

Henry Vignaud, American.

By ALVAN F. SANBORN.

(Boston Transcript.)

EARLY in 1862, Henry Vignaud, a young Captain in the Confederate Army, was captured with his company while defending against Farragut and Butler the city of New Orleans. Learning accidentally that Butler intended to commit him to a military prison, he decided to save him the trouble by taking French leave. Thanks to a pass which he bought of a Federal officer for \$250 (nearly all his ready money), he was able to traverse safely the enemy's lines. Then, having been made a member of the Confederate Commission and entrusted with Siddell dispatches, he embarked on a sailing vessel for France. The voyage lasted sixty-three days, during which he suffered terribly from sea sickness. Furthermore, he was so homesick at first in Paris that he would have hurried back to America had he had money enough, and, in that case, his whole life would doubtless have been different; but he had barely \$40 to his name.

ESCAPED TO PARIS AND DRIFTED INTO DIPLOMACY.

Forced to earn his living, he took up journalism, and it was as a journalist that he viewed the stirring and tragic happenings of the Invasion and the Commune of 1870 and

1871. In course of time he became, through the intervention of mutual friends, Private Secretary to Minister Washburn, who was devoting his leisure to making researches into French history, in which he was deeply interested. In this capacity his principal task was the deciphering and translating of French manuscripts for the Minister, although he read French print easily enough, was greatly embarrassed by French script. In 1875 his employer, without consulting him, had him named Secretary of the Legation by President Grant, and from that day to this—thirty-four years—he has never had a leave of absence, and, with the exception of a short time last year, has never been ill.

Henry Vignaud, as his name indicates, is of French extraction. His grandfather emigrated to Louisiana from a town near Marseilles, and his parents, although they were born in America, spoke French habitually, as did most of the families of their rank about them. Indeed, in Henry's childhood, large numbers of Louisianians knew no other language. He has not been back to his native State since it was "reconstructed," but from what he can learn at second hand he is forced to conclude that the changes caused by the war and by the invasion of Northern capital have completely transformed the intel-

lectuality of the Louisianians and that French civilization is rapidly disappearing from their midst. He frequently receives visits from citizens of his State, who are able to speak French themselves, but are not teaching it to their children, and he believes that fifty years from now French will be practically a dead language in a section where it was formerly the dominant speech. As for himself, he expects to finish his days in France. It was in France that he found his wife (a Comte), and he is so used to the French way of living that he would be very ill at ease in any other country.

These things and many more Mr. Vignaud told me in a recent interview at the Embassy in the Avenue Klöber, where he was still performing the duties of Secretary, at the same time that he was gradually packing up his personal belongings, preparatory to the arrival of his successor, Mr. Vignaud is a handsome man of striking appearance.

HIS GREAT POPULARITY.

It is probably well within the truth to say that Henry Vignaud is known to more Americans than any other man in Paris, since he has come into contact, at one time or another, not only with most of the members of the American colony, but with a goodly proportion of the American travelers who have passed through Paris; it is certain that he is beloved by more, by reason of his unvarying simplicity, courtesy and kindness. Ambassadors have come and ambassadors have gone, but Henry Vignaud has remained at his post. While this, that, or the other ambassador has enjoyed his little

hour of popularity, the Secretary of the Embassy has been popular under all the regimes. Indeed it is hard to conceive how the American Embassy will contrive to do business without him. France has shown its appreciation of his always tactful services by making him successively Chevalier, Officer and Commander of Her Legion of Honor, and it is exceedingly gratifying to learn that the two generations of Americans who have profited by his devotion have arranged to provide him with a substantial pension. Among the contributors are J. Pierpont Morgan and T. Jefferson Coolidge.

A REAL RURAL HOME.

