

The abundance of these marine animalcules, and the animal matter yielded by their rapid decomposition, are so vast that the sea water itself becomes a nutrient fluid to many of the larger animals. However much this richness in animated forms, and this multitude of the most various and highly-developed microscopic organisms may agreeably excite the fancy, the imagination is even more seriously, and, I might say, more solemnly moved by the impression of boundlessness and immeasurability, which are presented to the mind by every sea voyage. All who possess an ordinary degree of mental activity, and delight to create to themselves an inner world of thought, must be penetrated with the sublime image of the infinite when gazing around them on the vast and boundless sea, when involuntarily the glance is attracted to the distant horizon, where air and water blend together, and the stars continually rise and set before the eyes of the mariner. This contemplation of the eternal play of the elements is clouded, like every human joy, by a touch of sadness and of longing.

A peculiar predilection for the sea, and a grateful remembrance of the impression which it has excited in my mind, when I have seen it in the tropics in the calm of nocturnal rest, or in the fury of the tempest, have alone induced me to speak of the individual enjoyment afforded by its aspect before I entered upon the consideration of the favorable influence which the proximity of the ocean has incontrovertibly exercised on the cultivation of the intellect and character of many nations, by the multiplication of those bands which ought to encircle the whole of humanity, by affording additional means of arriving at a knowledge of the configuration of the earth, and furthering the advancement of astronomy, and of all other mathematical and physical sciences. A portion of this influence was at first limited to the Mediterranean and the shores of southwestern Africa, but from the sixteenth century it has widely spread, extending to nations who live at a distance from the sea, in the interior of continents. Since Columbus was sent to "unchain the ocean"* (as the unknown voice whispered to him in a dream when he lay on a sick-bed near

* The voice addressed him in these words, "Maravillosamente Dios hizo sonar tu nombre en la tierra; de los atamientos de la mar Oceana, que estaban cerrados con cadenas tan fuertes, te dió las llaves"—"God will cause thy name to be wonderfully resounded through the earth, and give thee the keys of the gates of the ocean, which are closed with strong chains." The dream of Columbus is related in the letter to the Catholic monarchs of July the 7th, 1503. (Humboldt, *Examen Critique*, t. iii., p. 234.)