

trigonometry I found the position of this Sumner line during a full morning's work. It fortunately cut at a very broad angle the course that we must anyhow be steering so as to come towards the south of Scotland, and I could therefore get quite a good position. Indeed some days later the Chief Officer told me he had been rather shocked because I had succeeded in telling him our longitude correct to fifty miles, and our latitude to a hundred or so. I would, however, not have ventured to estimate the probable error of my position.

There was a sequel. During the interminable voyage the passengers arranged a sweepstake about the day and time of our arrival at Liverpool; I think this was on a Wednesday and most of the passengers guessed we should arrive some time between the following Tuesday and Thursday. Using my (as yet unverified) estimate of the position and taking the known speed of the convoy—and also having to estimate the position of Liverpool which could not be accurately read from my atlas—I could calculate that the great circle to Liverpool would bring us there much sooner, in fact on the earlier Saturday. However there would obviously be delays, and so since nobody else had put down nearly so optimistic a date, I gave the time as Sunday afternoon at 4 p.m. We actually touched the quay at 3.30 p.m., so my methods of navigation proved quite profitable.

Columbus the Seaman?

from Professor E. G. R. Taylor

COMMANDER WATERS's review¹ of Professor Morison's recent book on Columbus (*Journal* 10, 216) should be read in the light of the following facts, published in 1932 by the City of Genoa.² They were supported by facsimiles of the documents from which they derive. The Great Discoverer was born in 1451, the son of a wool-weaver of Genoa. The family moved for a time to Savona, and were living there in 1472 when Christopher, in signing a deed, described himself as 'a wool-worker of Genoa'. He went to Lisbon not before 1476, and while there visited Madeira to buy sugar for two Genoese merchants. He made a brief business visit to Genoa in 1479, when he said he must soon return to Lisbon. In all this there is no hint of a person who has knocked about the sea from the age of ten. There is no evidence that on the voyage to Guinea Columbus travelled as a sailor, while as regards the voyage to Iceland, he said it was made in February 1477, that the south of the island lay in lat. 73° N., not 63° N., and that he sailed 100 leagues (400 miles) beyond it and found that the sea was not frozen. The authenticity of this voyage may be left to the judgment of the reader.

The outstanding feats of Columbus were to plan the voyage, to secure equipment for the voyage, and above all to carry it through despite the fears and the unwillingness of the mariners. His stature is not lessened by his romancing about his younger days, nor by his failure to grasp the rules for taking Sun and star—not even, perhaps, by his readiness to falsify the log-book. For it was a general maxim of ancient sea-laws that before the captain or master took any action of serious consequence, like cutting the cables, or leaving port in a storm, he must consult the ship's company and abide by a majority decision. John Cabot had been forced by his crew to turn back on his first effort to cross the ocean. Columbus did not turn back.

Professor Salvador de Madariaga (author of Christopher Columbus) comments:

I have unfortunately not read Professor Morison's book but gather from Cdr. Waters's review of it that the eminent Admiral-Professor duly appreciates the merits of the Admiral-Discoverer as a navigator. These would seem to me evident from the achievements of Columbus; and I find it difficult to see how any concrete defects in technique or knowledge that Columbus may have had can detract from his skill as a seaman. Rather should I be inclined to consider that the less theory Columbus is found to possess, the greater will stand out his skill as a practical seaman.

This in its turn tallies not merely with the views on the subject which I have expounded in my own *Life*, but, what is more to the point, with Columbus's own assertions. It seems to me too easy to dismiss as 'lies' and 'romancing' what a historical figure affirms unless there is no way whatever to reconcile his sayings with other unimpeachable evidence. I believe I have proved that Columbus's assertions on his long life at sea are in perfect accordance with the facts and documents of the Genoa series. Gallo, not only Columbus, says that the two elder sons of Domenico went out to sea at an early age. The documents prove that only the third son, Giacomo, became a wool weaver like his father; and that Christoforo had to rescue his father from financial difficulties, which shows that he was earning his living in a different way. In the circumstances, the logical conclusion is that he made his living as a sailor.

A long life at sea and a but indifferent theoretical education is precisely the combination that we find in the Discoverer when considered as a seaman. When all tallies, why wander from the harmony of the facts? What inducement could lead Columbus to make up an imaginary sea career? In order to convince cosmographers and pilots who would surely see the impostor in him far more easily than we do? And whence could come his outstanding seamanship if as it turns out he was awkward with the quadrant and did not know how to use astronomical tables? Whence could it come but from a long life at sea?

There is in the life of Columbus something which does not tally. This Genoese never wrote any language other than Spanish, or Latin. He wrote in Spanish even to his brothers, to the Bank of Genoa, to the Genoese Ambassador. This has to be explained and it will not do airily to declare that there is no problem here. There is a problem, and no biography that does not attempt to solve it can be considered as any more than a jumble of facts. For the *Life of Columbus* to acquire a unity, this fact must be explained. I have connected it with another curious fact of his life, the variety of his names. He called himself successively Colombo, Colomo, Colom and Colón. This last form of the name happens to be that which Italian Jews of the name of Colombo regularly adopted when writing in Hebrew characters. All this has led me to the hypothesis that the Colombos were Spanish Jews settled in Genoa. I have so far read nothing of any value against such an explanation of the facts, which on the other hand everything seems to confirm.

REFERENCES

- 1 *Christopher Columbus, Seaman.*
- 2 *Christopher Columbus: Documents and Proofs of his Genoese origin, City of Genoa, 1932.* (English-German edition.)