

CHAPTER I

Discoveries and Explorations

FLOATING down the stream of the ages have come many interesting myths and traditions regarding the Continent of America and that half of its vast area which has since become the Dominion of Canada. Plato, the Greek, described a mighty island of Atlantis which was supposed to have been submerged by the waters of a boundless sea, but was far more probably shrouded from sight by passing centuries of ignorant indifference. Seneca, the Spanish teacher of the youthful Nero, taught his Imperial pupil of a great continent which should one day defy the darkness of unknown waters and appear beyond the ultimate bounds of Thule. A Chinese record of the fifth century indicates a possible Buddhist visit to Mexico; and Welsh traditions of a later date record the mythical voyage of Madoc, in the twelfth century, to a far western country where he saw many strange sights and scenes. The sifting influence of historic research has, however, left these and many other stories to take their place beside the romantic quest for the Golden Fleece and similar legends of an olden time.

VOYAGES OF THE NORSEMEN

More satisfactory, because more stable in basis, are the records of Norse invasion and Viking adventure. Sailing from out their rugged shores about the middle of the Christian era, these wandering ocean warriors played a great part in the history of lands bordering upon the sea. Brave to rashness, and sturdy and stubborn in pursuit of gold, or silver, or precious stones, they made piracy almost respectable in days when power belonged to him who could hold it, and