of two or three decades ago. Inasmuch as the Midwest over the past twenty years "has undergone swifter and more drastic social and economic changes than in any other period since the passage of the Northwest Ordinance," Professor Nye concludes that these changes "demand new political approaches to the problems they create" (p. 354) and that "it is inconceivable that a Jerry Simpson, an Ignatius Donnelly, or even an elder LaFollette will ever again capture the fancy of the Midwestern electorate" (p. 362).

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The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by his Son Ferdinand. Translated and edited by Benjamin Keen. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1959. Pp. xxxii, 316. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. $7.50.)

A man who rises from obscurity into sudden prominence, as did William Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln, and Christopher Columbus (alias Cristoforo Colombo, Cristóbal Colón), is likely to become more legendary than historical. This is especially true of the last-named individual, as every person who has ever attempted to write his biography has readily discovered. The reaction of the biographer too often has been to increase the problem by creating more legend. When a sound scholar finally tackles the issue, he finds it necessary to spend more time denying the legend than he can devote to determining the truth.

The Columbus legend was compounded by the disappearance of essential documents such as the log of the first voyage, by the deliberate obfuscations of the Columbus family in their eagerness to magnify their status in a stratified society, and by the efforts of contemporary enemies to denigrate the upstart admiral. In some sense, the book now under review has contributed to each of these areas of confusion. The original manuscript was written by Ferdinand Columbus, the second son of the discoverer, and is characterized by the weaknesses inherent in such a relationship between biographer and biographee—filioptism, glossing over of some unpleasant facts, and exaggeration of certain other data. Ferdinand, for example, failed to mention his own illegitimacy—an understandable omission. On the other hand, his family connection gave him access to documents which have long since disappeared and makes his manuscript an indispensable source of information, however fragmentary, upon the life of his father. Every biographer, from Washington Irving to Samuel Eliot Morison, has been forced to lean very heavily upon it. Finally, much of the stimulus for Ferdinand's effort came from his indignation at published accounts which belittled his father's claims to greatness, and at the ingratitude displayed by the Spanish rulers toward the Italian who had given them an empire. The final result of these concurrent forces was a fascinating but polemical addition to the world's historical literature.

Ferdinand Columbus composed this biography during the last three years of his life (1536-1539), and more than three decades after the death of his father. Ferdinand was a wealthy bachelor, a trusted
servant of the crown and holder of lucrative sinecures, a scholar, a bibliophile, and something of a dilettante. At his death the manuscript remained unpublished, and was sold by his worthless nephew to a cultured Genoese physician who had it translated into Italian and published in Venice in 1571. From this hastily translated and unquestionably garbled version a poor English translation was made in 1744. Since the Spanish original had long since disappeared, these imperfect versions of Ferdinand's work were all that scholars could use until very recently. In 1930, however, the Italian scholar, Rinaldo Caddeo, scrupulously edited a new text, and in 1947 Ramon Iglesia published an excellent re-translation into Spanish. Mr. Keen worked from these texts in preparing this "first complete and adequate English translation."

Not qualified to test the validity of this claim by the publishers, this reviewer is inclined to accept it on the strength of Mr. Keen's proven skill as an historian, editor, and translator. The book is interestingly illustrated by sixteenth-century woodcuts and Morison's maps. Mr. Keen supplies an explanatory introduction and excellent notes, confined generally to identification of names and places in the text and to careful corrections of Ferdinand's factual errors.

The book thus has an authoritative air, and it should be extremely useful to scholars and teachers. It is also a wonderful piece of literature for average American readers—an adventure story with suspense, romance, and pathos aplenty. At the hands of an admiring offspring who shared his disastrous fourth voyage, Columbus comes alive—a man of infinite skill, faith, persistence, patience, and courage. One sees with him this virgin land in all its pristine glory and wonder. And one cannot escape the personal poignancy of supreme victory and nagging defeat and the end of it all when the great man, "much afflicted by the gout and by grief at seeing himself fallen from his high estate, as well as by other ills, yielded up his soul to God on the Day of the Ascension, May 20, 1506, in the city of Valladolid, having received with much devotion all the sacraments of the Church. . . . God, in His great mercy and goodness, assuredly received him into His glory" (p. 284).

Otterbein College  

Lynn W. Turner


The major part of this book consists of a half-dozen monographs by as many different authors on important aspects of seventeenth-century Virginia history. Besides this, there is a similar essay on Massachusetts Bay, a critical discussion of the historical accounts of the colonies in the seventeenth century written in or near the period, a lecture pointing out the significance of the experiences and changes of the period that resulted in the American way of life, and an excellent introduction summarizing the essential contribution of each chapter and supplying enough connective tissue to produce a unified whole.