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New World to Castile and Leon, "the like of which was never done by any man in ancient or in later times."

Successive popes of Rome had already conceded to the Portuguese the undiscovered world from Cape Bojador in Africa easterly to the Indies. To prevent collision between Christian princes, on the fourth of May, 1493, Alexander VI. published a bull, in which he drew an imaginary line from the north pole to the south a hundred leagues west of the Azores, assigning to Spain all that lies to the west of that boundary, while all to the east of it was confirmed to Portugal.

The commerce of the middle ages, concentrated upon the Mediterranean Sea, had enriched the Italian republics, and had been chiefly engrossed by their citizens. After the fall of the Byzantine empire the Christian states desired to escape the necessity of strengthening the Ottoman power by the payment of tribute on all intercourse with the remoter east. Maritime enterprise, transferring its home to the borders of the Atlantic, set before itself as its great problem the discovery of a pathway by sea to the Indies; and England, which like Spain and Portugal looked out upon the ocean, became a competitor for the unknown world.

The wars of the houses of York and Lancaster had terminated with the intermarriage of the heirs of the two families; the spirit of commercial activity began to be successfully fostered; and the marts of England were frequented by Lombard adventurers. The fisheries of the north had long tempted the merchants of Bristol to an intercourse with Iceland; and had matured the nautical skill that could buffet the worst storms of the Atlantic. Nor is it impossible that some uncertain traditions respecting the remote discoveries which Icelanders had made in Greenland toward the north-west, "where the lands nearest meet," should have excited "firm and pregnant conjectures." The achievement of Columbus, revealing the wonderful truth of which the germ may have existed in the imagination of every thoughtful mariner, won the admiration which belonged to genius that seemed more divine than human; and "there was great talk of it in all the court of Henry VII." A feeling of disappointment remained, that a series of disasters had defeated the wish of the illustrious