

THE NATION'S CAPITOL AT WASHINGTON.

Every American has reason to be proud of the National Capitol, which ranks as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. The main structure, with its original low-crowned dome (see cut, page 199), was completed in 1827; the two wings for the Senate and House of Representatives, and the new dome, 288 feet high, were added between 1851 and 1865.



1436-1506



Begging for Shelter at the Convent

## CHAPTER I

# Christopher Columbus

### I. THE BEGGAR

ON the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, where the peninsula of Italy widens to join the continent of Europe, stands the city of Genoa. Here, four hundred and fifty years ago, was born a boy who became a great sea-captain and who made one of the most famous voyages recorded in the history of the world.

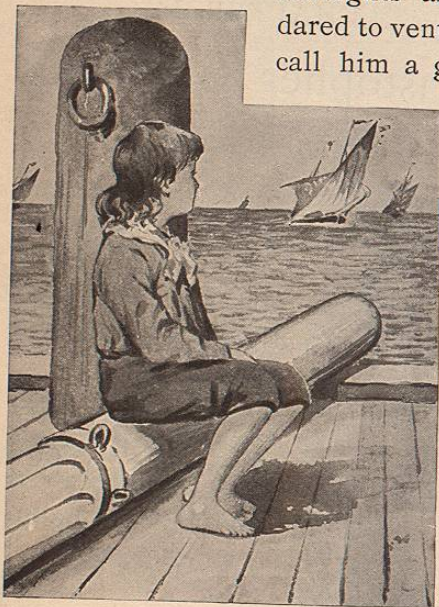
This boy's name was Christopher Columbus. His early life was very much like that of many other Italian boys. He went to school long enough to know something about arithmetic, geography, and astronomy, and to read Latin. His father was a wool-comber; that is, a man who combs out the wool and prepares it for the weavers.

For a while Christopher worked at his father's trade, as it was the custom at that time for the eldest boy to have the same trade as his father. But he soon determined that he did not want to stay in Genoa and comb wool all his life. Instead, he wanted to go to sea and learn something of the world.

It is not strange that he had this desire. Genoa was a busy seaport town, many of its inhabitants were sailors, and

vessels were continually coming and going in its beautiful harbor. Columbus, like other boys, doubtless enjoyed going down to the wharves and hearing the sailors tell stories of the countries they had seen.

When he was about fourteen years old he became a sailor, and for years led an adventurous life. He took part in many sea-fights and sailed wherever vessels dared to venture. People now would not call him a great traveler, but in those



THE BOY COLUMBUS.

days sailors were afraid to go far from sight of land, and what seems to us a short distance was then a very long journey. If we should take a map of the world as it was known five or six hundred years ago and compare it with the maps of to-day, we should find a great difference. There was no North nor South America, no Australia, on the maps that Columbus studied. People did not even dream that any such lands existed. Europe was the only continent that was well known. Only the northern portions and some parts of the western coast of Africa had been visited, and most of Asia was unexplored.

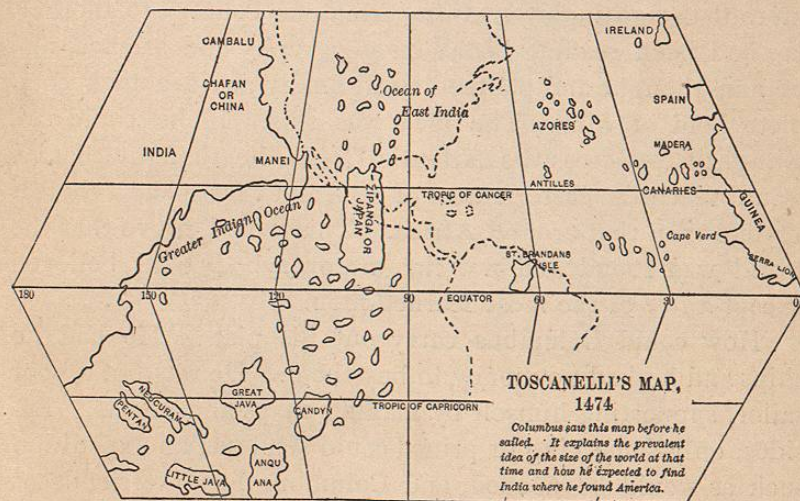
The unknown lands were thought to be filled with huge dragons and other fearful beasts; the men, instead of being small like the inhabitants of Europe, were supposed to be

great and terrible giants. Sailors said that in the Atlantic Ocean were monsters so large that they could take vessels upon their backs and dash them in pieces. Many other foolish and impossible stories were also believed.

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THE MAP THAT COLUMBUS STUDIED.

they could not see land, or sun, or stars. Now they were able to go farther from the shore. When the terrible things which they expected to find did not appear, they grew braver and the next time sailed a little farther.

More than a hundred years before the birth of Columbus, a man named Marco Polo wrote a book in which he described his travels in Asia. Wonderful stories of countries almost unknown were told. He said that these lands were rich in gold and jewels, and that fragrant spices and costly woods

were abundant. Of course people were anxious to see these countries and obtain wealth. But to do this they would have to make an expensive and dangerous journey across Asia on camel-back. So some of the wise men thought that if vessels could only sail around the southern part of Africa, it would be an easier and less costly journey.

