

INTRODUCTION.

AT the time of the discovery of America, Spain, England and France were the chief nations of the earth. Each, looking with covetous eye upon the alluring prospect of the New World, hastened to prepare for its conquest and for the inevitable conflict of rival interests. The recent rapid development of the science of navigation and of the spirit of discovery had kindled into surprising fervor the general passion for adventure. The success of Columbus had roused to the highest pitch the lust of conquest and foreign enterprise. All Europe was aflame. The New World was looked upon not only as a treasure-house in itself, but through it also was thought to lie the shortest route to the fabled Indies, where wealth unbounded awaited those who first should dare the perils of the unknown seas.

How little can we know what it then was to dream of "the peerless Orient." Europe was poor—and poverty intensifies cupidity. The old order of things was passing away; the new was hastening to take its place.

In the desire for adventure was embodied not only the lust of gold and of conquest, but the passionate zeal of the Church as well. With the soldier went