

Africa; and, when they had ascertained that the terrid zone is habitable even under the equator, the discovery of the islands of Madeira and the Azores could not divert them from the purpose of turning the southern capes of that continent and steering past them to the land of spices, which promised untold wealth to the merchants of Europe, new dominions to its princes, and heathen nations to the religion of the cross. Before the year 1474, and perhaps as early as 1470, Columbus was attracted to Lisbon, which was then the great centre of maritime adventure. He came to insist with immovable resoluteness that the shortest route to the Indies lay across the Atlantic. By the words of Aristotle, received through Averroes, and by letters from Toscanelli, the venerable cosmographer of Florence, who had drawn a map of the world with eastern Asia rising over against Europe, he was riveted in his faith, and lived only in the idea of laying open the western path to the Indies.

After more than ten years of vain solicitations in Portugal, he left the banks of the Tagus to seek the aid of Ferdinand and Isabella, rich in nautical experience, having watched the stars at sea from the latitude of Iceland to near the equator at Elmina. Though yet longer baffled by the skepticism which knew not how to comprehend the clearness of his conceptions, or the mystic trances which sustained his inflexibility of purpose, or the unfailing greatness of his soul, he lost nothing of his devotedness to the sublime office to which he held himself elected from his infancy by the promises of God. When half resolved to withdraw from Spain, travelling on foot, he knocked at the gate of the monastery of La Rabida, at Palos, to crave the needed charity of food and shelter for himself and his little son whom he led by the hand, the destitute and neglected seaman, in his naked poverty, was still the promiser of kingdoms; holding firmly in his grasp "the keys of the ocean sea," claiming, as it were from Heaven, the Indies as his own, and "dividing them as he pleased." It was then that through the prior of the convent his holy confidence found support in Isabella, the queen of Castile; and in 1492, with three poor vessels, of which the largest only was decked, embarking from Palos for the Indies by way of the west, Columbus gave a