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The Cover

It is a scene that demands to be painted: Along a hot, dusty road in Andalusia, leading away from the seaport of Palos, strides a well-proportioned, strong-limbed man of above average height. His countenance is pleasant—long-visaged, cheeks somewhat high, nose aquiline, eyes light and lively, complexion ruddy and freckled, and hair and beard very red. Though his clothes are humble and his pack is heavy, his bearing is that of a man who knows himself to be called by destiny. Struggling along beside him is a boy of 10 or 11 years who, despite a lighter load and a walking stick, is fainting from heat and thirst. Fortunately, they spy the ancient Franciscan friary of Santa Maria de Rabida, standing on bluff about half a league distant, and it is here that the two travelers quickly repair. The man asks nothing for himself, only for the porter to give his son a little bread and some water. At this moment the Prior, Juan Perez de Marchena, a man of great learning and also former confessor to the reigning Queen Isabella, happens by. Struck by the contrast between the visionary, almost prophetic-attitude of the stranger and his humble request, he engages him in conversation and learns that he wishes to find a new route to the Indies—by sailing west. The Prior, too, recognizes destiny when it stops at his gates. Columbus's wish, in a manner of speaking, is no sooner expressed than he and three caravels are sailing out of Palos, down the Rio Tinto, across the Rio Saltes bar, and into the unknown sea on their way to the Indies.

It does not matter that the account is not completely factual. For example, two visits to La Rabida have been compressed into one—the first having taken place when the boy Diego was 5 years old and Columbus was in his mid-30s. Moreover, Columbus's hair and beard were already white by the time he was 30. This was, however, the account given in 1828 by Washington Irving that inspired Eugene

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