del Campo, perhaps the most humiliating document ever signed by a monarch. For Enrique agreed to these stipulations:

Don Alfonso is recognized as Prince of the Asturias and lawful heir to the throne—virtually a confession of La Beltraneja's illegitimacy. Don Beltran, Count of Ledesma, will resign the Grand Mastership of Santiago in favor of Alfonso, and will retire from the Court with certain of his henchmen. Enrique will not increase certain taxes without the consent of the Cortes. Enrique will hereafter confess his sins and receive Holy Communion at least once a year.

Isabel's brother had suddenly become a personage of the first importance in Castile. The question arose, who should be his guardian. With amazing short-sightedness, Enrique delivered him into the custody of the Marqués. The royal humiliation was complete.

¹⁴⁸ **bridle:** to restrain, check, or control with or as if with a bridle (a horse's harness)

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and came to the notice of our Bishop Don Juan Arias de Avila,²⁸⁷ who, as higher judge at that time in causes pertaining to the Faith, proceeded in this matter and, on investigating the crime, had brought to our city²⁸⁸ sixteen Jews of the principal offenders. Some finished in the fire;²⁸⁹ and the rest were drawn and hanged in that part of the meadow occupied today by the monastery of *San Antonio el Real*. Among them a boy, with signs of repentance and many supplications, begged for Baptism and for his life, that he might do penance by entering and serving in a certain monastery of the city. All his requests were granted—though it is known for certain that as a double apostate he fled within a few days. Better advised were the people of Sepulveda, who, distrusting those (Jews) who remained there, killed several and forced the rest to go out of that territory, (thus) completely uprooting so pestilent a seed.”²⁹⁰

This passage, containing as it does the lurid²⁹¹ spark of a much greater subsequent conflagration, is highly important in the light it sheds upon the state of public opinion in Segovia during the spring of 1474 [six years after the horrific, blasphemous crime outlined above,] when Pacheco [the Marqués] cast his acquisitive eyes in that direction. Don Juan Arias de Avila, son of Jewish parents, was still the bishop there; and the Alcaide, or royal governor, was Cabrera, the friend whom Pacheco [the Marqués] had betrayed.

Now we discover the Marqués's crime. He decided to incite the Christians to massacre all the Jews in Segovia, whether genuine converts, false converts, or practicing Jews and whether or not they were criminals. This way he could have Cabrera killed (who was a genuine convert.) This was not a response to a specific crime or an unfortunate act of unruly mob justice—it was an evil, treacherous, unjustified plot. It is an especially appalling crime since peace was so fragile, and the Marqués himself had Jewish lineage!

Cabrera was a man of capacity, but he was a *Converso*, and therefore unpopular with the Old Christians. When a gust of rage passed through

²⁸⁷ [Author's note] This bishop was a son of the converted Jew Diego Arias de Avila, treasurer of Enrique IV.

²⁸⁸ [Author's note] Segovia.

²⁸⁹ [Author's note] This occurred thirteen years before the Inquisition was established in Castile.

²⁹⁰ [Author's note] This important passage has been omitted from several editions of Colmenares. It appears, however, in his original autograph manuscript, in the archives of the Cathedral at Segovia. It is given also in the edition of Diego Diez, Madrid, 1640, and in the edition printed at Segovia in 1921, cap. XXXIII, No. 2.

²⁹¹ **lurid:** causing horror or revulsion, gruesome; melodramatic, sensational

the cities of Castile after the Cordoba massacre of 1473, the Marqués saw a chance to pay old scores, get rid of Cabrera, and then obtain the rule of Segovia from the King. All this might be done under cover of a popular uprising against the *Conversos*. Pacheco, regardless of the Jewish blood that flowed in his own veins, arranged the massacre, sent his troops secretly to Segovia, rode thither himself.²⁹²

On Sunday, May 16, the *Conversos* awoke to find Segovia full of armed men, crying for their blood. Hoofs rang on the pavements, swords rattled, bullets pelted the walls, while Pacheco's men everywhere carried fire and slaughter into the houses of the "converted" Jews. The flames greedily lapped over the hillside, devouring house after house. The corpses lay in great tangled piles on the streets.

Fortunately, news of the plot had somehow reached Cardinal Borgia, the Papal Legate, at Guadalajara. He sent a warning to the King, who notified Cabrera at the eleventh hour. The Governor had barely time to snatch his sword, rally some of his troops, and dash to the rescue of the *Conversos*. He fought with reckless bravery and great skill. His men, inspired by his valour, swept the streets clear of Pacheco's men, and then rode down the Old Christian mob. The Marqués and his hirelings fled from the city.

The Queen's reaction

When Isabel and Fernando arrived at Segovia, there were still foul-smelling splotches of blood on the pavements and the walls of houses—the whole place stunk of charred timbers, rotting flesh, carnage, pestilence. Isabel commended Cabrera in the warmest terms, affectionately welcomed his wife Beatriz, passionately denounced those who had been the fanatical tools of Pacheco. On a recent occasion she had already shown, with a spirit reminiscent of her brother Alfonso, that she had no intention of currying popularity by even a tacit²⁹³ approval of the massacres. She had found Valladolid boiling with hatred, the populace ready to fall upon the detested Marranos at the slightest provocation. Some of her partisans, influential cavaliers of the city, began egging on the multitude. Isabel and Fernando fortunately learned of it in time. Putting principle above party advantage, both condemned

²⁹² [Author's note] Amador de los Rios, *Historia de los Judios*, Vol. III, pp. 162-3.

²⁹³ **tacit:** implied or indicated (as by an act or by silence) but not actually expressed

the nefarious²⁹⁴ work in unequivocal language; in fact, they stopped a riot that had already begun.²⁹⁵

Isabel and Fernando strongly condemned the massacre. However, many of their supporters, angered by the Jews, left the Prince and Princess after they condemned the unjust massacre. These former supporters now supported King Enrique. Since he had recently been plotting their kidnappings, Fernando and Isabel had to flee.

The plain speech of the young Prince and Princess cost them dear, for several of their most valuable adherents in Valladolid went over to the cause of Enrique. From then on the lives of Fernando and Isabel were actually in danger.²⁹⁶ They fled from the city with Carrillo, stayed for another while at Duenas, and later proceeded to Segovia.

During the days that followed Isabel and her husband discussed the state of Castile with several of the chief men of Segovia, with Cabrera, with the bishop Don Juan Arias de Avila, possibly with the humble and abstemious Fray Tomas de Torquemada, prior of the Dominican convent of Santa Cruz. There were counsels of anger and counsels of despair. What could save the land from utter ruin, from an anarchy that might end in a second conquest of the peninsula by the Mohammedans, applauded by Jews and *Conversos*? What could make the children of Israel stop exploiting the Christians and proselytizing, even as Christians, to destroy Christianity? And what could make the Christians stop massacring the Marranos on every provocation? The answer must have been obvious to the young princes. It was probably then that they formed the solid resolution that if ever they came to the throne of Castile they would subordinate all lesser considerations to the one great essential need of a government strong enough to be feared and respected by all classes. If the royal absolutism, the new caesarism of Spain, was not conceived among the cinders and bloodstains of Segovia, it was probably quickened there.

²⁹⁴ **nefarious:** infamous by way of being extremely wicked

²⁹⁵ [Author's note] Amador de los Rios, *Historia de los Judios*, Vol. III, pp. 161 et seq.

