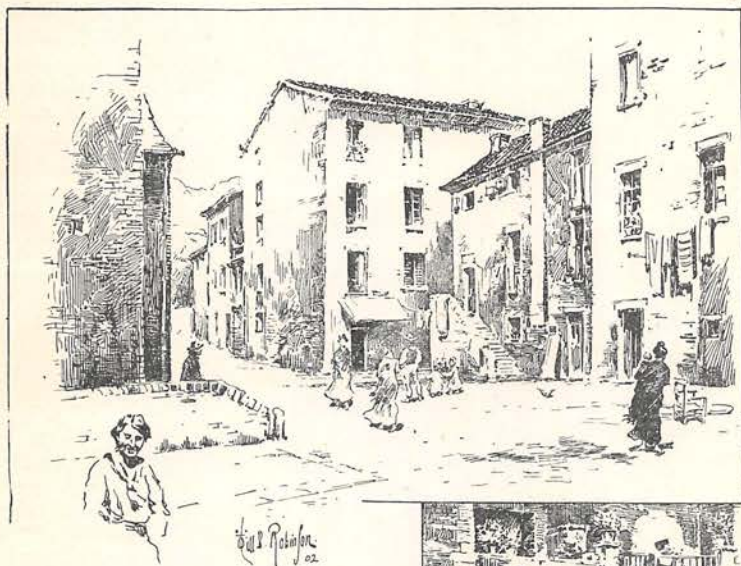


THE BIRTHPLACE OF COLUMBUS.

By MILLER CHRISTY.*

OF the great men who were born in the early centuries, when the formal registration of births and the art of printing were alike unknown, not a few are able (if the claims of posterity may be trusted) to boast an extraordinarily large number of birthplaces. For Posterity,

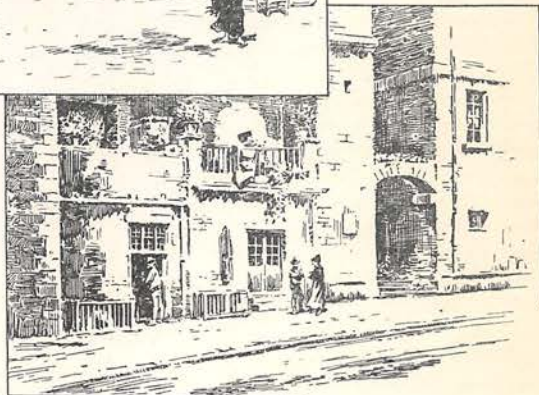
Columbus. Nevertheless, few who sift finely the arguments advanced by the different claimants can arrive at any other conclusion than that, if Columbus had really (like any ordinary mortal) only one birthplace, the honour of having given him birth belongs unquestionably either to the city of Genoa or to the little neighbouring town of Cogoleto. Years ago, the weight of learned opinion was decidedly in favour of Cogoleto, but nowadays the claims of Genoa are more approved. Good authorities, however, still beg to differ, and it is likely that the point at issue will never



THE PIAZZA BAPTISTA AGNESI, COGOLETO.

either through gratitude or vanity, seeks always to appropriate a share of the glory reflected down the Ages by the doings of some great man who has written his name in bold characters on the pages of the world's history.

Of no man is this more true than of him who achieved (albeit entirely by accident) what has been styled the greatest event in the history of our globe—the discovery of the New World. A living writer of high authority has declared that no fewer than ten towns and villages on the Italian Riviera claim to be the true birthplace of



THE SEA-FRONT OF THE COLUMBUS HOUSE.

be settled definitely, owing to lack of conclusive evidence.