Columbus, while a young man, had been doing something more than fighting and sailing from one country to another. He had been reading books on geography and science, and he had thought and planned until finally an idea took complete hold of him. The idea was this. If he could sail straight west across the Atlantic Ocean, he thought that he would reach the eastern coast of Asia and thus make a shorter voyage than that around Africa. This would prove that the world was round and not flat, as everybody still believed except a few of the most learned men.

How could Columbus carry out his plan? He had no ships and he had no money to buy them. He was but a poor sailor, supporting himself by making maps and charts. Besides, only some king or prince could send out an expedition such as would be needed, and Columbus had no friends at court to take up his cause. At the very beginning his plan seemed hopeless, and a less persistent man would have given up in despair.

Portugal had been for a long time more interested in sending out vessels on voyages of discovery than any other country of Europe. Columbus thought that its king might listen to his plan and give him help. Therefore he went to Lisbon and in time came before the king. King John called all his wise men together. They discussed the matter, and decided that it was impossible to make a voyage such as Columbus planned.

Some said, however, that there might be something in it, and that it would be a shame for Portugal to lose the glory of making the discovery. Therefore they decided to send out a vessel privately, without the knowledge of Columbus. This vessel sailed westward a few days, and then, because the sailors became frightened, came back and reported that



COLUMBUS SNEERED AT IN COURT.

the voyage could not be made. Columbus was very angry with the king when he learned of his deceit. He left Portugal and went to try his fortunes at the Court of Spain.

Columbus could hardly have chosen a more unfortunate time to seek aid from Ferdinand and Isabella, the king and queen of Spain. They were in the midst of a fierce and costly war against the Moors, who had possession of the southern part of the Spanish peninsula. It could scarcely be

expected that they would be willing to furnish money to aid an entire stranger, unless they were quite sure that his plan would be successful. Consequently Columbus was put off again and again.

At one time the king and queen went so far as to ask the opinions of the wisest men of the kingdom. These learned men laughed at the idea, and brought up all the old arguments and superstitions to prove that Columbus was entirely wrong. Columbus, however, was not easily discouraged, for he believed thoroughly in his plan. A few noblemen became his friends, but many thought him crazy. He was called the "man with the cloak full of holes." Even the children in the streets would point at him as he passed by.

At last Columbus became quite discouraged and decided to leave Spain. Taking his boy by the hand, he started on the long journey to France on foot. One day, tired and hungry, they stopped at the door of a convent, and Columbus asked for a bit of bread and a cup of water for his son. While they were resting, the prior walked by, and seeing the strangers stopped to talk with them. It was not long before he drew out the story of the traveler's life. He became interested, and he determined, if possible, to keep Columbus in Spain.

This good man had once been Queen Isabella's priest, and he knew that she would listen to what he said. Therefore he kept Columbus at the convent and hurried off to see the queen. He told her that Columbus was an honest man, and that what he said was true. To be sure, it would cost something to help him, but what would a little money be compared with the glory that would fall to Spain if the voyage should be successful?

Queen Isabella listened to the priest's plea and sent for

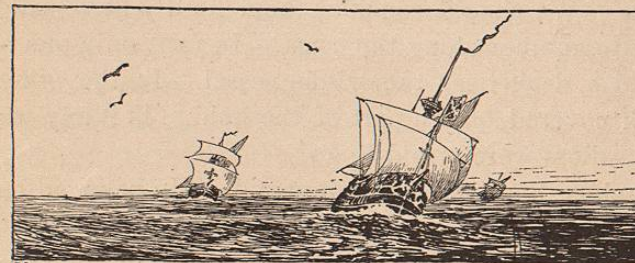
Columbus to come back to court. He arrived just as the Moors surrendered. Soon after he was summoned before the king and queen to describe his plans again, but he demanded so high a reward if he came back successful that they declared it would be impossible to help him. He would not accept anything less, and again everything was given up.

Columbus mounted his donkey and started once more for France. But the queen soon became sorry that she had allowed him to leave. She sent messengers after him in great haste to tell him that she had decided to furnish the money for ships and provisions for the voyage. Once more Columbus turned back. All the long weary years of waiting were at an end. At last the time had come to prove to those who had made such sport of him that he was not so wholly wrong after all.

Tell the story of Columbus: as a boy; as a sailor; at the court of King John; at the court of Spain; at the convent; as, at last, he obtains aid.

Give an account of Marco Polo and the effect of his book.  
Explain what was the great idea of Columbus.

How did the studies of Columbus, when a boy, help him in his great discovery? What route of travel did people use in going to Asia after spices and jewels? Why did people think that the earth was not round? Why did Columbus seek help from the courts rather than from rich men? Why was Columbus angry with the King of Portugal? Why was Columbus nicknamed? What made the prior interested in the poor beggar?



Columbus crossing the Atlantic.