²⁹⁶ [Author's note] Mariana, *Historia*.

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Benavente, since both were anathema to the mob. Several cavaliers added their respectful admonitions to the Bishop's.

The cold passion of Isabel's reply cut short their ceremonious speeches. "Tell those cavaliers and citizens of Segovia that I am Queen of Castile, and this city is mine, for the King my father left it to me; and to enter what is mine I do not need any laws or conditions that they may lay down for me. I shall enter the city by the gate I choose, and the Count of Benavente shall enter with me, and all others that I think proper for my service. Say to them further that they shall all come to me, and do what I shall command like loyal subjects, and cease making tumults and scandals in my city, lest they suffer hurt in their persons and their property."⁴¹⁵

So saying, she clapped spurs into her jaded horse, brushed past the bishop and the gaping cavaliers and, followed by her three friends, galloped through the gate of Saint John. She went directly to the Alcázar. Disregarding the Cardinal's advice, she pushed through the howling mob. Swords and spears flashed about her in the morning sun. She pressed on to the small courtyard near the tower. The bishop followed, vainly trying to quiet the people. The mob surged around the little group.

"Kill them all!" they cried. "To the sword with the friends of the Mayordomo! Down with Cabrera! Storm the tower and kill them all!"

The Queen, silent, haggard and dusty on her white horse, faced them. The Cardinal leaned toward her. Urgently he begged her to have the gate of the Alcázar closed, that no more of the mob might enter the court. The Queen shook her head.

"Open the gates wider," she said, "and bid them all come in."

The gates creaked.

"Friends," shouted a cavalier, "the Queen commands that all come in, as many as can."

A murmur went over the crowd. The Queen! After a hesitation there was a forward seething of the human sea, and all overflowed into the court. The Queen waited for silence. The Cardinal, indifferent to his own safety, watched her with a mixture of admiration and fear. Her words, clear and resonant, sped like arrows over the heads of the shoving and grumbling people:

"My vassals and servants, say now what you desire, for what suits you is agreeable to me, since it is for the common good of the city."

It was the complete confidence in her bearing and in her musical voice that silenced them. Fear would have been fatal, but Isabel in a crisis was no longer the tender mother and the womanly wife, but one of those

⁴¹⁵ [Author's note] Pulgar, *Cronica*.

mugeres varoniles,⁴¹⁶ like Juana of Aragon and the Amazonian Countess of Medellin, in whom the cruel times and many hardships bred masculine qualities before which the most hardened ruffians quailed⁴¹⁷ and hung their heads. “My city . . . my kingdom . . . my vassals and servants.” Her attitude was always proprietary.⁴¹⁸

A leader of the mob, motioning for quiet, stood forth as spokesman to relate their grievances at length.

“Señora,” he began, “we have several supplications to make. The first is that the Mayordomo Andres de Cabrera no longer have the keeping of this Alcázar! The second. . .”

“What you wish, I wish. He is removed. I shall take possession of these towers and walls and commit them to a loyal companion of mine, who will guard them with loyalty to me, and honor to you.”

A howl broke from the crowd, a howl of triumph and approbation. “*Viva la Reina!*” It was the same motley, swarthy multitude that had screamed those words to her that winter morning three years ago, when she rode out of this very court to be crowned. “*Viva la Reina!*” The people outside the gate took up the cry. In a trice the men who had been cursing Cabrera were clamouring for the blood of Maldonado and his partisans. The rebel leaders fled for their lives. By noon the towers and walls had been cleared of them, and the Queen was in complete possession of the Alcázar. Her first thought was to embrace the Princess, from whom she had so long been separated. Then she rode in weary triumph through the streets to the palace near the church of St. Martin, followed by a mob that all but smothered her in their joy and admiration. From the steps of the palace, she made a brief speech, promising them protection from the tyranny of Cabrera and all others, bidding them go peacefully to their homes, promising that if they would send a committee to her to explain all their grievances, she would have justice done. The multitude melted away. The Queen entered the palace, threw herself on a bed, and slept.

⁴¹⁶ *mugeres varoniles*: manly women

⁴¹⁷ **quail**: to cower in fear

⁴¹⁸ **proprietary**: of, relating to, or characteristic of an owner or title holder



Isabella at the Alcázar of Segovia

Bernard Gagnon, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Subsequently, when she considered the complaints laid before her by the committee and sifted them to the bottom, she concluded that Cabrera himself was innocent of the charges against him, though some of his subordinates had committed minor tyrannies, and that most of the animus⁴¹⁹ against him could be traced either to envy on the part of men who wanted his post, or to the strong Old Christian prejudice against him as an influential *Converso*. She reinstated him. That other *Converso*, Don Juan Arias, repented of his part in the day's work, bethinking him that the Queen might have a long memory and a long arm. The time was coming, though he little suspected it, when he would have a particular need of her friendship.

⁴¹⁹ animus: ill will



**The Alcázar of Segovia, the scene of Isabel's heroic rescue of
her daughter, the Infanta Isabel**

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Wikimedia Commons*

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the old foes. Hence, she ordered both to stay on their estates, and not to enter Seville under pain of death.

About the first of December the Court returned to Seville for the winter. On Christmas Day that year, Isabel and Fernando issued the first known royal decree on printing. Thierry Martins or Dierck Maertens, the famous Alost and Louvain⁴⁷⁵ printer whose disappearance from 1476 to 1480 so long remained a mystery, appeared that winter in Seville, where he was called Theodoric the German, or Teodorico Aleman. Isabel's decree of December 25, 1477, makes him exempt from taxation, as "one of the chief persons in the discovery of the art of printing books, an art imported into Spain at great risk and expense, to enrich the libraries of the kingdoms, and providing more books for many learned men of our kingdoms, which redounds to the honor and utility of them and of our subjects." Anyone who hinders Thierry or his workmen companions is threatened with civil and criminal prosecution and the confiscation of his property.⁴⁷⁶ The first book printed in Spain was a collection of songs in honor of Our Lady, 1474, followed by an edition of Sallust, 1478, and a translation of the Bible into Castilian, 1478, by Father Boniface Ferrer. Isabel, who had found time even during the war to add to her father's collection of illuminated manuscripts, immediately saw the possibilities of the new invention.

Seville, chastened by the Queen's justice and restored to tranquility by her mercy, enjoyed a gay winter outwardly, whatever discontents may have rankled under the surface. Spring came, and with it some interesting news from Portugal. A wondrous mine of gold, discovered at St. George la Mina six years before, was making the Portuguese fabulously rich. It was said that the naked black barbarians would give a nugget as large as a man's fist for an old suit of clothes, or a few hawk's bells. From Seville, from Cádiz, from every Port of Spain, caravels⁴⁷⁷ and galleys set sail, and one ship brought back 10,000 pesos (twenty thousand pounds—English money) in gold.

Prince Juan

But the most common topic of conversation in the Court and all Spain was the Queen's approaching *accouchement*.⁴⁷⁸ Prayers were said for her in the churches of Castile and Leon; and there was great joy, and much

⁴⁷⁵ **Alost and Louvain:** cities in Belgium

⁴⁷⁶ [Author's note] There are two facsimiles of this decree in the Yale Library.