It is true that, in one place, Columbus himself speaks of having been born in Genoa; but even this proves little. Supposing that he was really born in Cogoleto, or in any of the other small Ligurian towns which claim him as a native, nothing would be more natural than that, when

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resident on foreign soil, he should consider himself and declare himself a Genoese, thus claiming as the place of his birth the city under whose shadow he was born, in which he had certainly many near relatives and close friends, and with which he was unquestionably as familiar as any native. "Genoa the Superb" (as she proudly called herself) must have been, in any case, from his earliest youth, his ideal city. In the days of his boyhood, her enterprise was at its height, and his young imagination must have been stirred by stories of the naval and commercial successes of her citizens and the prowess of her sailors. What, therefore, would be more natural than that Spanish and Portuguese princes and historians should persistently associate Columbus with the city of Genoa, even if he did explain that he was born, in reality, not actually in the city itself, but in a little town a few miles distant, though within the boundaries of the Republic?

We must bear in mind that, even if Columbus was born really in Cogoletto, his name would become associated naturally with Genoa, whose overwhelmingly greater fame would certainly enable her, in after years, when the question came to be discussed ardently, to establish her claim by might (so to speak), if she could not do so by unquestionable right. But, if Columbus was really born in the city of Genoa, there is no conceivable reason why his name should have become associated with the comparatively insignificant village of Cogoletto. And, as what follows will show, the claim of Cogoletto is, to say the least, very plausible.

The earliest historian who names Cogoletto as the birthplace of Columbus appears to be Ovideo, whose "Historia General de las

Indias" was published in 1530, less than thirty years after the admiral's death. Since his day, many other writers have supported the claims of Cogoletto. Chief among these was Signor Felice Isnardi, who discussed the question in a pamphlet published some years ago. In any case, it is certain that Columbus was familiar with the little town; for he must have passed through it many a time when travelling along the ancient coast-road between Genoa and Savona, at both of which places his father had business establishments.

Facts and arguments innumerable have been brought forward to establish the claim of Genoa, but the Cogoletese (or *Cogoletani*, as they call themselves), like Gallio, care for none of these things. They assert, and claim to prove, that in Cogoletto, and nowhere else, the famous mariner was born. And, whether they are right or wrong, it is certain that their otherwise unimportant, if not unattractive, little town literally teems with interest for the hero-worshipper in whose Valhalla Columbus finds a place. None such will regard as wasted time an hour or two spent in a pilgrimage to this reputed birthplace of the great discoverer.

Lying right upon the shore of the tideless Mediterranean, in the territory of ancient Liguria, some eleven English miles east from Savona, and fifteen west from Genoa, and shut in at the back by the coast-ranges of the Ligurian Apennines, Cogoletto is a sleepy little seaport town of about 2,500 inhabitants, with narrow streets and dingy but picturesque houses. Though situated upon a main travel-route, the town is not very easy of access. It is not of sufficient importance for the faster express trains—the *accelerati*,



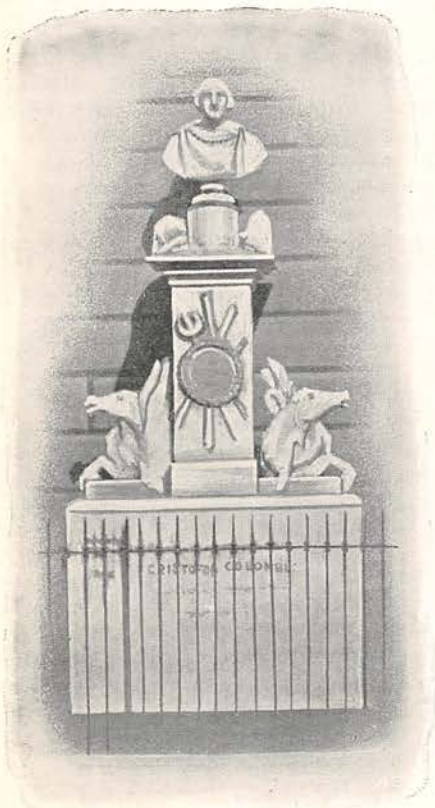
THE STREET-FRONT OF THE COLUMBUS HOUSE.

