

HALF-HOURS WITH THE EARLY EXPLORERS

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Half-hours with the early explorers by Thomas Frost

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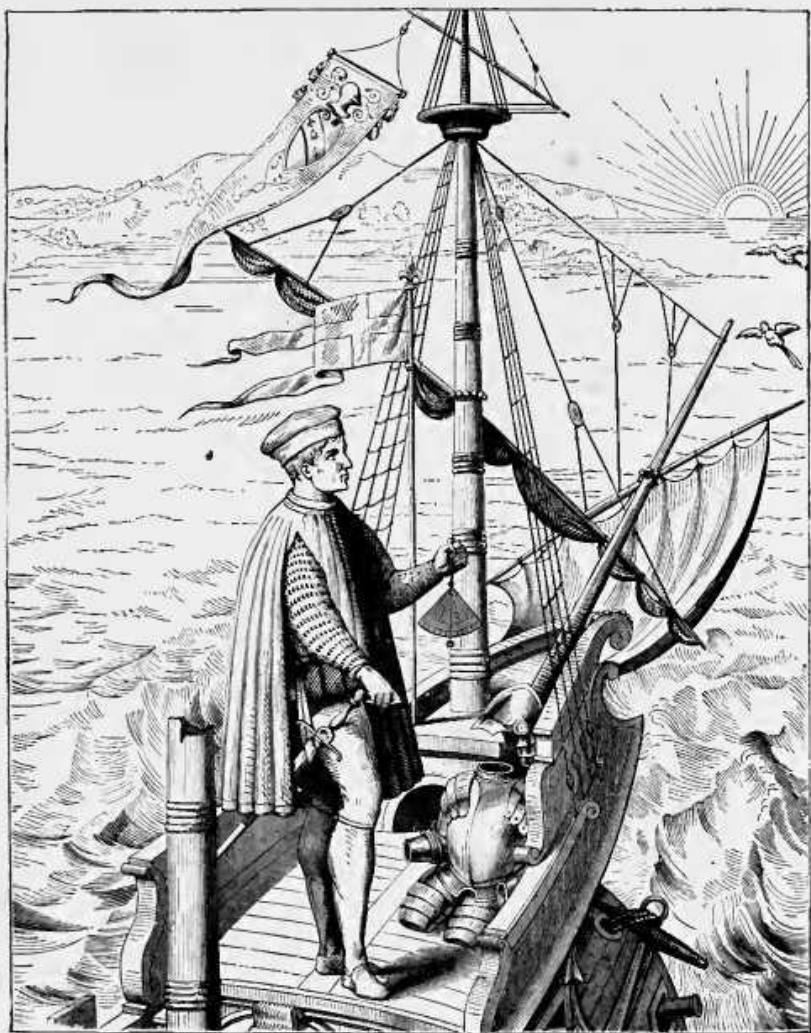
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THOMAS FROST

**HALF-HOURS WITH
THE EARLY
EXPLORERS**



COLOMBO IN SIGHT OF A NEW LAND.

HALF-HOURS
WITH THE
EARLY EXPLORERS.

BY

THOMAS FROST,

Author of "History of the Indian Revolt," "Memoirs of the Madiahs," etc.

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PREFACE.

NO period of the world's history presents us with more interesting records of zeal and enterprise, in the exploration of hitherto unknown lands and seas, than that between the middle of the thirteenth century and the close of the sixteenth. Marco Polo, following in the tracks of the Minorite monk, William de Ruysbroeck, opened up far Cathay to the knowledge of Europeans; and Sir John Mandeville, if he did little for geography, awakened curiosity as to the less-known countries of Asia and Africa by his wondrous narrative, which reads like a chapter of Herodotus pieced with fragments of the "Thousand and One Nights." The invention of the mariner's compass prepared the way for the great enterprises which made famous the names of Colombo, and Gama, and Cabota, and Magalhaen. Though the polarity of the magnet was known long before, the discovery was not applied to navigation until the beginning of the fifteenth century. The results were the discovery of an ocean route to India, the opening of a new world to European enterprise, and the circumnavigation of the globe. For a century and a half, Spaniards, Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch vied with each other in the zeal and energy which they displayed in the navigation of distant seas and the exploration of unknown lands.

As each State arrogated to itself the exclusive right to use the ocean routes discovered by its subjects, or by foreign navigators in its service, the skill and daring of explorers were tasked to the utmost for the discovery of seas and straits hitherto unknown. While Vespucci sought in the trackless Southern Ocean for a western passage to the

East, Cabota, Verazzano, and Cartier sought it by northern navigation; and, long after the route from the Atlantic to the Pacific had been found by Magalhaen, Willoughby, Chancellor, and Barentz ploughed the North Polar seas in search of a passage to China and India round the North Cape of Europe, and Frobisher and Davis pursued a similar quest in the frozen waters that so long, by their intricacies and perils, defied the endeavours made, down to our time, to penetrate from Baffin's Bay to the North Pole and to Behring's Strait.

The courage, and rarer moral qualities, of these early explorers have scarcely been appreciated at their full worth. In these days, when mail steamers of two or three thousand tons, starting at a fixed day and hour, make rapid voyages across oceans completely surveyed and mapped, the hesitation with which the old navigators put to sea, the frequency with which they returned to port, and the slowness of their progress are apt to raise a smile. But if we consider the smallness of their ships, the cumbrousness of their architecture, and the absence of the mechanical appliances of navigation now common, and even of charts, we must acknowledge that, in courage and in seamanship, the navigators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have never been excelled. The narratives embraced within the limits of the present work, necessarily brief as they are, will, it is hoped, conduce to a just appreciation of the claims of the pioneers of geographical discovery during that period. They have been compiled from careful study of the originals, and of the maps and charts of the period, in the library of the British Museum; and the illustrations have, for the most part, been copied from engravings made for early editions, and for other works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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