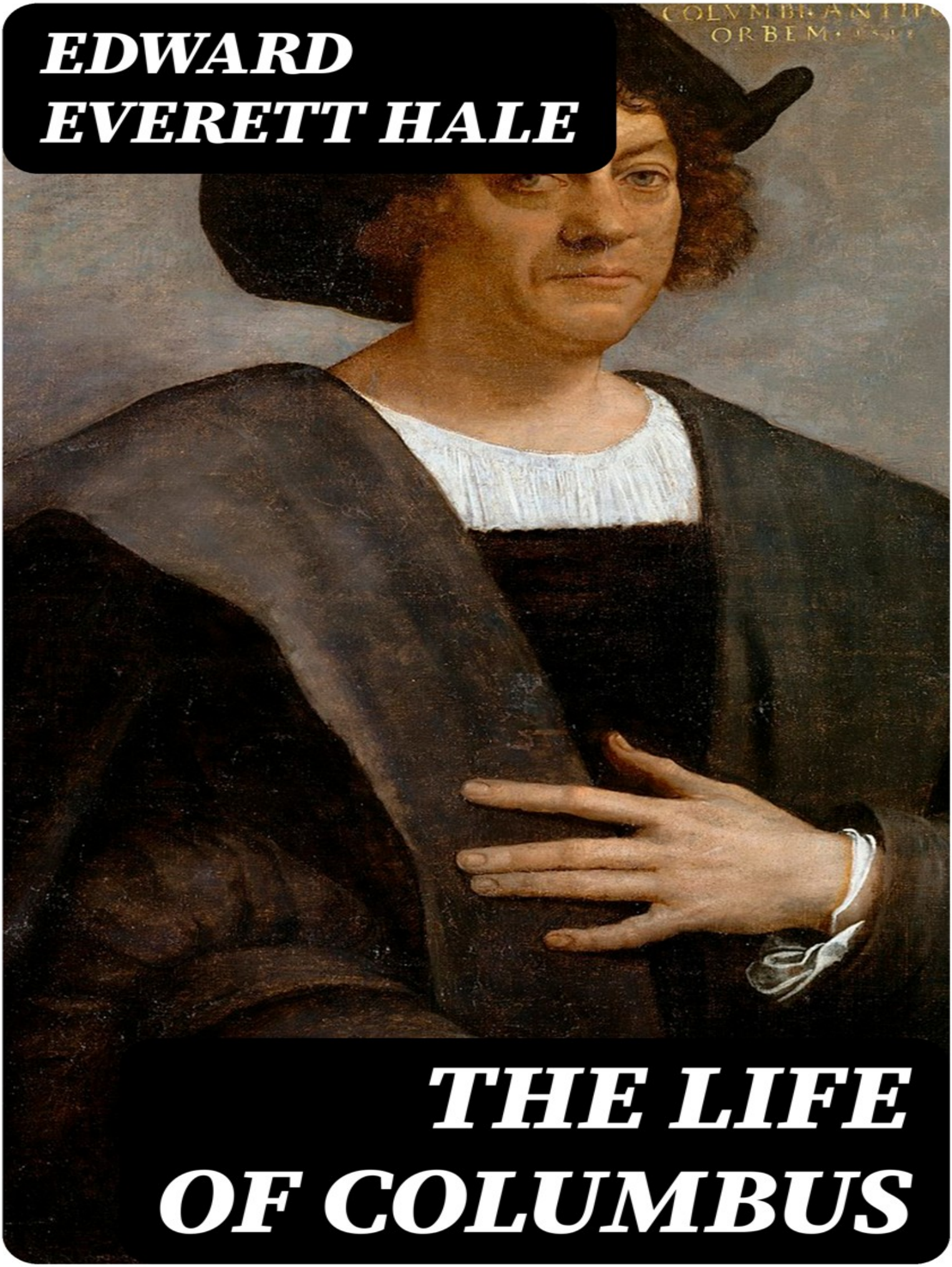
EDWARD
EVERETT HALE
THE LIFE
OF COLUMBUS

Edward Everett Hale

The Life of Columbus

From His Own Letters and Journals and Other Documents of His Time

EAN 8596547307006

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

This book contains a life of Columbus, written with the hope of interesting all classes of readers.