by which tourists generally travel—to stop there. To reach it, one is obliged to take one of the slow “omnibus” trains, which stop at every station. Still, these latter enable the pilgrim to reach his destination in good time, from either Savona or Genoa, to see the sights of the place, and return to his starting-point, or to proceed to the other city, all within the day. Sleeping at Cogoleto cannot be recommended. There is but one tiny inn, or *trattoria*, named (like most other things in the town) after Columbus. I slept there on one of my visits, and found it clean enough; but the *ménage* is of primitive simplicity, for the landlord combines within himself the multifarious offices of cook, chambermaid, boots, and waiter. Still, prices are proportionately modest, for dinner, bed, and breakfast cost only four lire (three shillings)! The visitors’ book,

The tourist, starting from Savona, reaches his destination by the “omnibus” train in about forty minutes. The slow rate of travel is well compensated, for the scenery is



CONTEMPORARY PORTRAIT OF COLUMBUS
PRESERVED AT COGOLETO.



THE STATUE TO COLUMBUS, AT COGOLETO.

which all guests in an Italian hotel are compelled to sign, shows that no other foreign tourist has passed a night at Cogoleto's one hotel within historic times.

charming and the line shows marvels of engineering skill. At few places is there more than just enough room between the rocky cliffs and the sea to allow of the passage of the road and the railway, while the embankment of the latter is washed in places by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and nearly every one of the many small headlands on the coast has had to be pierced, thus making the whole line little more than a series of many short tunnels. As the train nears Cogoleto, the traveller sees, almost for the first time, the mountains receding from the coast and leaving a stretch of fertile cultivable land, a mile or so in width, at the back of the little town.

The obvious antiquity of the place (anciently known as Cugoreo or Cogoreto) will strike every visitor. Its dark narrow street speaks of the past alone; and, were we concerned with its history, we should be carried back to very early times, when Hannibal with his Carthaginian hordes, on his way to humble the Roman Eagle, passed along its ancient roadway, which dates from pre-Christian days. Interesting stories are told of the old castle or fortress of Borgo di Cogoleto; but, to the visitor in search of Columbus lore, its chief interest lies in the

fact that it is said to have been granted, in the year 1200, to the then head of the great navigator's family as a reward for a victory gained by him. Many have questioned the truth of this story, but the Cogoletani admit no doubt of it and have erected a tablet in their church to confirm it.

In years long gone by, Tennyson visited Cogoleto and recognised its claim. He has left us a brief sketch of it and of his visit, in "The Daisy," in which he tells—

How young Columbus seemed to rove,
Yet present in his natal grove;
Now watching high on mountain cornice,
And steering now from a purple cove.

Now pacing mute by ocean's rim;
Till, in a narrow street and dim,
I stay'd the wheels at Cogoleto
And drank, and loyally drank, to him.

Nor know we well what pleased us most;
Not the clipt palm of which they boast,
But distant colour. Happy hamlet,
A moulder'd citadel on the coast!

To-day, Cogoleto consists of little more than two narrow streets, one of which skirts the seashore and is connected with the second, immediately behind it, by two small *piazas* or squares. Its inhabitants, like those of most small Italian towns, are not blest with an abundance of worldly wealth. Yet the Cogoletani are by no means devoid of enterprise, for they have provided themselves with an excellent water-supply and their streets are lit by electric light, the power for which is obtained from waterfalls



THE PIAZZA DEGLI ANSALDO, AT COGOLETO.

upon the mountains at the back. Close to the station is the boot-factory of Messrs. Biamonti and Co. Cogoleto also devotes her labour-power to the making of soap, dye,

lime, and shot; and she contributes an unusually large proportion of her sons to man the vessels of the Italian Navy. In the matter of public institutions, Cogoleto



GENERAL VIEW OF COGOLETO, FROM THE BACK.

is, for an Italian town, fairly well provided. It has a small hospital, almshouses, two communal schools, and an orphanage dedicated to the memory of Columbus.

