

Looking for a Route to India.—For centuries the people of Western Europe had carried on a lucrative trade with India, exchanging their woollens and other manufactures for the spices, ivory, pearls, diamonds, and other products of that rich land. The long-used route by way of the Mediterranean Sea had then become very dangerous by reason of the hostility of the Turks, who recently had taken possession of Constantinople.

Only the northern portions of Africa were then known to Europeans. Some navigators now began to think that possibly a good route to India lay around the southern end of that continent. Such a route, by the Cape of Good Hope, was soon discovered, and down to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 it continued to be the main water-road between Western Europe and India.

Sailing West to reach the East, 1492.—Meanwhile a bolder scheme was being planned by Christopher Columbus. He proposed to reach the far East by sailing westward. To recount the difficulties of Columbus in obtaining aid to carry out his plans would be too long a story to tell here. Finally, however, assisted by Ferdinand and Isabella, the King and Queen of Spain, he set out on his long voyage.

Discovery of America, 1492.—Sailing from Palos in Spain, for more than two months Columbus, with his three small vessels, traversed the wide waste of waters. Often it needed all his skill to keep his mutinous crew in subjection. At last, on the 12th of October, there came from the lookout the joyous shout, "Land! land!" A few hours later the little ships were lying at anchor on the shores of an unknown island, while Columbus and his men were making the acquaintance of its inhabitants. The island was one of the group now called the Bahamas. Before setting out for home Columbus visited Cuba and Hayti, remaining in all about three months. On his return to Spain he was received at Court with distinguished honor.

The West Indies.—Columbus now found it easy enough to obtain money and men for further explorations. In all he made four voyages across the Atlantic, but he died without