⁴⁷⁷ **caravel:** any of several types of small, light sailing ships, especially one with two to four masts and lateen sails used by the Spanish and Portugues in the 1400s and 1500s

⁴⁷⁸ *accouchement:* a confinement during childbirth

ringing of bells and firing of cannon, when she gave birth to a son on the morning of June 30th.⁴⁷⁹ The King, according to ancient custom, commanded Garci Tellez, Alonso Melgarejo, Fernando de Abrego and Juan de Pineda to be present as witnesses with the midwife, a woman of Seville called *la Herradera*; and the tiny Prince, on his arrival, was committed to the care of a wet-nurse of noble family, Dona Maria de Guzman. The people of Seville celebrated for three days and nights.

Prince Juan was taken to the Cathedral to be baptized on the ninth of July. Fortunately for curious posterity, there stood among the spectators a young priest with the eye of a society reporter, who set down all he saw in detail. The chapel where the baptismal font was, and the pillars of the whole forest of marble and granite, were draped with brocades and silks of all gay colors imaginable. Followed by the glad cries of the people, and held on a pillow of red brocade in the arms of a nurse, the royal child entered the Cathedral at the head of a splendid procession, including the Court, the foreign ambassadors, the officials of Seville, and the great prelates and nobles of the south. First came Cardinal Mendoza, "the third King of Spain," followed by the distinguished godfathers, the Papal Legate, the Ambassador of Venice, the Constable of Castile, and the Count of Benavente.

In Spain no such ceremonial is complete without music. So, there were *infinitos instrumentos de musica*, including horns of all sorts from the highest piccolo to the throatiest basso profundo. The magistrates of Seville carried the rods of justice in their hands, and all wore new robes of ornamental black velvet that the city purchased for the occasion. Don Pedro de Stuniga guarded a great silver dish containing the baptismal candle and the customary offerings. Before him, carrying the dish, walked a page so small that he held it atop of his head, steadying it with his hands, that the people might see that the offering was a great gold *excelente* made of 50 melted gold pieces. Walking beside this midget were two damsels of the Queen, and behind them two brothers of noble birth with a gilded pitcher and a golden cup for the ceremony. The high-born wet-nurse was attended by four grandes of the court, and many other *caballeros*⁴⁸⁰ and notables. Last of all, in a burst of splendor, came the godmother, the Duchess of Medina Sidonia, carried, "for greater honor," on the haunches of the mule of the Count of Benavente, and followed by nine damsels clad in silk of different colors, with silken skirts and tabards.⁴⁸¹ The Duchess

⁴⁷⁹ [Author's note] Bernaldez, *Historia*, cap. xxxii. Prescott's date is an error.

⁴⁸⁰ *caballeros*: knights

⁴⁸¹ **tabard**: cape or coat usually emblazoned on the front and back with a coat of arms

herself, with a heavy chain at her neck, wore a rich skirt of brocade, embroidered with pearls, and a tabard of white satin lined with damask. At the feast that followed the baptism, the King and the Court were very festive and merry. King Fernando's pet dwarf, Alegre, was never more amusing. As he admired the tabard of the Duchess, she sent it to him after the banquet.⁴⁸²

You may be asking yourself, “where was Queen Isabel?!” Historically, a baby would be baptized as soon as possible since babies often died in those days, and without baptism (of some form), one cannot be saved. But with most births, the mother was still recovering in bed and usually couldn’t attend. Instead there was an additional ceremony called the “churching” of the mother, which was a special blessing for the mother after she had recovered from childbirth. The priest said a prayer of thanksgiving for the woman’s survival of childbirth. This practice of churching is based on the purifications required by the Old Law, but instead of an emphasis on cleansing and purification, there is an emphasis on thanksgiving. We see Our Lady, St. Joseph and Our Lord go through the old Jewish rites in Luke 2:22 at the Presentation of Our Lord.⁴⁸³

Just a month later, on a Sunday in August, the Queen went to Mass to present the Prince at the temple, as the Infant Jesus had been presented in Jerusalem by His Mother. The King went before her, very splendid on a small silver-grey nag. His Majesty wore a sumptuous brocade trimmed with gold and a sombrero bordered with thread of gold, and the trappings of his horse were of gold on a black velvet. Queen Isabel sat on a small white horse with a gilded saddle and caparisons of gold and silver, and her silk skirt was woven with pearls. With her went the Duchess of Villahermosa, and no other lady. Following joyously were many musicians; and walking before their Majesties were the officials of the city, on foot, and the *grandes* of the court.

The nurse of the Prince followed on a mule, proudly bearing the Prince on a pillow in her arms. *Grandes* of the court surrounded her, and with her went the Admiral of Castile. “That day they said Mass at the bright altars of the Cathedral *muy festivamente*,”⁴⁸⁴ wrote Bernaldez,⁴⁸⁵ and all returned to the Alcazar.

⁴⁸² [Author’s note] Bernaldez, *Historia*, cap. xxxii.

⁴⁸³ Catholic Encyclopedia, “Churching of Women.”

⁴⁸⁴ *muy festivamente*: very festively

⁴⁸⁵ [Author’s note] Bernaldez, *Historia*, cap. xxxiii.



The Baptism of Prince Juan

Francisco Pradilla y Ortiz, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Three weeks after this event the people of Seville and all Andalusia were terrified by a total eclipse of the sun. Scientists in the Dominican college at Salamanca had expected it, and observed it, but the populace was sorely troubled when the sun became black in the middle of the day, and the stars appeared as at night. With cries and prayers, they rushed into all the churches to implore God not to destroy them. Bernaldez reports that the sun did not resume the natural clear color it had the day before the eclipse.⁴⁸⁶ Astrologers looked solemn and gave various interpretations. Some said it was a good omen of the greatness of the King and Queen and of the mighty power that the Prince Don Juan would inherit. Others feared disasters for the Prince and Castile.

Religious tensions continue

Over the heads of some unfortunate inhabitants of Seville, at any rate, a storm was indeed gathering. It was about this time that the Bishop of Cádiz reported the results of his investigation. He told the Queen what she had long suspected, that most of the Conversos were secret Jews, who had kept contact with the Jews of the synagogue. They were continually winning over Christians to Judaical practices. They were “on the point of

⁴⁸⁶ [Author’s note] Bernaldez, *Historia*, cap. xxxiv.

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religious of the mendicant or the non-mendicant orders, above forty years of age, of good conscience and exemplary life, masters or bachelors in theology, or doctors in canon law or licentiates carefully examined, God-fearing men, whom you shall consider worthy to be chosen, for the time being, in each city and diocese of the aforesaid kingdoms according to the needs of the places. . . . Furthermore, to the men thus designated we grant, in regard to those accused of these crimes, and in regard to all who aid and abet⁵⁹⁵ them, the same judicial authority, peculiar rights and jurisdiction as law and custom allow to Ordinaries and Inquisitors of heretical perversity.”⁵⁹⁶



Queen Isabel viewing the corpse of her father, King Juan II of Castille.

Luis Álvarez Catalá, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons See also: Isabel la Católica in the Carthusian monastery of Miraflores - Collection - Museo Nacional del Prado (museodelprado.es) <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/isabel-la-catolica-en-la-cartuja-de-miraflores/776a4bfd-2266-4b54-94b7-8aa84d8f9f32>

This text makes it clear that Isabel's agent in Rome had represented the Inquisition to the Pope as a necessary war measure during a crusade; a temporary one – “for the time being”; and one that would be conducted in cooperation with the bishops, according to the practice that experience had

⁵⁹⁵ **abet:** to actively second and encourage (something, such as an activity or plan); to assist or support (someone) in the achievement of a purpose

⁵⁹⁶ [Author's note] The complete Latin text is given in the *Boletins*, Vol. IX., p. 172.

taught was needed to prevent abuses. As the royal petition reached the Pope, the only new feature of it appeared to be the request that he permit the sovereigns to name the Inquisitors. That was unusual, but so were the conditions in Spain. Sixtus could have had no idea that the Spanish tribunal would exist for three centuries to come.