On leaving the station, the visitor should take the narrow road leading to the sea-front. A couple of hundred yards brings him to the Piazza Baptista Agnesi, one of the two squares already mentioned. I give a view of it, taken from the sea-front. The house with an awning in the background is the "Trattoria del Christoforo Colombo," already spoken of. Turning sharply to the left, one enters the Via Christoforo Colombo (that is, "Christopher Columbus Street"). It is extremely narrow and roughly paved, but is, nevertheless, Cogoleto's principal thoroughfare. A few paces bring one to No. 22, and here, in this plain, solidly built, two-storey, stone house there took place, at some unknown date in the year 1446 or early in 1447, the event which was to prove a time-mark in the world's history—at least, so say the Cogoletani.

To-day the ground floor of the Columbus house is used as a tobacconist's shop. The present occupants of the house are kindly disposed towards visitors and are always pleased to show it for a small consideration. Perhaps, even, they may present the pilgrim (as in my case) with a memento in the shape of a flower grown upon the balcony at the back, overlooking

the sea, upon which in his youth Columbus may have sat, pondering upon his scheme "to reach the East by sailing West." The present occupants are, however, not linguists; and if the pilgrim does not command Italian, his reveries will not be disturbed by the commonplaces of the showman. The front of the house is adorned by inscriptions and designs commemorating its history. It is difficult to obtain a better view of it than that on page 432, owing to the narrowness of the street.

On the front of the ground floor are two inscriptions in Latin, with the date (1826) when they were put up. Rendered into English their legend would be:—

Traveller, stay thy steps. Here Columbus, one of the world's greatest men, first saw light. Alas! a much too modest birthplace!

One world there was. Two there are, said he. There were!

Under what special circumstances or by whom these inscriptions were put up does not appear; but the cause of erection of other legends on the front of the ground floor is obvious. One, on a marble tablet erected by the Town Council in 1888, commemorates the fact that, on September 2nd 1857, King Humbert, with his brother Amadeo, Prince of Savoy, visited the house. Another records that the house was repaired on the 28th of August 1872. A third tablet, also erected by the municipal body, relates that in 1880 the Crown Prince of Germany, afterwards the Kaiser Frederick, came to Cogoleto from San Remo and inspected the house. There are also the armorial bearings of Columbus.

On the front of the first storey is a portrait of Columbus, with a eulogium upon him, put there two centuries and a half ago by Father Antonio Colombo, who is said to have been the last member of the family to reside in the town. Though now too much effaced to be legible easily, it read originally as follows:—

Con generoso ardir dall' Arca all' onde
Ubbidente il vol Colomba prende,
Corre, s'aggira, terren scopre, e fronde
D'olivo in segno, al gran Noe ne rende.

L'imita in cio COLOMBO, ne s'asconde,
E da sua Patria il mar solcando fende;
Terreno alfin scoprendo diede fondo,
Offerendo all' Ispano un nuovo Mondo.

Li 2 Dicembre 1650.

Prete Antonio Colombo.*

On the front of the second storey is a painted representation of a globe within an ornamental scroll.

Having exhausted the interest of the front of the Columbus house, the visitor should

proceed a hundred yards or so further along the "narrow street and dim." This will bring him to the second and larger of the two squares, the Piazza Degli Ansaldo, of which a view, taken from the seashore, is given. In the centre is a small fountain. On the eastern side, against the wall of the *Casa Comunale*, or Town Hall, is a monument, erected by the town to the memory of the man whom every Cogoletan claims as a fellow-citizen. The bust which crowns the monument is the work of Domenico Vassallo, of Genoa, who presented it to the town in 1864, on condition that it should be erected on a worthy pedestal in a public place, but the monument was not unveiled till March 1889. The pedestal of Baveno granite was largely subscribed for by a colony of natives of Cogoleto resident in Buenos Ayres. On the front is the simple dedication: "A Cristoforo Colombo, Cogoleto." On the sides are other inscriptions, which refer to the fame and achievements of Cogoleto's hero. The shaft which supports the bust bears on the front, within a wreath, the historic date, "11 Ottobre 1492," the day on which the New World was discovered. The monument is artistic and not unworthy to commemorate Columbus.