For a number of years past Henry Vignaud has made his home in the suburb of Bagneux, near Fontenay-aux-Roses (coming to the Embassy each day by tramway), and it is there that he will spend the remainder of his life. Bagneux, which is supposed to owe its name to the baths that existed on its site in the time of the Romans, is situated on a slight, well-shaded eminence which affords charming views of the capital, barely three miles away. It contains a chateau which was a secret resort of Cardinal Richelieu and a cottage which was inhabited for a time by the great French song writer Beranger. Its thirteenth-century church, St. Hervyland, is considered the finest small church in the suburban district of Paris and resembles at many points (allowing, of course, for difference of scale) the Cathedral of Notre Dame, to the chapter of which it originally belonged. The wine of Bagneux, which was the chief beverage of the Paris prelates

of the Middle Ages as well as the favorite tippie of King Dagobert and Henri IV, is still esteemed by epicures; and the phrase "cueillir la fraise au-bols de Bagneux" (to pick strawberries in the Bagneux woods) has passed into the French language as a synonym for the verb that means to woo. The number of large estates at Bagneux is practically the same as in the time of Louis XV, and the population (less than two thousand) has remained very nearly stationary for many generations. In short, Bagneux is one of the very few communities close to Paris which has retained a really rural character, its sole animation being that of the crop gathering and the vintage. It is thus an ideal retreat for a person who desires the tranquillity of country life, but who, like Henry Vignaud is too thoroughly Parisianized to renounce the capital altogether.

HIS CHIEF WORKS DEAL WITH COLUMBUS.

Mr. Vignaud affirms that he withdrew to the suburbs because he could not afford to rent in Paris itself an apartment large enough to house all his books. He looks every inch the French savant, and he is a good deal of a savant as a matter of fact. He is the author of a number of books about Christopher Columbus; but he is so modest regarding his historical work that I should never have got even an inkling of the amount and importance of it, had I not supplemented by several visits to the National Library the meager information he vouchsafed me on this subject in our interviews.

At the Congress of the "Americanists," held in Paris in 1900 (in connection with the Exposition of that year)

Henry Vignaud read a paper entitled "Memoire sur l'Authenticite de la Lettre de Toscanelli" (supporting, with modification, a theory advanced by Senor de la Rosa), which was afterwards issued as a pamphlet. The following year he brought out, through the publishing house of Ernest Leroux (in the same series as the epoch-making work of Henry Harisse) a thick octavo volume, the exhaustive title page of which (Englished) was "Toscanelli and Columbus. The Letter and Chart of Toscanelli on the Route to the Indies by the way of the West, sent in 1474 to the Portuguese Fernam Martins and later on to Christopher Columbus. A critical study on the authenticity and value of these documents and the sources of the cosmographical ideas of Columbus, followed by the various texts of the Letter with translations, annotations, several facsimiles and also a map." In this volume he undertook to prove (with what degree of success it would be presumptuous for a person not a specialist to venture an opinion) that the letter, attributed to the learned Florentine Toscanelli, giving Columbus advice and information regarding the route to the Indies was a forgery designed to discredit the rumor that Columbus got his information regarding the Western route from an ordinary pilot, and, conversely, to create the impression that the discovery of America resulted from the application of a scientific theory devised by Columbus and sanctioned by a great scholar. With regard to the role of Columbus himself in this hoax, the author says: "It is impossible to exonerate the great navigator from all complicity in a plot

which had both the intention and the result of making history lie in attributing to the discovery of America a character and origin different from the true facts, and in according to the author of that discovery a credit to which he was not entitled. If Columbus refrained from taking part in the concoction of the correspondence attributed to Toscanelli, he has at least carefully hidden his obligations to the unlucky pilot to whom, in fact, he owed everything. He has allowed it to be believed; he has even taken trouble to have it believed, that his discovery was the result of a laborious working out of a scientific conception, whereas, in fact, it was solely due to material and practical information secretly obtained from another; and by so doing he has usurped before posterity a place to which he was not entitled. Nothing can wash his character clear from this stain, not even his many misfortunes, borne with heroic fortitude, nor the greatness of the service he rendered to the world, nor yet the nobility of his soul and the loftiness of character he often showed under critical circumstances. There are some moral weaknesses which nothing can obliterate.

