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FERDINAND OF ARAGON

(1452–1516)

FERDINAND OF ARAGON was the son of John II, king of the Spanish provinces of Navarre and Aragon.

For centuries before Ferdinand's time, Spain had been divided into a number of petty kingdoms. Some of them were in the hands of the Christians, and the rest belonged to the Moors, whose ancestors were partly Arabs and partly people of North Africa.

The Moors were Muslims. About seven hundred years before the time of Ferdinand, they had crossed the Mediterranean Sea and invaded Spain, capturing nearly the whole of that country, with the exception of the provinces which lay in the extreme north.

For a long time, therefore, Spain was a Muslim country. But the Spanish Christians became more numerous and more powerful, and during the time of the Crusades, they were almost continually at war with their Moorish neighbors.

At the time that Ferdinand was born, they had regained all Spain except the one kingdom of Granada.

In Granada several thousand Moors still lived. They irrigated the land and cultivated rice. They planted mulberry trees and were famed for their production of silk. They even grew sugar cane and were the first to make Europeans acquainted with sugar. The beautiful city of Granada was their capital and great stronghold at the time

when Ferdinand became king; even today, travelers go by the thousands to see the remains of its splendid palaces.



Ferdinand of Aragon

Ferdinand married Isabella, who was the queen of Castile, so that under these two sovereigns three of the Christian kingdoms of Spain—Aragon, Navarre, and Castile—were united.

It seemed to them, however, a disgrace to Christianity, as well as an injury to Spain, that there should be a Muslim kingdom in their country. They therefore determined to add Granada to their domains, and a bitter war against the Moors was begun.

General Gonsalvo, a famous soldier whom the Spaniards still delight to call 'the great captain,' was put in command of the Spanish army.

Granada was invaded. Sallies were made by the Moors, and many single combats were fought between their champions and the Christian knights. But no great battle was fought, and the war continued for months.

One time the Spanish camp of tents took fire by accident and was destroyed. A permanent town with houses of stone was then built by Ferdinand for his army. The town still stands and is called Santa Fe.

When the Moorish king, who was named Boabdil (bo ab' deel), heard that King Ferdinand had threatened to take Granada, he laughed in scorn; nevertheless, he at once made ready to defend his city.

The war lasted more than ten years. The Moors defended themselves bravely, but the Spaniards devastated the fruitful lands of their country, totally destroyed twenty-four of their principal towns, and then besieged the city of Granada itself.

The Moors held out bravely for almost a year; then, being on the verge of starvation, they surrendered Granada.

It was agreed that Boabdil should reign over a small territory and should pay homage to Ferdinand for it. He soon grew tired of his little kingdom, however, and crossed the Mediterranean to Africa, where not long afterwards he perished in battle. He was the last of the Moorish kings of Spain.

The year 1492 proved to be a memorable one for Ferdinand and Isabella and for the country which they governed. It began



Surrender of Boabdil

with the conquest of Granada, and it ended in seeing Spain's condition wonderfully improved in almost every particular.

For two hundred years the Turks had been the terror of Christendom. Christians who traded with India were obliged to sail across the Mediterranean Sea and to pass through lands that belonged to the Turks to reach that country. They had also to bring back through those lands and across the Mediterranean whatever goods they bought in India.

Their ships and cargoes were often captured by Turkish pirates, and the owners and crews were made slaves. Thousands of such Christian slaves were chained to the rowing benches of the Turkish galleys and were cruelly whipped if they did not obey their masters.

The people of those times wished to find a way by which to reach India without encountering these difficulties and dangers. More than once did the different



King Ferdinand



Queen Isabella

nations of Europe join together to make war against the Turks. Ferdinand himself, after taking Granada from the Moors, sent a fleet across the Mediterranean and captured Algiers, the great stronghold of the Turkish pirates.

Many Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese Christians who had been slaves for years came home, most of them sick, and all of them poor. You can imagine how the sight of them, when they landed, made the people wish for some safer way to India. When, therefore, Columbus offered to find one, Ferdinand and Isabella supplied him with money and ships and men.

Columbus did not, however, find a new way to India, but he thought he had done so, and so did the king and queen. The people of Spain, and of Europe generally, rejoiced at the thought that trade with India could in the future be carried on without so great a loss of life and treasure.

While Columbus failed in this one important point, his discoveries were of great value to Spain, for they gave her immense possessions in the 'new world' and added largely to her wealth and power.

Ferdinand was at first rather cold toward Columbus. He did not have much faith either in the great discoverer or in his

plans. The real credit of Spain's assistance belongs far more to Queen Isabella than to King Ferdinand. But by consolidating and strengthening his dominions, Ferdinand lifted Spain into a prominent position among the European nations; and his influence was felt for many years after his death, which occurred in 1516.

