

in reality, all memory of the land which lay beyond the waters of the Atlantic had faded as utterly from the minds of Europe's mariners, in that fourteenth century, as in the elder days when Plato restored a lost Atlantis to give local habitation to his ideal Republic; and when the idea revived, in the closing years of the fifteenth century, not as a philosophic dream, but as a legitimate induction of science, the reception which it met with from the embodied wisdom of that age, curiously illustrates the common experience of the pioneers in every path of novel discovery.

To Columbus, with the well-defined faith in the spherical form of the earth which gave him confidence to steer boldly westward in search of the Asiatic Cipango, the existence of a world beyond the Atlantic was no mere possibility. So early, at least, as 1474 he had conceived the design of reaching Asia by sailing to the west; and in that year he is known to have expounded his plans to Paolo Toscanelli, the learned Florentine physician and cosmographer, and to have received from him hearty encouragement. Assuming the world to be a sphere, he fortunately erred alike in underestimating its size, and in overestimating the extent to which the continent of Asia stretched away to the eastward. In this way he diminished the distance between the coasts of Europe and Asia; and so, when at length he sighted the new-found world of the west, so far from dreaming of another ocean wider than the Atlantic between him and the object of his quest, he unhesitatingly designated the natives of Guanahani, or San Salvador, "Indians," in the confident belief that this was an outlying coast of Asiatic India. Nor was his reasoning unsound. He sought, and would have found, a western route to that old east by the very track he followed, had no American

continent intervened. It was not till his third voyage that the great admiral for the first time beheld the new continent: not indeed the Asiatic mainland, nor even that of our northern dominion; but the continent of South America, and the embouchures of the Orinoco River, with its mighty volume of fresh water, proving beyond dispute that it drained an area of vast extent, and opened up access far into the interior of a new world.

Columbus had realized his utmost anticipations, and died in the belief that he had reached the eastern shores of Asia. Nor is the triumph in any degree lessened by this assumption. The dauntless navigator, pushing on ever westward into the mysterious wastes of the unexplored Atlantic in search of the old east, presents the most marvellous example of pure faith that Science can adduce. To estimate all that that faith implied, we have to turn back to a period when his unaccomplished purpose rested solely on that sure and well-grounded faith in the demonstrations of Science.

In the city of Salamanca, there assembled in the Dominican Convent of San Estebán, in the year 1487, a learned and orthodox conclave, summoned by Prior Fernando de Talavera to pronounce judgment on the theory propounded by Columbus, and decide whether, in that most Catholic of Christian kingdoms, on the very eve of its final triumph over the infidel, it was a permissible belief that this Western World of ours had even a possible existence. Columbus set before them the scientific demonstration which constituted for himself indisputable evidence of an ocean highway across the Atlantic to the Western World beyond. The clerical council included professors of mathematics, astronomy and geography, as well as other learned friars and dignitaries of the Church: probably as respectable an assemblage of cloister