

Without question the expeditions of the Crusaders from the west of Europe to Palestine and the east beyond the Mediterranean Sea in the tenth and eleventh centuries, opened up the Oriental world with its treasures of spices, jewels, rich fabrics, and plenty of gold and silver to an extent hitherto undreamt of on the hard, rocky coast of Western Europe. In the fourteenth century a most adventurous Englishman, Sir John Mandeville, voyaged eastward through Asia to the far country and left in his printed book an account of Cathay as a land of wonderful riches, and even roused the imagination of Western Europe more than the story of Marco Polo, who had preceded him on his eastern journey, had done. The appearance of the printed book, as had been made possible by the discovery of printing, stirred up the interest of the educated classes, while the improvement of the astrolabe—a scientific instrument used for taking observations—and the invention of the mariner's compass showed that the time in the mind of the Creator for the opening up of the New World had come.

#### *Section II.—Search for the Rich Cathay*

To Italy belongs the intellectual impulse that in the fifteenth century led to the discovery of America. Marco Polo, who had preceded Mandeville on his Oriental journey, was a Venetian. Toscanelli, a native of Florence, eighteen years before the discovery of America, had maintained in Portugal that there was an open sea to the west of Europe by which Asia could be reached. Columbus, who succeeded—first—in reaching the western continent, belonged to Genoa. Americus Vesputius, who succeeded Columbus and gave his name to the new-found continent, was a Florentine. John and Sebastian Cabot, who in the service of England were first to reach the continent of America, were from Venice. Verrazano, who first led France to take an interest in western exploration, was from Florence, and the influence