

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

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Christopher Columbus by Mildred Stapley

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MILDRED STAPLEY

**CHRISTOPHER
COLUMBUS**

TRUE STORIES OF GREAT AMERICANS

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS



From the painting by Sebastiano del Piombo, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

"There was a man of La goa, a dealer in printed books, trading in this land of Andalusia, whom they called Christopher Columbus, a man of very high intellect without much book-learning, who perceived by what he read and by his own discernment how, and in what wise, is formed this world into which we are born. And he made, by his wit, a map of the world; and studied it much; and judged that from whatever point of Europe he should sail west, he could not fail to meet land."

Andrés Bernaldez, a friend of Columbus.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

BY

MILDRED STAPLEY

Whatever can be known of earth we know,
Sneered Europe's wise men, in their snail-shells curled;
No! said one man in Genoa, and that No
Out of the dark created this New World.

— JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1915

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PREFACE

CRITICAL research into the life of Christopher Columbus was unknown until about thirty years ago. It was then, for the first time, that authors began to ransack the archives of Spain and Genoa for material, instead of merely repeating the long-accepted story whose outline had been ingeniously sketched by the navigator himself and as ingeniously filled in by his son Fernando. The many inaccuracies of this story had not escaped writers as shrewd as Washington Irving and Alexander Humboldt; but they, instead of subjecting disturbing misstatements to critical examination, bent all their talents to inventing plausible explanations of every discrepancy. A later panegyrist, Count Roselly de Lorgues, refused even to admit that explanations were needed. To counteract his very partisan biography, the American, Henry Harrisse, after scholarly study of Fernando's life of his father, exposed its multitudinous errors in a work entitled "Fernand Colomb, sa vie, ses oeuvres."

When the four-hundredth anniversary of the great discovery brought its flood of Columbian literature,

very few authors put any new matter into their work. Among those who did, however, were several of the Italian scholars who helped compile the splendid "Raccolta Columbiana" for the Italian Government; Sophus Ruge, whose book appeared in German; Henry Harrisse, who wrote in French ("Colomb devant l'Histoire"), and a few others whose contributions, while original, were much less important. Following Harrisse, and greatly amplifying his work, came the convincing "Etudes Critiques sur la vie de Colomb avant ses découvertes," by Henry Vignaud, First Secretary of the American Embassy, Vice-President of the Society of Americanists, Member of the Geographical Society, etc.

Of all this learned and painstaking investigation very little has appeared in English. The text-books of the country most concerned in the true story of Columbus still teach that he alone, in the age of darkness, had great scientific wisdom; that he had formed a theory of sailing west in order to reach India; and that, in his search for India in 1492, he accidentally came upon the outlying islands of North America. It is to show how erroneous and inconsistent this old legend is, and properly and sympathetically to relate Columbus to his period and its influences, that the present story is offered to young Americans.

In the new version here set forth there is nothing not already known and recognized by students of the subject. In following Vignaud's revival of the now generally accepted pilot story, it offers a far more logical motive for the great voyage than the search for Asiatic India, a country which, by papal order, was to belong to Portugal, no matter who might discover it. Indeed, India was never mentioned in connection with Columbus until after his return, and then it meant "The Indies of the Antilles." The story of the unknown pilot circulated throughout Portugal and Spain during the end of the fifteenth century and all of the sixteenth. Columbus for obvious reasons never mentions it. His son Fernando, for the same reasons, refers to it but scantily; but Las Casas, the first historian of the new world, who heard the story from the lips of Columbus's companions, devotes a chapter to it. Although this history was not printed till three hundred and fifty years after it was written, many Spanish and Portuguese books published during the sixteenth century likewise gave the pilot story at length. Thus it can be traced through a century of histories and biographies. It is known to have stimulated a Madeiran captain and several navigators in Portugal to ask royal permission to sail west. That Columbus himself should not have divulged

his more intimate familiarity with it is natural; yet certain it is that he had received instructions for reaching an island in the far Atlantic; equally certain that he placed unbounded confidence in these instructions, and therefore remained persistent in face of many discouragements. Furthermore, it appears very probable that when he advocated his cause for the last time before the Spanish monarchs, he won their sanction because he showed them material proofs instead of presenting scientific theories which had previously failed to convince them.

Las Casas, writing in San Domingo, says, "Columbus brought with him a map on which was marked these Indies (of Antilla) and their islands, the most prominent being Española." Again he says, after telling the story of the pilot, "Columbus went out to discover that which he did discover and to find that which he did find as certain of it as if it were something he had kept in his own room under his own key." To accept the story does not dim Columbus's courage as a navigator. The unknown pilot found Española without effort, involuntarily, even; Columbus found it as the result of years of effort and tenacity and voluntary risk.

MILDRED STAPLEY

NEW YORK CITY,
August, 1915.