

God. Out on the great ocean he never failed, morning and evening, to call his crew to prayers. He vowed to devote a large portion of his share of the profits of the enterprise to initiate a new crusade, in order to rescue the Holy Sepulchre from the Infidel,—one of the great religious ideas of his age. Whatever human weakness clung to him, in this at least he was strong—in that religious hope and trust which led him to refer immediately to God, whatever of clear knowledge and new illumination he possessed. Here was the secret of his strength.

Great men are not the mere products of the times in which they live—the epitome of their age—the creations of those formative currents of thought that are traversing the masses. Great men are the gifts of kind Heaven to our poor world; instruments by which the Highest One works out his designs; light-radiators to give guidance and blessing to the travellers of time. Though far above us, they are felt to be our brothers; and their elevation shows us what vast possibilities are wrapped up in our common humanity. They beckon us up the gleaming heights to whose summits they have climbed. Their deeds are the woof of this world's history. In their minds the mighty thoughts, the discoveries, the enterprises that create epochs and mould the masses of men, first take shape. These heroic souls have toiled to smooth for us the rough surface of earth: they have braved danger and death, and laid the spoils at our feet. Still, though not the mere outgrowth of their age, they are, of necessity, influenced and limited by it. Thus it was with Columbus. However far in advance of his fellows, he was still a man of the fifteenth century. The impulses and ideas then current, the discoveries then made, told on his sensitive, largely-inquiring mind, fired his imagination, and gave a bent to his thoughts. It was a stirring era—the age of geographical discoveries and maritime adventures. In the preceding century the Mariner's Compass had been constructed; and in 1452 printing was invented—the most momentous of all the creations of man's inventive brain. New ideas, regarding the world and man's destiny in it, began to make way. Blind subjection to the past was repudiated. Science entered on her great career. A wider theatre was needed for the development of the new life of men. The narrow strip of earth, consisting of parts of Europe, Asia and Africa, on which history had hitherto transacted itself, was suspected not to be the whole. The Portuguese led the way in the new career of discovery. Away down the African Coast their daring mariners crept, passing Cape Bojador—"the fearful out-stretcher," as the name signifies,—which had barred the way for twenty years, penetrating the dreaded torrid zone, crossing the line, losing sight of the North Polar Star, and gazing in rapture on the Southern Cross and the luminaries of another hemisphere, till at length Vasco De Gama doubled the Cape of Good Hope and reached the shores of India. Thus the earth was continually widening in man's view. What new discoveries might not the abysses of ocean yet disclose! What stirring tales these Portuguese voyagers were telling of strange lands, of new races of men, of the terrors and wonders of the deep! Everything was fresh and romantic to these mariners, who gazed on all with the ready credulity and simple fancy of children.

Deep in the soul of one man these wonders and mysteries had sunk.—Columbus began to ponder on the secrets of the world that were now coming to light. Born in Genoa in 1435, the son of an honest wool-comber, he acquired when a youth a good knowledge of the Latin language, and studied geography, geometry, astronomy and navigation. At the age of fourteen he took to sea, being drawn to it by an irresistible longing. For twenty years