During the panic over the fall of Otranto—on September 26, 1480—the King and Queen published the bull as part of an edict establishing the Inquisition in Castile. The text of this document shows that their purpose was not merely to punish or to persecute for the sake of intolerance; it was in part at least to prevent a repetition of the ghastly massacres of the Conversos. The aim of the new court, the edict stated, was not only to punish the Judaizers who sought to draw simple-minded Christians from the true faith, but also “to protect faithful Christians” among the *Conversos* “from unjust suspicion and persecution.” Two Inquisitors were appointed: Fray Juan de San Martin, bachelor of theology, and Fray Miguel de Morillo, master of theology. They were given to understand in the plain language of the edict that their responsibility was no longer to the Pope but to the royal Crown. “We command you,” said the edict, “to accept this office.” Failure on their part to carry out the royal commands would be punished by the confiscation of their goods, and the loss of their citizenship; they could be removed at any time by the King and Queen.⁵⁹⁷

Isabel and Fernando may not have been aware at this stage that their ambassador at Rome had in reality tricked the Pope into granting them powers that would be used to the glory of the State and the discredit of the Church. Isabel, at least, despised all double-dealing; and it may be significant that her name appears less frequently than the King's on the correspondence with Sixtus. “Fernando had so contrived that the duty, which the Church was bound to perform, and which the Pope could neither refuse nor evade, of declaring where errors in faith existed, should be made subservient⁵⁹⁸ to the State purpose of detecting high treason, then identical with Judaism; while the Church itself could exercise no controlling influence whatsoever to stay the terrible retributions⁵⁹⁹ awarded by the criminal courts of the realm.”⁶⁰⁰ In short, the Inquisition, as Fernando arranged matters, was religious in form only; in spirit and purpose it was

⁵⁹⁷ [Author's note] The Spanish text of this edict is published in the *Boletín*, Vol. XV, p. 448 et seq

⁵⁹⁸ **subservient:** 1.) useful in an inferior capacity; subordinate 2.) serving to promote some end

⁵⁹⁹ **retribution:** “payback,” something given or exacted in recompense, especially punishment

⁶⁰⁰ [Author's note] *Dublin Review*, Vol. IX, p. 172.

the instrument of the new Caesarism to which events had gradually led him. Its judges were to be Dominican friars; but the friars were servants of the State, not of the Church.

It is entirely possible that Fernando carried Isabel, as well as Sixtus, into deeper waters than she realized. Nevertheless, the Queen never shirked her share of the responsibility for the Holy Office. And there is no contemporary evidence to support the theory by which most of her biographers, anxious to reconcile her natural kindness and rectitude with her severity against the *Conversos*, have attributed her long delay to what would now be called “humanitarian” motives. All such well-intentioned efforts arise from a failure to understand the perilous conditions in which she labored—the war psychology of Spain, the challenge of the secret Jews allied to a nation within the new nation, the intensity of the popular distrust of them, and the extent to which the Queen probably shared it. She was, after all, the daughter of that uncompromising Queen who had pursued de Luna [Remember, Queen Isabel’s mother, Dona Isabella of Portugal, had to push her husband King Juan II to put the treacherous Alvaro de Luna to death,] the friend of Jews and *Conversos*, to his doom. She was the girl who had turned with disgust from the immoralities of Enrique’s court where the *Conversos* held the palm, who had shuddered at the bare thought of being embraced by that lecherous⁶⁰¹ *Converso* Don Pedro Giron, who had sickened on hearing men accuse that other *Converso* Juan Pacheco of poisoning her brother Alfonso. She had in her, after all, the blood of those Plantagenets⁶⁰² who were so ruthless that men called them devils, of William the Conqueror, who, when his wife reminded him once too often of his bastardy, was said to have tied her long hair to the tail of his horse and to have dragged her about, to teach her the duty of a wife.

Isabel, the maid, had resolved to complete the reconquest and rehabilitation⁶⁰³ of Spain, and only the Moors and the *Conversos* stood in her way. And the mature woman who had calmly ordered the executions of so many thieves and murderers in the Jew-ridden city of Seville would hardly hesitate to exact conformity from those who were guilty of an offence which she considered even worse than theft or murder—heresy. To most people of the twentieth century the word “heresy” connotes merely an independence of thought, a difference of opinion. We are likely to forget that the mass of men in the Middle Ages nearly always associated

⁶⁰¹ **lecherous:** given to or suggestive of inordinate indulgence in sexual activity

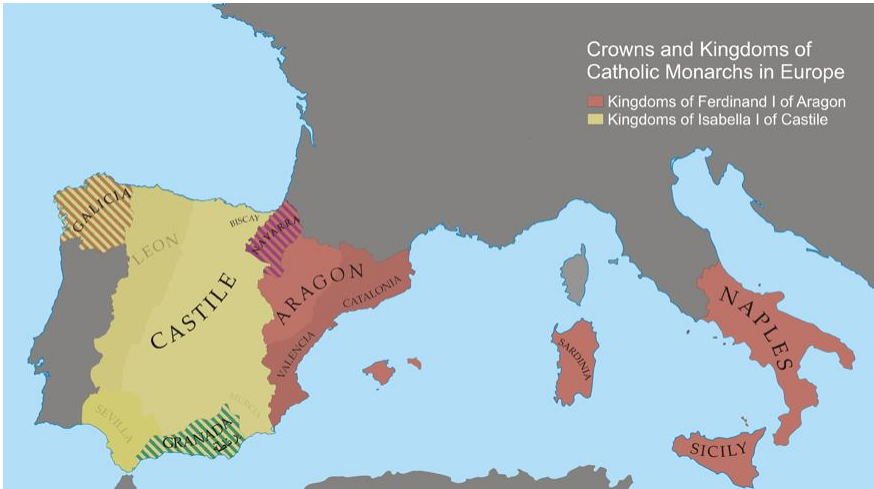
⁶⁰² **Plantagenets:** the ruling dynasty of England from 1154 to 1485 AD

⁶⁰³ **rehabilitation:** the restoration of something damaged or deteriorated to a prior good condition

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Chapter 17

THE WAR — LOJA — MALAGA — DISASTER



The Kingdoms of Isabel and Ferdinand Around the Year 1481

Alexandre Vigo, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Fernando's perspective

FERNANDO, handsome, bald and quietly self-confident in his thirtieth year, went into the Moorish war almost as lightheartedly as he had galloped into the lists during the feasts at Valencia, to split a few lances for the honor of his lady: it was a good game of chivalry and God willing, he would win it. His spirit, though firm, lacked the diamond clarity and hardness of his Queen's. And differences of heredity and training gave them somewhat different points of view,

When the Queen looked at a map, she saw the Castile and Leon of her fathers, reconstructed; Granada wrested from the Moors, the Faith triumphant over all. Fernando saw Aragon, robbed of two provinces by Louis XI; Sicily to the east, vitally implicated in the fate of an Italy which was a discord of small bickering kingdoms; to the north, a united and expanding France. Beyond that there was a vague insignificant England which might, however, be coaxed on to annoy the King of France and keep him from troubling Spain; and in the Germanies, a possible friend or foe

in Maximilian, the Hapsburg King of the Romans, parsimonious⁶⁵⁹, thick-lipped, dull-witted. All these political realities struggled for one thing or another between an uncharted abyss of ocean to the west, and an unfathomed darkness of pagan Asia containing millions of Mussulman enemies to the east; between the chill Scandinavia's that were only a name, and the infinite expanse of sun and mystery that was Africa, whose known fringes swarmed with other Mohammedan enemies, glaring across the Mediterranean.