His life has often been written, and it has sometimes been well written. The great book of our countryman, Washington Irving, is a noble model of diligent work given to a very difficult subject. And I think every person who has dealt with the life of Columbus since Irving's time, has expressed his gratitude and respect for the author.

According to the custom of biographers, in that time and since, he includes in those volumes the whole history of the West India islands, for the period after Columbus discovered them till his death. He also thinks it his duty to include much of the history of Spain and of the Spanish court. I do not myself believe that it is wise to attempt, in a book of biography, so considerable a study of the history of the time. Whether it be wise or not, I have not attempted it in this book. I have rather attempted to follow closely the personal fortunes of Christopher Columbus, and, to the history around him, I have given only such space as seemed absolutely necessary for the illustration of those fortunes.

I have followed on the lines of his own personal narrative wherever we have it. And where this is lost I have used the absolutely contemporary authorities. I have also consulted the later writers, those of the next generation and the generation which followed it. But the more one studies the life of Columbus the more one feels sure that, after the greatness of his discovery was really known, the accounts of the time were overlaid by what modern criticism calls myths, which had grown up in the enthusiasm of those who honored him, and which form no part of real history. If then

the reader fails to find some stories with which he is quite familiar in the history, he must not suppose that they are omitted by accident, but must give to the author of the book the credit of having used some discretion in the choice of his authorities.

When I visited Spain in 1882, I was favored by the officers of the Spanish government with every facility for carrying my inquiry as far as a short visit would permit. Since that time Mr. Harrisse has published his invaluable volumes on the life of Columbus. It certainly seems as if every document now existing, which bears upon the history, had been collated by him. The reader will see that I have made full use of this treasure-house.

The Congress of Americanistas, which meets every year, brings forward many curious studies on the history of the continent, but it can scarcely be said to have done much to advance our knowledge of the personal life of Columbus.

The determination of the people of the United States to celebrate fitly the great discovery which has advanced civilization and changed the face of the world, makes it certain that a new interest has arisen in the life of the great man to whom, in the providence of God, that discovery was due. The author and publishers of this book offer it as their contribution in the great celebration, with the hope that it may be of use, especially in the direction of the studies of the young.

EDWARD E. HALE.

ROXBURY, MASS., June 1st, 1891.

DETAILED TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XII. FOURTH VOYAGE.
The Instructions Given for the Voyage—He is to go to
the Mainland of the Indies—A Short Passage—Ovando
Forbids the Entrance of Columbus into Harbor
Bobadilla's Squadron and Its Fate—Columbus Sails Westward
—Discovers Honduras, and Coasts Along Its Shores
—The Search for Gold—Colony Attempted and Abandoned
—The Vessels Become Unseaworthy—Refuge at
Jamaica—Mutiny Led by the Brothers Porras—Messages
to San Domingo—The Eclipse—Arrival of Relief
—Columbus Returns to San Domingo, and to Spain

CHAPTER XIII.
Two Sad Years—Isabella's Death—Columbus at Seville—
His Illness—Letters to the King—journeys to Segovia
—Salamanca and Valladolid—His Suit There—Philip
and Juana—Columbus Executes His Will—Dies—His
Burial and the Removal of His Body—His Portraits—
His Character

THE LIFE OF

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I. — EARLY LIFE OF COLUMBUS.

Table of Contents

HIS BIRTH AND BIRTH-PLACE—HIS EARLY EDUCATION—HIS EXPERIENCE AT SEA—HIS MARRIAGE AND RESIDENCE IN LISBON—HIS PLANS FOR THE DISCOVERY OF A WESTWARD PASSAGE TO THE INDIES.

