

praise. He aimed at something more. A project had been conceived of finding out a passage by sea to the East Indies. The accomplishment of this became a favorite object with Columbus. The Portuguese sought this route by steering towards the south, in hope of arriving at India, by turning to the east, after they had sailed round the farther extremity of Africa; which passage was afterwards effected in 1497, by Vasco de Gama, a Portuguese navigator. Columbus contemplated a shorter and more direct passage to the East Indies, by sailing towards the west, across the Atlantic Ocean. The principles and arguments which induced him to adopt this opinion, then considered as chimerical, were highly rational and philosophical. The sphericity and magnitude of the earth, were at that period ascertained with some degree of accuracy. From this it was evident, that the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, formed but a small part of the terraqueous globe. It appeared likewise extremely probable, that the continent on the one side of the globe was balanced by a proportional quantity of land in the other hemisphere. These conclusions concerning the existence of another continent, drawn from the figure and structure of the globe, were confirmed by the observations and conjectures of modern navigators, and from pieces of timber artificially carved, canes of an enormous size, trees torn up by the roots, and the dead bodies of two men with singular features, which had been discovered and taken up, floating before a westerly wind, or driven on the coasts of the Azores. The force of this united evidence, arising from theoretical principles and practical observations, led Columbus to conclude, that by sailing directly towards the west, across the Atlantic Ocean, new countries, which probably formed a part of the vast continent of India, must infallibly be discovered. As early as the year 1474, he communicated his ingenious theory to Paul, a physician of Florence, eminent for his knowledge of cosmography. He warmly approved of the plan; suggested several facts in confirmation of it, and encouraged Columbus to persevere in an undertaking so laudable, and which must redound so much to the honor of his country, and the benefit of Europe.

Columbus now became impatient to bring to the test of experiment the truth of his system, and to set out upon a voyage of discovery. The first step towards this was to secure the pa-