

but he was descended of an honorable family, though reduced to indigence by various misfortunes. His ancestors having betaken themselves for subsistence to a sea-faring life, Columbus discovered, in his early youth, the peculiar character and talents which mark out a man for that profession. His parents, instead of thwarting this original propensity of his mind, seem to have encouraged and confirmed it, by the education which they gave him. After acquiring some knowledge of the Latin tongue, the only language in which science was taught at that time, he was instructed in geometry, cosmography, astronomy, and the art of drawing. To these he applied with such ardor and predilection, on account of their connexion with navigation, his favorite object, that he advanced with rapid proficiency in the study of them. Thus qualified, in the year 1461, he went to sea at the age of fourteen, and began his career on that element which conducted him to so much glory. His early voyages were limited principally to those places which had before been discovered, in which nothing very remarkable happened, except that in a sea-fight, off the coast of Portugal, with some Venetian coasters, the vessel on board which he served took fire, together with one of the enemy's, to which it was fast grappled; upon which he threw himself into the sea, laid hold of a floating oar, and by the support of it, and his dexterity in swimming, he reached the shore, though more than six miles distant, and thus preserved a life designed for great undertakings.

Soon after this Columbus went to Lisbon, where he married a daughter of Bartholomew Perestrello, one of the captains employed by prince Henry in his early voyages, and who had discovered and planted the islands of Porto Santo and Madeira. The journals and charts of this experienced navigator, his father-in-law, fell into his hands, and he, with avidity, availed himself of the valuable information they contained. His impatience to visit the places which Perestrello had seen and described, became irresistible; and he made a voyage to Madeira, and spent several years in trading with that island, the Canaries, the Azores, the settlements in Guinea, and all other places which the Portuguese had discovered on the continent of Africa.

By the experience acquired during such a variety of voyages, Columbus became one of the most skilful navigators of Europe. But his ambition did not suffer him to rest satisfied with that