Christopher Columbus was born in the Republic of Genoa. The honor of his birth-place has been claimed by many villages in that Republic, and the house in which he was born cannot be now pointed out with certainty. But the best authorities agree that the children and the grown people of the world have never been mistaken when they have said: “America was discovered in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, a native of Genoa.”

His name, and that of his family, is always written Colombo, in the Italian papers which refer to them, for more than one hundred years before his time. In Spain it was always written Colon; in France it is written as Colomb; while in England it has always kept its Latin form, Columbus. It has frequently been said that he himself assumed this form, because Columba is the Latin word for “Dove,” with a fanciful feeling that, in carrying Christian light to the West, he had taken the mission of the dove. Thus, he had first found land where men thought there was ocean, and he was the messenger of the Holy Spirit to those who sat in darkness. It has also been assumed that he took the name of Christopher, “the Christ-bearer,” for similar reasons. But there is no doubt that he was baptized “Christopher,” and that the family name had long been Columbo. The

coincidences of name are but two more in a calendar in which poetry delights, and of which history is full.

Christopher Columbus was the oldest son of Dominico Colombo and Suzanna Fontanarossa. This name means Red-fountain. He bad two brothers, Bartholomew and Diego, whom we shall meet again. Diego is the Spanish way of writing the name which we call James.

It seems probable that Christopher was born in the year 1436, though some writers have said that he was older than this, and some that he was younger. The record of his birth and that of his baptism have not been found.

His father was not a rich man, but he was able to send Christopher, as a boy, to the University of Pavia, and here he studied grammar, geometry, geography and navigation, astronomy and the Latin language. But this was as a boy studies, for in his fourteenth year he left the university and entered, in hard work, on “the larger college of the world.” If the date given above, of his birth, is correct, this was in the year 1450, a few years before the Turks took Constantinople, and, in their invasion of Europe, affected the daily life of everyone, young or old, who lived in the Mediterranean countries. From this time, for fifteen years, it is hard to trace along the life of Columbus. It was the life of an intelligent young seaman, going wherever there was a voyage for him. He says himself, “I passed twenty-three years on the sea. I have seen all the Levant, all the western coasts, and the North. I have seen England; I have often made the voyage from Lisbon to the Guinea coast.” This he wrote in a letter to Ferdinand and Isabella. Again he says, “I went to sea from the most tender age and have continued in a sea life to this day. Whoever gives himself up to this art wants to know the secrets of Nature here below. It is more than forty years that I have been thus engaged. Wherever any one has sailed, there I have sailed.”

Whoever goes into the detail of the history of that century will come upon the names of two relatives of his—Colon el Mozo (the Boy, or the Younger) and his uncle, Francesco Colon, both celebrated sailors. The latter of the two was a captain in the fleets of Louis XI of France, and imaginative students may represent him as meeting Quentin Durward at court. Christopher Columbus seems to have made several voyages under the command of the younger of these relatives. He commanded the Genoese galleys near Cyprus in a war which the Genoese had with the Venetians. Between the years 1461 and 1463 the Genoese were acting as allies with King John of Calabria, and Columbus had a command as captain in their navy at that time.

“In 1477,” he says, in one of his letters, “in the month of February, I sailed more than a hundred leagues beyond Tile.” By this he means Thule, or Iceland. “Of this island the southern part is seventy-three degrees from the equator, not sixty-three degrees, as some geographers pretend.” But here he was wrong. The Southern part of Iceland is in the latitude of sixty-three and a half degrees. “The English, chiefly those of Bristol, carry their merchandise, to this island, which is as large as England. When I was there the sea was not frozen, but the tides there are so strong that they rise and fall twenty-six cubits.”