Here in Europe, as custodians of Roman culture, were a few millions of more or less Christian souls, fighting with one another while cold and heat and darkness and the devil pressed in on them from all sides. The leaven that held this mass from being overwhelmed and obliterated was the Faith, the Church. Fernando began to visualize a united Italy, an England strengthened to make a balance of power against France, a Germany bound to Spain by matrimonial alliances—all joined under the spiritual fatherhood of the Pope to defend and perpetuate Christian civilization despite the barbarians of Asia and Africa. With singular farsightedness, Fernando in 1482 was beginning to envisage a Europe with geographical demarcations very similar to those of 1914. If he had had his way, he would have left the map almost as Napoleon did; but death repeatedly checkmated him.

In short, Fernando, as heir to the policies of Aragon and Sicily, was naturally drawn into the European scene; Isabel, as heiress to the miseries of Castile, unavoidably had her gaze drawn to Jews and *Conversos*, southern Moors, domestic problems, Portugal and the western ocean. Each saw, and to a great extent shared the view of the other. But Fernando's mind was the more flexible and accepted compromise more readily.

Left to his own courses, he would probably have followed the example of several of his ancestors; he would have waged a valiant medieval warfare against the Moors, defeated them, made the most favorable terms he could with them, then turned to gain an advantage over France; then perhaps, at a later, more favorable time, have struck the Moors again and taken what profit he could. He was always content to take small and sure gains; like a skilled and cautious gambler, he preferred to keep part of his resources in reserve, even when he defeated an enemy, he gave moderate terms rather than stake all in trying to gain more. He was always humble enough to learn from experience and, beyond any question, was the greatest and most able king of his time. Yet with all his prudence and skill, he fell just short of the one thing that could not be gained from experience: genius. That was Isabel's possession. Her contribution to his success was an intuitive sense that outran all calculation; the sixth sense that enables

⁶⁵⁹ parsimonious: showing extreme or excessive economy or frugality

one to stake all when all seems lost, and win. It would be strange if such a wife and such a husband did not sooner or later find themselves at cross purposes.

Don Rodrigo and the loss of Záhara

While they were making plans at Medina for a spring campaign of retaliation against Muley, their hand was forced in a measure by another exploit of the irrepressible⁶⁶⁰ Don Rodrigo, Marqués of Cádiz. In his late thirties, that high-spirited magnifico⁶⁶¹ was the popular hero of Andalusia, and romantic ladies were comparing him to the Cid Ruy of immortal memory. Bernaldez, who knew him well, said that he was chaste, sober, a lover of justice, and “the enemy of all flatterers, liars, traitors and poltroons.” He heard Mass each morning and knelt from beginning to end. Moorish women who fell into his hands were treated with knightly courtesy and scrupulous respect for their honor. Like Leonardo da Vinci, he had a passion for geometry applied to fortifications, and he liked music, though the conscientious Bernaldez adds that he preferred the notes of clarions and sackbuts, drums and trumpets.

To this cavalier, the loss of Záhara, a few miles east of his own fortress of Jerez and his city of Cádiz, seemed almost a personal insult, and since its recapture, at the present at least, was out of the question, he stroked his curly red beard and began to look about for a place where he might repay Muley with interest. Living as he did on the perilous frontier, he maintained a large number of spies, including some Mudejares—Christian Moors—to warn him of Moslem incursions and cattle raids.

⁶⁶⁰ **irrepressible:** impossible to repress, restrain, or control

⁶⁶¹ **magnifico:** 1.) a nobleman of Venice 2.) a person of high position

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Chapter 21

COLUMBUS FIRST APPEARS AT COURT—HIS PLANS AND PROPOSALS—THE CRUSADE AGAINST ISLAM

Columbus in Spain

A MAN in his late thirties, with prematurely grey hair that added a touch of nobility to a solemn and rather morose countenance, rode on a mule through the western gate of Córdoba on a warmish day in January, 1486. The sun was bright after the long rains, the air perfumed with the scents of new flowers. The whitewashed houses and gilded turrets sparkled like a city of alabaster and gold. The narrow zigzagging streets—let us imagine the scene—were full of people: silversmiths and leather-workers with Moorish faces, silk-weavers, farmers from the country driving mules and ox-carts, a torero with a red sash, a lady on a little mouse-colored mule, a Franciscan in a brown cowl, a squad of men-at-arms in leathern jerkins, with arquebusses over their shoulders; a knight on a black horse with gleaming cuirass and helmet, and a scarlet cloak woven with gold threads over his shoulder; a beggar, a thief, a white-clad Dominican on a mule followed by two servants of the Inquisition, armed to the teeth; a Jew with a long beard. But the man with greyish hair rode on without looking to the right or the left until, in the next street, he came to the great Cathedral with nineteen doors of polished brass. Hardly glancing at it, he turned the head of his mule to the left and continued a little way until he came to the Alcázar. There he dismounted, tied his mule to a post, and walking into the palace with the same abrupt directness, asked for their Majesties, the King and Queen of Castile.

The attendants, suspiciously eyeing the somewhat frayed cloak of the stranger, and listening disdainfully to the bad Spanish that he spoke rapidly in a loud nervous voice, were on the point of ejecting him when he presented a letter addressed to their Serene Highnesses by the Duke of Medina Celi. That put a different face on the matter. He was led into the presence of Don Alonso de Quintanilla, the Royal Treasurer. To that nobleman he explained that he had a plan to communicate to their Majesties, which would be greatly to their advantage, and that of all Christendom, and that he would discuss with no one else.

In that case, said Don Alonso, faintly amused, the visitor must wait until their Highnesses returned to Córdoba for the spring campaign. Meanwhile, knowing from their letter to the Duke of Medina Celi that they desired to speak with him, the Treasurer would gladly provide lodgings for him as a guest.

Cristoforo Colombo, or as he generally called himself in Spain, Cristóbal Colón, though he was also known as Colom and Colomo, had

three months to wait about the court, supported at public expense, but growing more impatient each day under his gloomy self-restraint.

