

SENECA'S PROPHECY

AND ITS FULFILMENT.

HAVING chanced to acquire many years ago, while yet a lad at school, a copy of Washington Irving's "Life of Columbus," I became fascinated with a certain brief Latin quotation which appeared on its title page, as a kind of motto, implying an evident prophecy of the new world of America, delivered sometime in the first half of the first Christian century, by the Latin philosopher and poet, Lucius Annaeus Seneca.

Adopting, in the case of one word, a reading for which there is good authority and which for a reason given in a foot-note would seem to be the true one,* the prophecy on the title page of Irving's Columbus may be rendered into English with a little expansion as follows:—"Late in time eras will arrive when Oceanus himself may undo the bands which confine human enterprises, and a vast land may be laid open to the general view, and Tethys, spouse of Oceanus and mother by him of countless Oceanids, guardians of islands in the sea, may disclose new spheres, and Thule may no more be styled earth's utmost limit."

I could not at the time of the reception of this prize grasp the full import of the Latin motto referred to, but I saw enough of its force to become greatly interested in the contained prediction, and in the writer who had recorded it. To such an extent was this carried that among the modest ornaments of my chamber when a student at college figured a small bust of the philosopher and poet, obtained from an Italian trader in such articles, albeit, that the Graces had by no means been favourable to Seneca's general aspect, which harmonized not badly with one's idea of a tutor of the tyrant Nero, and of a stoic of the strictest school. To the interest in Seneca thus early excited is due the present tribute to his memory, framed and put together in the midst of the new hemisphere which he so long ago was in vision permitted to behold.

The passage occurs in a chorus to be found in the second act of a drama entitled "The Medea." The speakers in the drama are supposed to be citizens of Corinth who are greatly excited by troubles brought upon them in connection with the history of this Medea. The old story of Jason's search after the

* The difference referred to is the employment of the name Tethys instead of that of Typhis. The former harmonizes better with the personified Oceanus, of whom Tethys was supposed to be the spouse, whilst the latter was the name of a pilot during a portion of the Argonautic expedition which at the time of the supposed utterance of our prophecy was already a past event.