

HISTORY

OF THE

UNITED STATES

INTRODUCTION.

THE continent of America was probably unknown to the ancients. If once known, as some have supposed, to the Carthaginians, the Scandinavians, and the Welsh, all knowledge of it was afterwards lost. The discovery of this extensive region, constituting nearly one half of the habitable globe, was the accidental result of the attempts, made in the fifteenth century, to find a passage, by sea, from the ports of Europe to the East Indies, whose precious commodities were then transported, over land, by a long, dangerous, and expensive route.

2. This passage was universally sought by sailing south, along the western coasts of Europe and Africa, in the hope of finding the termination of the continent, when the Indies, it was supposed, might be attained by taking at first an easterly and then a northerly course. The discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, in 1487, encouraged expectation, and gave increased activity to the spirit of adventure.

3. Among the navigators of that age, Christopher Columbus, a native of the republic of Genoa, was distinguished for experience and skill in his profession, for extensive knowledge, and for a bold and original genius. The shape of the earth, then known to be round, and the fact that pieces of carved wood, a canoe, and two human bodies, of a complexion different from that of Europeans, had been driven, by long westerly winds, upon the shores of islands contiguous to Europe, suggested to his observing mind the project of seeking the East Indies by sailing directly west.