ADMITTED OF THE OCEAN SEA

A Life of Christopher Columbus.

By Samuel Eliot Morison

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By William B. Munro

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No one in American history has stir-
red up more controversy than the Geno-
ese navigator who was designated as
"Admiral of the Ocean Sea" and sent
on his westward way by the sovereigns
of Spain in 1492. By some he has been
exalted as the most courageous and bril-
liant navigator of all time, one whose
dogged perseverance in the face of mon-
umental difficulties brought a new world
into the orbit of human knowledge. By
others he has been pilloried as a quixotic
adventurer who stumbled upon a piece
of good fortune and then stole the glory
that belonged to other men. Professor
Morison has undertaken to find out, by
a new and interesting method, just what
kind of navigator Columbus was. Him-
self a good historian and an equally
kind of navigator Columbus was. Him-
adventurer who stumbled upon a piece
of good fortune and then stole the glory
into the orbit of human knowledge. By
brilliant navigator of all time, one whose
was correct he probably never would
have started.

It has often been said that the inven-
tion of the astrolabe by the Arabs made
possible the first voyage to America.
Columbus, as a matter of fact, did not
use the astrolabe to determine his posi-
tions. He was a dead-reckoning navi-
gator, but a mighty good one as Pro-
fessor Morison proves. Occasionally
Columbus took a shot at the altitude of
a star to verify his figures, but the results
were valueless. He was so inexpert in
identifying the constellations that on
more than one occasion he mistook other
stars for Polaris. But when it came to
reckonings from log and compass he was
as good as the best. He also knew where
to find the trade winds and how to use
them. Not infrequently, when conditions
were good, his caravels scurried along at
six or seven knots per hour.

Some historians have suspected that
the Journal which Columbus kept was
faked, — written up after he returned
home to prove that he knew where he
was when he didn't. Professor Morison
disposes of such yarns conclusively. Col-
umbus had his failings, no doubt, but
dishonesty was not one of them. He was
vain and to a degree self-seeking, with
an undue interest in titles and honors.
He was not always a good disciplinarian
and his followers sometimes got out of
hand. He let them treat the natives bad-
ly, although it can fairly be said that
had it not been for him the treatment
would have been a good deal worse.

The book is a fine combination of
sound history and nautical narrative.  It
will appeal strongly to those who like
the sea and know how a ship can be
handled in fair weather or foul. No
reader who belongs in that category will
fail to marvel at the consummate skill
with which this Admiral of the Ocean
Sea, with only the most primitive instru-
mements of navigation, plotted his course,
kept his three ships together, brought
them safely to new shores, and went
confidently coursing around the un-
charted Caribbean. His descriptions of
landmarks on the various islands were
so accurate that Dr. Morison was able
to depend on them in negotiating a fair-
way between the reefs.

So here, in a word, is a narrative of
the most significant sea exploit in all
history by an author who is at once an
eminent historian, a skillful navigator
under sail, and a writer of good litera-
ture. It goes without saying that such
book is considerably out of the ordin-
ary and represents an original approach
to the problems and achievements of the
first great figure in American history.
One cannot too highly praise the quality
of the author's style, his power of vivid
description, his frequent flashes of humor
— even his facility in the effective use
of contemporary American slang. A lover
of the sea, and all that is therein, Dr.
Morison succeeds in transmitting to his
readers much of the thrill that he felt
as his own barkentine ploughed along
the route of the Great Admiral toward
the setting sun.

* It is issued in both two-volume and a
one-volume edition. The latter omits the
extensive footnotes and most of two
rather technical chapters.

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