It was late that spring when the Court returned, for their Majesties were delayed in the north by much business. After the Queen's churching [this is the ceremony after a mother recovers from childbirth—she had given birth to the newest baby, Catherine, in 1485], they had gone to Madrid, to thank the chapter there for money contributed to the war fund, and to beg the Dean and the chapter to preach the crusade with all fervor. Returning to Alcalá de Henares, they had then ridden to Segovia and Medina del Campo, swinging around in a hundred-mile semicircle to Béjar to console the Duke of Alba, who had been widowed. Thence they had gone through Guadalupe to Cordoba, arriving on April 28th.⁷⁹⁶

Meanwhile Christopher Columbus, to give him his English name, had been having a liaison, it would appear, with a girl named Beatriz Enriquez de Arana, the daughter of poor parents, and making some powerful friends. A man with the presence of a Roman senator, with courtly manners picked up from noble patrons, and with the adaptability of a good actor, he seems to have taken by storm most of the principal advisers of Isabel and Fernando. Alonso de Quintanilla introduced him to Cardinal Mendoza, to Prince Juan's tutor, the Dominican Fray Diego de Deza, who later became Archbishop of Seville and, although of Jewish ancestry, second Inquisitor General of Spain; to Fray Hernando de Talavera, Prior of Prado; to the Aragonese Converso, Juan Cabrero, camarero of the King; to Queen Isabel's girlhood friend Beatriz de Bobadilla and her husband; to Dofia Juana de la Torre, nurse of Prince Juan, and other notables. Every one of these exalted persons received Columbus with kindness, agreed with him that his plans were reasonable, and promised to help him gain the royal consent necessary to start on his voyage of discovery. Others who encouraged him from the beginning were Gabriel Sanchez, Royal Treasurer for Aragon, Caspar Gricio, the Castilian Secretary, the King's Aragonese secretary Juan de Coloma, and somewhat later, the rich bank-lawyer, Luis de Santángel, in whose house, only the year before, the conspirators had planned the assassination of Pedro Arbues. Santángel was now the King's *escribano de racion*, clerk of supplies, a man more powerful for the time being than even the Inquisition; for while his relatives and friends were being burned in Aragon, he remained in the royal service—protected by Fernando, it would seem, from the zeal of

⁷⁹⁶ [Author's note] Ibarra y Rodriguez, *Don Fernando E l Católico y el descubrimiento de America*.

Torquemada's officials.⁷⁹⁷ He was a statesman and financier of ability; besides, the King had probably borrowed money from him. On the whole, Columbus was helped from the beginning by the leading men in Spain.

Columbus's biography—and urban legends

Who was Columbus and what did he want? His own accounts of himself at various times are conflicting, and do not wholly solve the mysteries of his origin and early life. He was a Ligurian, born in one of the little villages outside Genoa—the latest to claim the honor is Cogoleto, a small fishing town—probably about the year of Queen Isabel's birth, 1451;⁷⁹⁸ the son of a wool-comber, Domenico Colombo, and his wife Susanna Fontanarosa. Christopher seems to have been a weaver at Savona, his father's birthplace, until late in 1472.⁷⁹⁹ That year he made a voyage to Chios, and in 1476 he sailed in a merchantman from Genoa to England; but, his ship having been attacked at Saint Vincent and disabled, he took refuge at Lisbon. There he married Felipa Moniz Perestrello, and there, in 1480, his son Diego was born. After a voyage to Guinea, he received from his mother-in-law the papers of her husband, Perestrello, was moved thereby to become a maritime discoverer, and asked the aid of Dom João, King of Portugal. A committee of two bishops and two doctors—one “that Jew Joseph” whom Columbus bitterly blamed afterwards for the unfavorable report—advised against the project, and described Colombo as a visionary. Dom João, however, retained an interest in him as late as 1488, when he invited him to return to Portugal, in a letter which has only increased the mystery of Columbus's early life by its hint of his having run afoul of the law, either for debt or for some crime or misdemeanor. “And as you may have some fear of our justice, because of certain things that render you liable,” wrote the King, “by these presents we guarantee that neither upon your arrival, nor during your sojourn, nor at the time of your departure, shall you be arrested, held accused, cited or prosecuted for any cause, be it civil or criminal of any nature whatsoever.” This throws but

⁷⁹⁷ [Author's note] Santángel did public penance as an abjuring heretic in 1491.

⁷⁹⁸ [Author's note] Some guesses have put this date as early as 1436, and a Peruvian scholar, Señor Luis Ulloa, has recently propounded a new Columbian theory based upon that premise. Señor Ulloa is convinced that Columbus's self-confidence and extravagant demands were the result of his having visited the New World before his first appearance at the Castilian court. Henri Harrisse has shown, however, that Columbus could not have been born before 1446. See *Christopher Columbus and the Bank of Saint George*, privately printed, New York, 1888.

⁷⁹⁹ [Author's note] Corsica, then Genoese territory, is one of the numerous “birthplaces” of Columbus.

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notary—and that they buried him with a large hoe which their brother Lopé brought along. Juan also said (and Benito admitted this) that Benito had helped him to look for a boy in Toledo, but it was Juan who found one at the Door of the Pardon in the Cathedral at Toledo. Afterward—and this we learn from a letter of the notary Gonzalez to the officials of La Guardia, November 17— Juan Franco took the Inquisitors to the place where the child was buried, and they found a hole there; but nothing is said of the finding of any remains. However, if Fita's conjecture is correct that the Jews of the synagogue of Segovia knew of Yucé's first confession, it is not unlikely that some one of the prisoners may have got word to friends outside, who removed the evidence. In a book written later by the parish priest of La Guardia, the belief is expressed that since the Holy Child, as he became known immediately, had shared in the passion of Jesus Christ, he had also been permitted to share in the glory of His Resurrection.

The executions of the criminals

The case was now complete, and justice followed swiftly. The *auto de fe* was held on Wednesday, November 16, in the presence of all the citizens of Avila and a great number of people from villages for many around, for the whole country was now ablaze with horror and wrath. The sentence of the Court, reviewing the evidence at some length, was read, and the prisoners relaxed to the secular arm. After they were given into the custody of Queen Isabel's Corregidor, Alvaro de Sant Estevan, they were tied by his men to the stakes. All of them then made final confessions of guilt, which were taken down by the notary Anton Gonzalez and which confirmed all their previous admissions. Benito, in spite of his previous boast that he would die a Jew, now declared that he was sorry for his sins and wished to die a Christian. He was reconciled to the Church by one of the friars; and so were two other Conversos, Juan Franco and Juan de Ocafia. These three, therefore, were strangled before they were burned.

Yucé and his father Ca, however, died as Jews, roasted over a slow fire.

The "Holy Child Juan, son of Alonso Pasamontes and Juana La Guindera"

The notary Gonzalez, writing to the officials of La Guardia the following day, urged them to set up a suitable monument on the spot where Juan Franco had pointed out the grave of the boy, and not to allow anyone to plough there or otherwise disturb the spot, "since Their Highnesses (the King and Queen) and Cardinal Mendoza had yet to visit it." An inscription on a tablet erected in La Guardia in 1569 gives the name of the *Santo Niño* as "Juan, son of Alonso Pasamontes and Juana La Guindera." Monuments were erected to his memory, and he was venerated by many people as a saint.

Two days after the *auto de fe*, the Inquisitors examined one Juan, who was sacristan of the Church of Santa Maria at La Guardia, where according

to Yucé's confession, Alonso Franco had obtained the second Host. Why Villada put off interviewing this witness until after the executions remains one of the puzzles of the case, but the notarial record clearly gives the date as November 18.

The sacristan, evidently a New Christian, confessed that he himself had promised the Host to Alonso, who was his uncle, and who had asked for it on two occasions. But Alonso sent Benito for the Host, and Benito assured him they were going to do no harm with it, but much good would come of it. This was about two years ago, he thought. Asked whether he believed that the consecrated Host was the true body of Jesus Christ, Juan said he always believed it; but Benito told him that while it would be a sin to give him the Host, it would not be heresy, so that the Inquisition could not punish him. He took the keys from an earthenware vessel where the priests kept them, and opened the pyx containing the Host. There were two consecrated Hosts in it, and he gave one to Benito, Benito offered him an unconsecrated Host to put in the place of the one taken, but the sacristan refused to do that. Here the record breaks off, and we do not know what happened to the sacristan. We do know, however, that he corroborated the strange story of Yucé Franco.⁸⁸⁸

The testimony was not published, but Yucé's sentence was read the following Sunday from the pulpit of the Church at La Guardia, and the news spread rapidly from village to village. There were riots everywhere against the Jews, and at Avila a Jew was cruelly stoned to death by the angry mob.

