

INTRODUCTION.

4. Unable to defray the expenses of an expedition, he sought first the assistance of his native city. His countrymen, accustomed only to cruising, in frail vessels, along the shores of the continent, treated the project as chimerical, and declined furnishing aid. A pressing application to the king of Portugal, in whose dominions he had resided, met likewise with ridicule and rejection. Persevering in his purpose, he then sent his brother, Bartholomew, to England, to apply to Henry VII, and went himself to Spain, which was then governed by Ferdinand and Isabella, from whom he solicited assistance.

5. For a long time he solicited in vain. At length the queen persuaded by his representations, became his friend and patron. By her directions, three small vessels were fitted out, and he was authorised to sail with these upon his projected voyage of discovery. On the third of August, 1492, he departed from Palos, in Spain, directing his course towards the Canary Islands.

6. He stopped there to refit, and, on the sixth of September, boldly adventured into seas which no vessel had yet entered, with no chart to direct him, no guide but his compass, and without any knowledge of the tides or currents which might interrupt his course. He moved rapidly before the trade wind, which blows invariably from the east to the west between the tropics, judiciously concealing from his ignorant and timid crews the progress he made, lest they might be alarmed at the speed with which they receded from home.

7. About the fourteenth of September, he was distant nearly six hundred miles from the most westerly of the Canaries, and here the magnetic needle was observed to vary from its direction to the polar star, and incline towards the west; an appearance which, although now familiar, had never before been observed.

8. Columbus and his companions were alarmed. They were far from land, and far from the tracks of other navigators. All before and around them was unknown, and their only guide seemed to be no longer entitled to their confidence. But although alarmed, Columbus lost not his presence of mind. He assigned a reason for the variation, which, without satisfying himself, silenced the murmurs of his companions.

9. But the interval of quiet and subordination was short. Disaffection soon reappeared among the ignorant and wavering, and, gradually spreading, at length pervaded the