The order of his life, after his visit to Iceland, is better known. He was no longer an adventurous sailor-boy, glad of any voyage which offered; he was a man thirty years of age or more. He married in the city of Lisbon and settled himself there. His wife was named Philippa. She was the daughter of an Italian gentleman named Bartolomeo Muniz de Perestrello, who was, like Columbus, a sailor, and was alive to all the new interests which geography then presented to all inquiring minds. This was in the year 1477, and the King of Portugal was pressing the expeditions which, before the

end of the century, resulted in the discovery of the route to the Indies by the Cape of Good Hope.

The young couple had to live. Neither the bride nor her husband had any fortune, and Columbus occupied himself as a draftsman, illustrating books, making terrestrial globes, which must have been curiously inaccurate, since they had no Cape of Good Hope and no American Continent, drawing charts for sale, and collecting, where he could, the material for such study. Such charts and maps were beginning to assume new importance in those days of geographical discovery. The value attached to them may be judged from the statement that Vespucius paid one hundred and thirty ducats for one map. This sum would be more than five hundred dollars of our time.

Columbus did not give up his maritime enterprises. He made voyages to the coast of Guinea and in other directions.

It is said that he was in command of one of the vessels of his relative Colon el Mozo, when, in the Portuguese seas, this admiral, with his squadron, engaged four Venetian galleys returning from Flanders. A bloody battle followed. The ship which Christopher Columbus commanded was engaged with a Venetian vessel, to which it set fire. There was danger of an explosion, and Columbus himself, seeing this danger, flung himself into the sea, seized a floating oar, and thus gained the shore. He was not far from Lisbon, and from this time made Lisbon his home for many years.(*)

(*) The critics challenge these dates, but there seems to be good foundation for the story.

It seems clear that, from the time when he arrived in Lisbon, for more than twenty years, he was at work trying to interest people in his “great design,” of western discovery. He says himself, “I was constantly corresponding with learned men, some ecclesiastics and some laymen, some

Latin and some Greek, some Jews and some Moors." The astronomer Toscanelli was one of these correspondents.

We must not suppose that the idea of the roundness of the earth was invented by Columbus. Although there were other theories about its shape, many intelligent men well understood that the earth was a globe, and that the Indies, though they were always reached from Europe by going to the East, must be on the west of Europe also. There is a very funny story in the travels of Mandeville, in which a traveler is represented as having gone, mostly on foot, through all the countries of Asia, but finally determines to return to Norway, his home. In his farthest eastern investigation, he hears some people calling their cattle by a peculiar cry, which he had never heard before. After he returned home, it was necessary for him to take a day's journey westward to look after some cattle he had lost. Finding these cattle, he also heard the same cry of people calling cattle, which he had heard in the extreme East, and now learned, for the first time, that he had gone round the world on foot, to turn and come back by the same route, when he was only a day's journey from home, Columbus was acquainted with such stories as this, and also had the astronomical knowledge which almost made him know that the world was round, "and, like a ball, goes spinning in the air." The difficulty was to persuade other people that, because of this roundness, it would be possible to attain Asia by sailing to the West.

Now all the geographers of repute supposed that there was not nearly so large a distance as there proved to be, in truth, between Europe and Asia. Thus, in the geography of Ptolemy, which was the standard book at that time, one hundred and thirty-five degrees, a little more than one-third of the earth's circumference, is given to the space between the extreme eastern part of the Indies and the Canary Islands. In fact, as we now know, the distance is one

hundred and eighty degrees, half the world's circumference. Had Columbus believed there was any such immense distance, he would never have undertaken his voyage.

Almost all the detailed knowledge of the Indies which the people of his time had, was given by the explorations of Marco Polo, a Venetian traveler of the thirteenth century, whose book had long been in the possession of European readers. It is a very entertaining book now, and may well be recommended to young people who like stories of adventure. Marco Polo had visited the court of the Great Khan of Tartary at Pekin, the prince who brought the Chinese Empire into very much the condition in which it now is. He had, also, given accounts of Japan or Cipango, which he had himself never visited. Columbus knew, therefore, that, well east of the Indies, was the island of Cipango, and he aimed at that island, because he supposed that that was the nearest point to Europe, as in fact it is. And when finally he arrived at Cuba, as the reader will see, he thought he was in Japan.

