

the dim prophetic notices of unknown lands ; Portuguese discoveries, and vague reports among mariners of drift-wood seen upon the ocean. It required the quick instinct of genius, on the part of Columbus, to link all these together, and divine from them a new world in the west, with that strong-winged conviction that bore him to its shores. Did not Shakespeare construct his immortal dramas out of the roughest materials—traditions, stupid old chronicles, plays and histories? These, fused by the fire of his genius, came forth deathless creations, to delight and instruct the world. How little others made of the same materials that were available to Columbus, appears from the fact that for years he was in a minority of one, and that all the scientific men of the day condemned his scheme as visionary. In spite of all this, he arrived at the fixed conclusion that there was a way by the west to the Indies ; that he could discover that way, and so arrive at Cipango, Cathay, and the countries described in such glowing phrases by Marco Polo. He by no means calculated on finding a mighty continent, untrodden by the foot of any European. His theory was, that, as the earth is a sphere, it might be travelled round from east to west ; that only a third of its circumference yet remained unexplored ; that this space was partly filled up by the eastern regions of Asia, which he imagined extended so far as to approach within a moderate distance of the western shores of Europe and Africa ; and that, by sailing due west across the intervening ocean, he would land on the eastern shores of Asia, or, as he always termed it, India. Thus, what Columbus actually accomplished, proved to be far greater than anything he proposed. He hoped to find a new way to India ; he discovered instead a mighty continent, undreamed of before, cut off from the Old World by mighty oceans. The gifts of genius are far greater than the givers themselves venture to suppose. Two fortunate errors entered into Columbus's calculations :—He fancied the globe much smaller than it is ; and he imagined Asia to stretch much further eastward than it really does. These happy mistakes encouraged him to venture out into the western waters, under the impression that his voyage could not be unduly lengthened before he touched some of the islands off the coast of Eastern Asia. Thus, then, the great thought, dimly seen at first, rose grander and grander, like a great sun on his soul, and at length possessed and enthralled his whole being. Doubts vanished. The long arms of his faith reached across and touched the promised land, while he stood on the shores of Spain.

We have all looked with interest on the picture that represents Columbus expounding to the Prior of La Rabida the grounds of his mighty hope. Seated at a table, with a map before him and compasses in hand, is the stately figure of the hero, his little son Diego by his side. A striking portrait it is : tall, majestic, grave and lofty in bearing ; the face lighted up with that enthusiasm which marks the hero and the saint ; the ruddy cheek, bronzed by exposure to the ocean winds ; the hair prematurely white ; the man himself fresh and courageous—battered but not overthrown by misfortune. He had arrived at the Franciscan Convent of Santa Maria de Rabida, in Andalusia, on foot, leading by the hand his little boy. Weary, dust-covered and thread bare, he begged at the Convent gate for a crust of bread. He had turned his back in disgust on Portugal, whose king had meanly tried to act on his plans when confidentially submitted, without his concurrence or aid, and so rob him of his reward. Now he was on his way to the capital of Spain. The Prior of the Convent, Juan Perez by name, entered into conversation with the careworn wayfarer ; and being a man of education and intelligence, he soon found that he was entertaining no ordinary traveller. Hour after hour he listened,