The reaction of Isabella and Ferdinand to the atrocities

Torquemada must inevitably have presented the sentence of the Court, and probably the whole record of the case, to the King and Queen as the most powerful kind of evidence to justify the course he advocated—the expulsion of all the Jews. We know for a certainty that their Majesties had the case brought to their attention in various ways. The Jews of Avila appealed to them for protection against the infuriated populace, and Isabel and Fernando sent them a letter of safe-conduct from Córdoba, December 16, 1491, forbidding anyone to harm the Jews or their property, under extreme penalties, ranging from a fine of 10,000 maravedis to possible death.⁸⁸⁹

This merciful step was taken by the King and Queen during the ferment of the last month of the siege of Granada. Two weeks later they entered the Moorish capital in triumph; but just before they did so they took time to commend and reward the Inquisitor General and the three Inquisitors of

⁸⁸⁸ [Author's note] *Boletin*, Vol. XI, p. 109.

⁸⁸⁹ [Author's note] *Boletin*, Vol. XI, p. 420.

the Court at Avila for the excellent work they had done in bringing Yucé, Ca Franco and his accomplices to justice. The La Guardia crime is not specifically mentioned in the royal edict of January 4, 1492, but there can be no doubt that it is the one referred to. It commends “the devout father Fray Tomás de Torquemada, prior of the monastery of Santa Cruz of Segovia, our confessor and of our council” and states that certain judicial powers are delegated to him “in the Bishopric of Avila and its diocese.” He is given authority to transfer and sell all the property confiscated for the use of Their Highnesses—presumably in the La Guardia case—and to use the money “for the expenses and salaries of the Señores Inquisitors and their officers” and for other extraordinary expenses.⁸⁹⁰

During the next few weeks, while Columbus was unsuccessfully negotiating with the sovereigns for his titles and profits, Fray Tomás de Torquemada was also at the Alhambra, urging them to do what they had long contemplated doing—to go to the very heart of the Jewish problem by expelling all Jews from Spain. This they decided to do, and on March 31 they issued the famous edict [which was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter].

The Jews’ reaction to the expulsion order

Naturally the Jews, through their powerful friends at Court, made every effort to avert the catastrophe. The millionaire Abraham Senior, chief rabbi of Castile, and Isaac Abravanel may have offered the sovereigns 30,000 ducats, as the story goes, to revoke the edict; but the assertion that Torquemada prevented their accepting by throwing a crucifix on the table and shouting that they were betraying Christ for 30,000 pieces of silver as Judas did for thirty is extremely improbable and must be dismissed as a legend of later fabrication. There is no contemporary evidence for it, and it is not consistent with what we know of the sovereigns and Torquemada in this connection.⁸⁹¹

The Jews, however, would naturally mobilize their great wealth to prevent the final destruction of their dominion in Spain. “They lived mostly in the larger cities,” wrote Bernaldez . . . “and in the most wealthy and prosperous and fertile lands . . . and all of them were merchants and vendors, and lessors and farmers of taxing privileges and stewards of manors, cloth-shearers, tailors, cobblers, leather-dealers, carriers, weavers, spicers, peddlers, silk-merchants, jewelers, and had other similar occupations. Never did they till the soil, nor were they laborers, nor

⁸⁹⁰ [Author’s note] *Boletin*, Vol. XXIII, p. 427

⁸⁹¹ [Author’s note] The earliest authority for this legend seems to be Paramo, p. 144.

carpenters, nor masons; but all sought easy occupations and ways of making money with little work. They were a very cunning people, and people who commonly lived on gains and usuries at the expense of Christians, and many of the poor among them became rich in a short time. They were very charitable among themselves, one to another. If in need, their councils, which they called *alhamas*, provided for them. They were good masters to their own people... They had among them very rich men, who had great wealth and estates, worth a million or two million, as for example Abraham Senior, who leased most of Castile.”⁸⁹²

When it became evident that the King and Queen, who were all-powerful now that the war was over, would undoubtedly enforce the edict, Abraham Senior and his son became Christians rather than relinquish their great wealth and power. The Chief Rabbi of Castile was baptized June 15, 1492, at Santa Maria de Guadalupe. His sponsors were the King and Queen and Cardinal Mendoza, and he took the name of Ferrand Perez Coronel. The distinguished Spanish Catholic family of that name are his descendants.

Most of the Jews, however, began selling their goods and preparing to leave. “When the gospel was preached to them,” wrote Bernaldez, “their rabbis preached the opposite to them, and encouraged them with vain hopes, telling them they considered it certain that all this trial came from God, who wished to lead them from captivity and bring them to the Promised Land; and that in this exodus they would see how God would perform many miracles for them, and lead them from Spain with wealth and honor. And if they had any mishap or misfortune on land, they would see that when they went upon the sea, God would guide them, as he had guided their ancestors out of Egypt. The rich Jews paid the expenses for the exodus of the poor Jews, and showed much charity for one another, so that only a very few, and those of the most needy, were converted. It was a common belief among the Jews, the simple as well as the learned, that wherever they wished to go the strong hand and arm of God would follow with much honor and riches, as God through Moses had miraculously led the people of Israel from Egypt,”

Obliged to dispose of all their property that was not portable within three months, the Jews were virtually at the mercy of their purchasers, who, it may be inferred, included large numbers of the rich *Conversos*. The prohibition against carrying gold and silver out of the country increased the difficulty. Hence, says Bernaldez, a Jew would give a house for an ass, and a vineyard for a tapestry or a piece of linen. Nevertheless “it is true that they took an infinite amount of gold and silver secretly, especially cruzados and ducats ground between the teeth, which they

⁸⁹² [Author’s note] Bernaldez, *Historia*, cap. cx.

swallowed and took in their bellies... The women in particular swallowed more, and one person is said to have swallowed thirty ducats at one time.”

The Jews leave Spain

When the appointed day approached—the time had been extended by the King and Queen to August 2, the Israelites caused all the boys and girls over twelve years of age to marry, so that each girl might go under the protection of a husband. And so, “putting all their glory behind them, and confiding in the vain hope of their blindness,” wrote the curate of Los Palacios, “they gave themselves over to the travail of the road, and went forth from the lands of their birth, little and great, old and young, on foot and on horses and asses and other beasts, and in carts, each one pursuing his way to the port to which he had to go. They stopped on the roads and in the fields, with many labours and misfortunes, some falling down, others getting up, some dying: some being born, and others sick; and there was no Christian who did not grieve for them. Everywhere the people invited them to be baptized . . . but the rabbis encouraged them and caused the women and boys to sing and play tambourines and timbrels to make the people merry.