The *Casa Comunale* is the next point of interest. A plain, commonplace, stone building, of no great pretension, it contains, nevertheless, treasures which are intimately connected with the life and work of the great navigator, and bring the associations of the place more closely home to the mind of the visitor than even the house of his birth. In the tiny chamber which serves as a municipal art gallery and museum, as well as the mayor's private office, visitors are always courteously received by the civic officials, who exhibit with pardonable pride the relics in their charge. By far the most interesting is the contemporary portrait of the navigator—one of the two genuinely ancient ones now known to exist—which has remained in the possession of the autho-

* With noble courage, from the Ark, the Dove,
Obedient, takes her flight across the Deep.
She hastens, wanders round, discovers land,
And, for a token, bears to Noah an olive twig.

In this, Columbus imitates her. He flees away,
And, leaving his country, ploughs the main.
At last, discovering land, he anchors,
Thus giving unto Spain a New World.

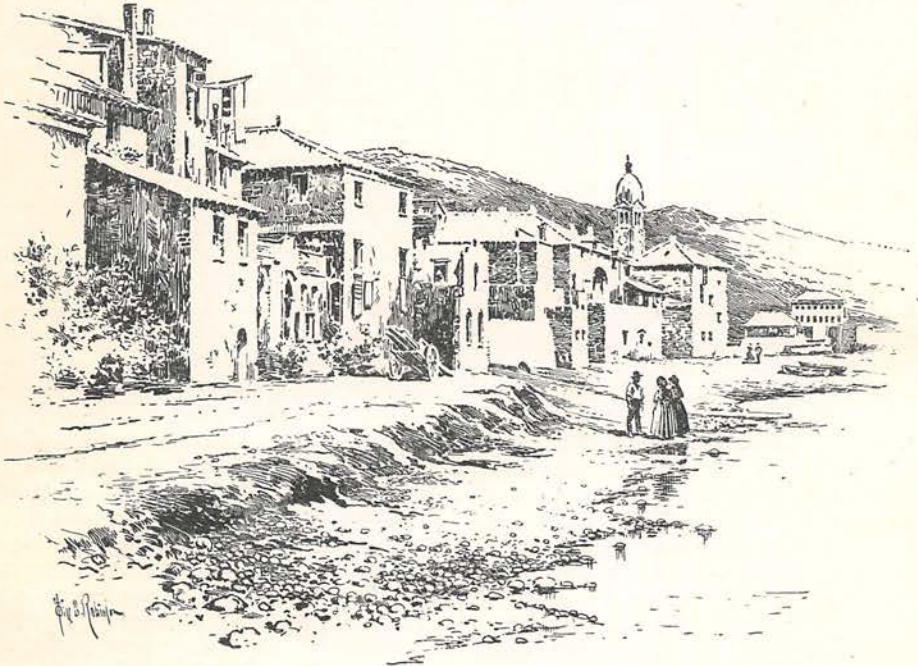
December 2nd, 1650.

Father Antonio Colombo.

The play upon the words *Colomba* (the Dove) and *Colombo* (the discoverer) should be noted; also the very neatly expressed idea underlying it.

rities of the town, it is said, for over three hundred years. Somewhat tattered and the worse for age, it is guarded with the utmost care, as becomes a treasure beyond all price. The portrait measures about three feet in height by two in width, and represents, with but few points of dissimilarity, the same thoughtful, almost monastic, face, with which everyone has become familiar through the many reproductions of the better known portrait now at Como. At the top are the words: *CHRISTOPHORVS COLVMBVS NOVI ORBIS REPERTVR* (Christopher

of the gift of Vassallo, the sculptor, a framed portrait of him is included also in the collection. All visitors are invited to sign their names in a book kept for that purpose. The entries show clearly how few now perform the pilgrimage to Cogoletto; for the same small book has served for nearly a century, and seems likely at the present rate to last another. Years ago, American visitors came occasionally, and now and then an Englishman; but for the last quarter of a century, though a few Frenchmen and Italians have entered their names, no one of either English



THE SEA-FRONT AT COGOLETO.

