

American's Work on "Columbus."

Henry Vignaud, Venerable Chief Secretary of United States Embassy in Paris, is First Yankee to Receive Highest Literary Honor France Can Bestow.

Special to The State.

Paris, Jan 1—Henry Vignaud, the venerable first secretary of the United States embassy in Paris, is now putting the finishing touches to the second series of his monumental work, "Critical Studies of the Life of Columbus." His first series has just been "crowned" by the Academy. This is the highest form of appreciation that France can bestow, and no other recognition elsewhere is held in such high esteem as the men who confer it are all savants of the specialist order. It is a distinction rarely given to foreigners and Mr. Vignaud is the first American to receive it.

During the 32 years that he has resided in Paris Mr. Vignaud has devoted all his leisure time to historical studies and for the most part with reference to Columbus. In hunting up information about him from all sorts of musty records he has displayed infinite pains and patience. He verifies everything. His first series, as is generally known, showed that the real Columbus bore little resemblance to the heroic figures of legend and tradition who has been enshrined for centuries in the popular imagination. In fact, he has proved to be a good deal of a humbug and charlatan. The second series, judging from the conversation I have just had with Mr. Vignaud, will be still more destructive of the halo with which historians, who have devoted little original research to the subject, have surrounded him.

"In my first series of critical studies," said Mr. Vignaud, "I left Columbus when he settled in Portugal and married. In the new series I take him from the commencement of his life in Portugal until his departure for the discovery of America. In other words, my second series is a continuance of the first. My critical studies, however, conclude with Columbus' starting on his voyage because after that his life is fully recorded and there are no disputed points about him to be cleared up. Columbus was a man of mystery and a most consummate liar. He lied continually about himself. He lied whenever he thought it served his personal interests. I prove him to be a confirmed liar.

"In my coming work I take up the supposed discussion of his plan of voyage, with the learned men of the University of Salamanca and of Spain generally. Columbus was more of a sailor than of a savant, but he wished to give the impression that he was constantly in communication with the learned men of his day. He was not.

"There is also a curious point about Beatrice Henriquez, mother of his second son. It is a debated question whether he was married or not. I prove beyond dispute that he was not married to Beatrice. This is something that will have to be taken into account in considering his fitness for canonization. His eldest son, however, is legitimate, for Columbus was married in Portugal. It is from this son that the

Duke de Veragua, who raises bulls for the fights in Spain and who visited America during the Chicago exposition, is descended.

"It is often said that I am too severe upon Columbus. I have sought only to get at the truth about him, and it is the truth about him that proves him to have been a consummate liar. The results of my investigations set forth in my first series of studies are now accepted as incontrovertible by all serious students of the discoverer of America. Filson Young, for instance, in his life of Columbus, accepts my contentions throughout.

"I may mention also that the discovery of the true date of Columbus' birth is mine. Since I made that known a document has been brought to light showing that Columbus was born in 1451 as I maintained. Formerly all histories of the navigator were based largely upon tradition, but the facts that I have brought to light concerning him show that he was far from being the sort of man who is worthy of hero worship."

"Will Columbus ever be made a saint, Mr. Vignaud?" I asked.

"Never, I believe," Mr. Vignaud replied. You might look upon me as a kind of lay devil's advocate. You know that the cardinal who is appointed to oppose the canonization of a saint and who raises all the objections he can is called the devil's advocate. The question of the canonization of Columbus is full of interest for Americans. I believe that the Knights of Columbus, a powerful organization in the United States, pushed the canonization. Americans contributed towards the expense of the investigation. The movement originated in France, Pius IX favored it, Leo XIII frowned upon it, and Pius X has taken no action in the matter. Recently it was said that the question was being taken up again at the instigation of the Knights of Columbus. I have communicated with Rome on the matter and the reply is that nothing is being done by it.

"Columbus can not be canonized because, according to the canons of the Catholic church, that honor is reserved only for those who are possessed of heroic virtues and by whom, or at least through whom, not less than three miracles have been wrought. Now, no miracles are attributed to Columbus and he can not have been heroically virtuous because he was a most accomplished liar and he lived in concubinage with Beatrice Henriquez. The question of his canonization never even reached the congregation of rites which is the first step. The Knights of Columbus will have to wait a long time for their saint."

Mr. Vignaud's studies of Columbus and his estimates of the character of the man are all the more interesting because of the fact that it was a feeling of profound admiration for the discoverer of America, based upon what he had up to that time read about him, that led him to take up the subject.