An Auto De Fe

Museo Nacional de Arte, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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Chapter 28

THE RETURN OF COLUMBUS—THE SHIPS LOG—THE INVASION OF ITALY

Columbus returns and travels to Barcelona to be in the presence of the Monarchs

COLUMBUS arrived at the bar of Saltes at daybreak on March 14, 1493, and entered the harbor of Palos that noon. It was disappointing to learn that the Court was at Barcelona, nearly six hundred miles away. However, there would be all the more cities and towns to pass through in triumph, and Columbus can hardly be blamed if after all his years of waiting and of obscurity, he took full advantage at last of what might prove his only opportunity to dramatize himself on a wide stage. Courts are cruel and the favor of kings is variable. And as if his poetic soul already whispered to him that after six months of applause he would be almost a forgotten man, the weaver who thought that he had been to the waters of Cipango and the shores of Cathay received the acclamations of the people of Palos with a natural swelling of the heart, and immediately set off like a conqueror on an imperial progress through Seville, Córdoba, and a dozen other great cities that lay on the route to Barcelona, far in the northeast.

He entered Barcelona with a burst of splendor in the middle of April. Many young cavaliers and noble merchants, followed by the populace, came forth from the gates to receive him, as if he had been a Roman victor returning from the wars. The first to enter the city were the six Indians he had brought from the lands of Kubla Khan, painted and be-feathered, and shivering with cold. After them walked the sailors of Columbus's crew, carrying live parrots, stuffed birds and animals from the Indies, weapons and implements of the Indians. At last came Columbus on horseback, in silken doublet and hose, with a new velvet bonnet and a gorgeous cloak flung over his shoulders—the Admiral of the Ocean Seas attended by the chivalry of Spain.

To show signal honor to the discoverer of new lands, the King and Queen had ordered their throne to be placed in public before the Cathedral, under a canopy of gold brocade, and there, with Prince Juan on one side of them, and the venerable Cardinal of Spain on the other, they received him. As Columbus knelt to kiss their hands, they raised him. Indeed, they stood up, as if he were a person of the highest rank, and begged him to be seated in their presence—a courtesy commonly extended only to princes of the blood. The wool comber's son who had been jeered at because his cloak was patched would hardly have been human if he had not felt the

elation of that moment, but he carried off the situation with a grave and gracious dignity.

He gave a brief summary of the events described in the log of his voyage, which he presented to their Majesties, and as he spoke, his imagination conjured up not only what he had seen, but the shapes of things unknown that he intended to discover—gold and pearls, great cities, mighty empires; for the actualities he related, amazing as they were, proved a little pale beside the promises he had made, based upon the accounts of Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville. When he concluded, Isabel and Fernando and the Prince knelt and raised their hands and voices in gratitude to Heaven. All the Court followed their example, and Columbus and his sailors too, while the choir of the royal chapel, accompanied by many instruments, sang the *Te Deum laudamus*, and all arose to form a joyous procession through the city. Isabel must have felt the pleasure of one whose judgment of a man has been confirmed by the event. She invited the Admiral to dine with the royal family and promised him a new fleet for a second expedition. While the Admiral described the wonders of Asia, Prince Juan hung upon every word uttered, and at the end asked for one of the Indians for a servant. The request was granted, but the Indian soon died, for the Spanish climate was too much for him. The King and Queen sponsored the six aborigines when they were baptized.



The return of Columbus.

Museo Nacional de Arte, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

For a whole month Columbus was the hero of the Court, He was seen riding on horseback in the park with King Fernando and Prince Juan. He was entertained at supper by Cardinal Mendoza. His praises were sung in London, Paris, Vienna, at the court of Pope Alexander VI, and especially at Genoa. Sebastian Cabot, his fellow-countryman who was to emulate his example, pronounced the discovery "a thing more divine than human."

Few had any doubts that the islands he had found were near the mainland of Asia; it seemed that this daring man had actually arrived at the east by sailing west—he had annihilated the great mystery, he was what he had claimed to be, the man God had chosen to bring to pass the prophecy of Seneca in the chorus of *Medea*. Not everyone, however, was certain that the Admiral had actually reached the waters of Asia. A note of caution is discovered in the earliest reference in print to the discovery, an *oratio* by Cardinal Bernardino Carvajal at Rome in 1493:

"And Christ placed under their rule the Fortunate Islands, the fertility of which has been ascertained to be wonderful. And he has lately disclosed some other unknown ones towards the Indies which may be considered among the most precious things on earth, and it is believed that they will be won over to Christ by the emissaries of the King."

Details of Columbus's journal

Columbus's journal, abbreviated by his biographer and friend Las Casas, so that we sometimes have the words of the Admiral in the first person and sometimes only summaries in the third person,⁹³² may still be read as Isabel read it that April in Catalonia. He tells how he made for the Canaries, and then on September 6, after certain repairs, boldly sailed west. On the eleventh they saw part of the mast of a ship of about 120 tons floating in the water. On the night of the fifteenth, they beheld "a remarkable bolt of fire fall into the sea at a distance of four or five

⁹³² [Author's note] Jacob Wassermann solemnly explains in his *Christopher Columbus*, pp. 80-1, that the "I" and "The Admiral" alternately used in the narrative known as the Journal of Columbus, "are strongly opposed manifestations of himself. They were two persons of different rank, different responsibility and different importance, one of these a suspicious, feverishly excitable, dream-tormented, weary, obstinate man, and the other, a being not wholly of this world—the instrument of divine power, an infallible spirit." Evidently Herr Wassermann has not heard that the original text of the Journal was lost, and that the text we have was transcribed by Las Casas, who sometimes gives the Admiral's direct words in the first person, and sometimes summarizes them in the third. Psychoanalyzing a man who has been in his grave more than 400 years seems to be a task of some difficulty, even for a popular novelist.

leagues.” It drizzled next day, but from then on there was nothing but very pleasant weather. “The mornings were most delightful,” wrote the Admiral. “Nothing was wanting but the melody of the nightingales to make it like Andalusia in April.” He encouraged the sailors by pointing to some patches of green weeds, and said, “The continent we shall find further ahead.” But on the seventeenth the sailors were terrified when the Admiral noted, for the first time in history, the magnetic variation of the needle, a whole point from the north. The Admiral invented a very ingenious explanation to quiet the men; the compass was correct, but the North Star, instead of being stationary, as all had supposed, evidently revolved about the pole like a lantern—what could be simpler? After that “they were all very cheerful, and strove which vessel should out sail the others.” They saw tunnies, and a live crab. The Admiral said he saw a white bird called a water-wagtail, which does not sleep at sea. On the eighteenth a pelican came aboard. The Admiral said they never went more than twenty leagues from land; there must be islands nearby. He was then in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

The wind blew so steadily from the east that the sailors began to say that it never blew in any other direction in that ocean, hence they could never return home, but must sail west forever. Fortunately, on the twenty-second the wind changed. The Admiral, seeing the hand of God in everything, said, “This head was very necessary to me, for my crew had grown much alarmed.” The next day the sea was so smooth and tranquil that the sailors murmured, saying they had got into an ocean where no winds blew. But they were presently astonished to see the waves rise without a wind. The Admiral recorded, “The rising of the sea was very favorable to me, as it happened formerly to Moses when he led the Jews from Egypt.”

He had differences of opinion with Martin Alonzo Pinzon. At sunset on September 25, Pinzon cried that he saw land, and the crew of the *Pinta* sang the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the other crews joining in. Sailors of that period commonly sang at their work, and by the Admiral's orders they sang every evening the beautiful hymn called the *Salve Regina*:

*Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, hail,
Hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope!
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve,
To thee do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious Advocate,
Thine eyes of mercy towards us,
And after this our exile
Show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary,*

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