FLAWS IN THE CHARACTER OF COLUMBUS.

"This was not, unfortunately, the only weakness from which Columbus suffered. Whatever may be the admiration felt for his great qualities, his indomitable energy, his perseverance in pursuing the quest, had in view, his unshaken loyalty to the sovereigns who had employed him, his uprightiness in all he touched, the

signed to the Birth of Christopher Columbus," in which he attempts to prove that Columbus, his relatives and his friends concealed the real date of his birth ("to prevent the discovery of the fact that he belonged to an artisan family who lived by manual labor") and in which he announces that this real date was 1451. He defended this thesis further in a pamphlet published in 1904 by the Société des Americanistes de Paris (of which he is Vice President) and entitled "La Maison d'Albe et les Archives Colombiennes."

In 1905, Mr. Vignaud published (in French) the first volume of a biography of Columbus (dedicated to the historian of Louisiana, Alcee Fortier), the titlepage of which (Englished)—Mr. Vignaud, it will be observed, affects archaic and exhaustive title-pages—is as follows: "Critical Studies upon the Life of Columbus before his Discoveries. The Origin of his Family. The two Colombos, His Pretended Parents. The True Date of His Birth. His Studies and the First Campaigns he Made. His Arrival in Portugal and the Naval Combat of 1476. His Voyage to the North. His Establishment in Portugal. His Marriage. His Portuguese Family."

This volume undertakes to prove, among other things, that Columbus was never at the University of Pavia; that there was no famous admiral in his family; that he never commanded a galley for King Rene, nor fought for that monarch; that he did not leave Portugal because the King wished to rob him of his secret, and that he did not make proposals to Genoa, England and France. Its tenor may be judged from the following utterance of Mr. Vignaud: "Columbus never spoke one word of truth on what related to himself personally, and his family, on this point, have carefully followed his example. Throughout his letters and writings he has sprinkled incorrect statements skillfully devised with the object either of obscuring certain portions of his life or of hiding traces of his origin; and, in fact, these statements have resulted in the creation of a sort of conventional history as to the formation of his ideas and the causes which led to his discovery. The principal disseminators of this history were Las Casas and Ferdinand Columbus, and criticism to-day is destroying, fragment by fragment, this falsification. Already the majority of the lies of which it is composed have been subjected to the light of truth, and by degrees we are beginning to form a correct notion of what part of the life of the crafty Genoese he and his have been pleased to present to us under false colors."

The second volume of this work upon which Henry Vignaud is now working in his suburban retreat of

Bagneux will appear in about six months.

CROWNED BY THE ACADEMY.

Whatever the final verdict of world scholarship may be regarding Henry Vignaud's contributions to the vexed Columbus problem, his works must be taken into serious consideration, at the present time, by every conscientious Columbus student. The Institute of France has recognized this in crowning the first volume of his "Critical History." In providing him with the means to spend his last years free from financial anxiety, therefore, his American friends are not only rewarding a faithful servitor of their country, but are patronizing historical research.

HENRY VIGNAUD

(Continued from Sixth Page.)

his duties, we cannot shut our eyes to certain traits in his character which reveal him in a very unfavorable light. He was violent, haughty, greedily, harsh, dissembling, and, worst of all, untruthful."

This iconoclastic work (Spanish and English translations of which appeared in 1902) was not only reviewed by most of the serious periodicals of the Old and New World, but evoked a large amount of controversial literature of a very special sort to which Henry Vignaud's chief contributions were letters (printed as pamphlets) to the Belgian scholar Jules Mees, to the German scholar Sophus Ruge, and to the English scholars C. Raymond Beazley and Sir Clements R. Markham.

In 1903 Henry Vignaud published in English a volume entitled "A Critical Study of the Various Dates As-