Columbus's father-in-law had himself been the Portuguese governor of the island of Porto Santo, where he had founded a colony. He, therefore, was interested in western explorations, and probably from him Columbus collected some of the statements which are known to have influenced him, with regard to floating matters from the West, which are constantly borne upon that island by the great currents of the sea.

The historians are fond of bringing together all the intimations which are given in the Greek and Latin classics, and in later authors, with regard to a land beyond Asia. Perhaps the most famous of them is that of Seneca, "In the later years there shall come days in which Ocean shall loose his chains, and a great land shall appear… and Thule shall not be the last of the worlds."

In a letter which Toscanelli wrote to Columbus in 1474, he inclosed a copy of a letter which he had already sent to an officer of Alphonso V, the King of Portugal. In writing to Columbus, he says, “I see that you have a great and noble desire to go into that country (of the East) where the spices come from, and in reply to your letter I send you a copy of that which I addressed some years ago to my attached friend in the service of the most serene King of Portugal. He had an order from his Highness to write me on this subject.… If I had a globe in my hand, I could show you what is needed. But I prefer to mark out the route on a chart like a marine chart, which will be an assistance to your intelligence and enterprise. On this chart I have myself drawn the whole extremity of our western shore from Ireland as far down as the coast of Guinea toward the South, with all the islands which are to be found on this route. Opposite this (that is, the shores of Ireland and Africa) I have placed directly at the West the beginning of the Indies with the islands and places where you will land. You will see for yourself how many miles you must keep from the arctic pole toward the equator, and at what distance you will arrive at these regions so fertile and productive of spices and precious stones.” In Toscanelli’s letter, he not only indicates Japan, but, in the middle of the ocean, he places the island of Antilia. This old name afterwards gave the name by which the French still call the West Indies, Les Antilles. Toscanelli gives the exact distance which Columbus will have to sail: “From Lisbon to the famous city of Quisay (Hang-tcheou-fou, then the capital of China) if you take the direct route toward the West, the distance will be thirty-nine hundred miles. And from Antilia to Japan it will be two hundred and twenty-five leagues.” Toscanelli says again, “You see that the voyage that you wish to attempt is much legs difficult than would be thought. You would be sure of this if you met as many people as I do who have been in the country of spices.”

While there were so many suggestions made that it would be possible to cross the Atlantic, there was one man who determined to do this. This man was Christopher Columbus. But he knew well that he could not do it alone. He must have money enough for an expedition, he must have authority to enlist crews for that expedition, and he must have power to govern those crews when they should arrive in the Indies. In our times such adventures have been conducted by mercantile corporations, but in those times no one thought of doing any such thing without the direct assistance and support of some monarch.

It is easy now to see and to say that Columbus himself was singularly well fitted to take the charge of the expedition of discovery. He was an excellent sailor and at the same time he was a learned geographer and a good mathematician. He was living in Portugal, the kings of which country had, for many years, fostered the exploration of the coast of Africa, and were pushing expeditions farther and farther South.

In doing this, they were, in a fashion, making new discoveries. For Europe was wholly ignorant of the western coast of Africa, beyond the Canaries, when their expeditions began. But all men of learning knew that, five hundred years before the Christian era, Hanno, a Carthaginian, had sailed round Africa under the direction of the senate of Carthage. The efforts of the King of Portugal were to repeat the voyage made by Hanno. In 1441, Gonzales and Tristam sailed as far as Sierra Leone. They brought back some blacks as slaves, and this was the beginning of the slave trade.

In 1446 the Portuguese took possession of the Azores, the most western points of the Old World. Step by step they advanced southward, and became familiar with the African coast. Bold navigators were eager to find the East, and at last success came. Under the king’s orders, in August, 1477, three caravels sailed from the Tagus, under Bartolomeo