

**COLUMBUS AND HIS
PREDECESSORS; A STUDY
IN THE BEGINNINGS
OF AMERICAN HISTORY**

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Columbus and His Predecessors; A Study in the Beginnings of American History by Charles H. McCarthy

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CHARLES H. MCCARTHY

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COLUMBUS MEMORIAL, WASHINGTON, D. C.

COLUMBUS AND HIS PREDECESSORS

A Study in the Beginnings of
American History

BY

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PHILADELPHIA:
JOHN JOSEPH McVEY

1912

TO THE

Knights of Columbus

WHO HAVE SHOWN A GREAT PRACTICAL INTEREST IN
AMERICAN HISTORY, THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

PREFACE

Although the approved method whereby the present-day historian gleans the facts of his narrative is by research among original documents and contemporary papers and by collating these in the most critical manner, this method seems to have been little followed in the history of the discovery of America. Strange as it may seem, the beginnings of the history of the New World remain hidden in the dusk of uncertainty. At best we have come only into the twilight of knowledge regarding even the central figure of this period, for it cannot be said that the full and accurate story has yet been told of the man himself who is the accepted discoverer of the Western hemisphere. In view of our honest pride in our country's standing among the nations, it is far from flattering that we should have to make such an admission at this late date.

Viewed from another angle, however, one may find that our neglect in this regard is partly extenuated by the distracting conditions which sit upon a country during the period of its formative and maturing process. The time of such development leaves little enough opportunity for the fol-

lowing of the culturing sciences and arts and for the fullness of that intellectual life which makes its dwelling in the abode of peace. But if our forefathers in pioneer days, and if our fathers in still more stirring times, had work to do which excused them from following to their sources the early records of American history, the same may not be said of the generations in these piping times of peace and of scientific research into the annals of the past.

This essay on *Columbus and his Predecessors* is but one among the signs that the duty which Americans owe to the memory of Columbus, is before the eyes of the present generation. The learned author in the following pages has set himself the task of clearing the ground and setting the stage, as it were, for a true survey of the drama whose culmination finds the immortal navigator of Genoa on the shores of a new world. With painstaking care he sketches, beginning with the Phœnicians, what the old pagan world knew about the globe and about navigation; also the extent of the knowledge of these matters among the early Christian nations, down to the famous explorations of the hardy Norsemen. Briefly, too, he reviews the nautical expeditions, before Columbus' time, undertaken by Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and England, showing in the course of the interesting story that as the

outcome of all this maritime activity there came a system into their schemes of discovery, greatly increased geographical knowledge, and better instruments and sea-going apparatus. Columbus, the man of destiny, steps into the story now, and the genesis of his grand project is skilfully traced, and the story told of his struggles, stage by stage, up to his glorious triumph. The legend of the "Nameless Pilot" is critically examined and rejected as the fabrication of an enemy. Next follows a chapter, which is perhaps the most important in the whole book, on the equipment of the expedition and the discovery of the new Continent. From the records in the archives of Spain it is clear that seven-eighths of the money needed for the equipment was loaned to Ferdinand and Isabella by the *Santa Hermandad* of which Santangel and Pinelo were the treasurers. We do not yet know whence came the one eighth furnished by the Admiral himself.

One of the concluding sections makes it plain that the discoveries of Cabot were suggested by the success of Columbus. It was upon the explorations of the former that England based her claims to North America. The United States sprang from the union of thirteen English dependencies. Hence the interest of Americans in everything pertaining to the discoverer of the New World. The study is concluded by a brief

but very suggestive statement of Spanish achievement in America.

The publication of the volume on the eve of the unveiling in Washington of the Columbus statue, by the order of Congress, is most opportune. It is a like happy circumstance that the essay comes from the experienced pen of the Professor of American History at the Catholic University, Washington, D. C. His gracious act in dedicating the volume to the Knights of Columbus is deeply appreciated, and it will doubtless serve as an encouragement to them to a renewed and patriotic interest in the history of their country.

JAMES A. FLAHERTY,
*Supreme Knight,
Knights of Columbus.*

April 25, 1912.