Columbus, Discoverer of the New World). Here, too, may be seen copies of ancient documents connected with the family of Columbus. There is an authenticated copy, made in the year 1586, of the will (now lost) of Domenico Colombo, made in Cogoletto in 1449, wherein he names as his heirs his three sons, Christoforo, Bartolomeo, and Giacomo; also a power of attorney procured on September 5th, 1482, by Bartolomeo Colombo through a notary at the neighbouring town of Varraze, empowering him to act for his brother Christoforo, who had left for Spain. These documents, with others upon which Cogoletto partly founds her claims, were brought to light by the researches of Signor Felice Isnardi, to whose memory a tablet has been gratefully erected; while, in recognition

or American nationality has done so except myself.

A hundred yards or so further along the Via Christoforo Colombo is the parish church, built on the site occupied by an earlier church, attached to which was, it is said, a chapel erected in the year 1500 by Antonio and Bartolomeo, brothers of Columbus. Modern and outwardly plain, the present church is internally as gorgeously ornate as most Italian churches, and is dedicated to Sta. Maria Maggiore, the Holy Virgin, after whom Columbus named the vessel in which he made his first voyage.

Returning to the other end of the town by the road along the sea front which is here shown, the visitor will find more tablets to interest him—indeed, the commemorative

instinct seems to be developed quite abnormally in the Cogoletani.

On the wall of a communal school, facing the sea, there is a tablet which commemorates the heroism of Massena, who, in 1800, bravely held Genoa for three months, though beset by an Austrian army and blockaded by an English fleet. For a time, indeed, he actually established his headquarters at Cogoleto.

Passing on, the Columbus house is again reached. This time it is the back, looking out over the sea, which of the two views is certainly by far the prettier, including as it does the balcony, or *loggia*, already alluded to, and shown in the drawing on page 431. Here another tablet on the wall records that, in 1847, the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of Columbus, and on the 11th of October, the anniversary of the day on which the New World was discovered, came Captain R. Engle, with the officers and crew of the United States warship "Princetown," "*A salutare la Patria del Grande Navigatore*" (to salute the birthplace of the Great Navigator).

This exhausts the list of objects of interest in connection with Columbus now to be seen at Cogoleto. Of the little town as a whole, and of its vicinity, the visitor may obtain a good idea by strolling back past the railway-station to a good look-out point just above a large quarry in the hillside, whence no doubt came much of the stone of which the town is built. Just below is the station,

with the town and the church beyond, as shown on page 434. Eastward, along the coast, is seen the tall lighthouse over the harbour mouth at Genoa. In the opposite direction—that is, westward—may be seen the entrance to the harbour of Savona.

If the pilgrim is proceeding towards Genoa, he will there find much more to interest him in connection with Columbus. The house forming No. 37 in the Vico Dritto di Pontichello stands on the site of that in which (according to the Genoese) Columbus was born. But of Genoa many have written.

In connection with the life-history of Columbus, it may be noted as strange that the place of his final sepulture is now almost as doubtful as the place of his birth; for the remains, or supposed remains, of the great discoverer have been disinterred and removed elsewhere for re-burial so often that their present resting-place has become uncertain.

It only remains to say that, if any visitor to Cogoleto or Genoa can find convincing and irrefutable proofs that either was the sole and only birthplace of the discoverer of the New World, mankind will hail him as a second Columbus and will award him an honoured niche in the Temple of Fame. Even should a decision be given ultimately in favour of Genoa, and against the claims of Cogoleto, still no one interested in Columbus need ever regret the hours spent in a pilgrimage to this "moulder'd citadel on the coast."

THE VICTORY.

SEE, see!—the blows at his breast,
 Abyss at his back,
 The peril of dark that pressed,
 And doubts in a pack
 That hunted to drag him down,
 Have triumphed? and now
 He's crushed, who climbed for the
 crown
 To the summit's brow?

No! though at the foot he lies,
 Fallen and vain,
 With gaze to the peak whose skies
 He could not attain,
 The victory is, with strength—
 No matter the past!
 He'd dare it again, the dark length,
 And the fall at last!

CALE YOUNG RICE.