

## THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.\*

THE four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America furnishes a very opportune time for a new study of the great actors in that world-drama. The classical lives of Columbus and his successors by Irving and Prescott, need revision and re-statement of the facts. The publishing house of Houghton, Mifflin & Co. presents two of these re-statements, one, Dr. Justin Windsor's new "Life of Columbus," just issued from the press, and the other, Professor Fiske's more comprehensive study of "The Discovery of America." Professor Fiske's book is a thoroughly satisfactory treatment of the whole subject. He gives a preliminary chapter on ancient America, showing the development of social institutions, which, among the Zuni, the Mexicans and the Aztecs, had reached a very considerable degree of development. We think that Mr. Southall, our own Sir William J. Dawson and the late Sir Daniel Wilson have shown that so much time as Professor Fiske demands for this progress is not necessary, and is indeed contra-indicated by the facts.

A feature of special importance in this admirable book is a series of maps showing the growth of knowledge concerning the new world from time to time. Many of these are fac-simile reproductions of very rare contemporary charts. They show how slowly dawned upon the mind of Europe the fact that America was really a new continent, and not merely the eastern shore of Asia.

## PRE-COLUMBIAN DISCOVERIES.

The pre-Columbian discoveries of America are also very fully treated. The discovery of Greenland by the Norsemen is by no means strange inasmuch as Iceland is nearer to Greenland than to Norway. Certain it is that for four hundred years there was a Norse colony in Greenland, at one time exceeding 6,000 persons with herds of cattle. The remains

of Norse churches and farmsteads are still to be seen; of one of these Professor Fiske gives an excellent picture. When the great Moravian missionary, Hans Egede, visited Greenland in 1721, he found the ruins of old Norse villages, the population of which had perished. The failure of the Norsemen to plant a colony on the mainland of North America is not remarkable, for even after the time of Columbus, says our author, "the founding of colonies in America was no pastime; it was a tale of drudgery, starvation, and bloodshed, that curdles one's blood to read; more attempts failed than succeeded."

In an admirable chapter entitled "Europe and Cathay," our author shows the strange superstitions concerning the farthest East, the interest awakened by the travels of Marco Polo and other adventurers, and the Oriental trade which made Constantinople in the twelfth century the seat of the highest civilization on the globe. In the search for the Indies, unknown terrors awed men's souls. "Gorgons and hydras and chimæras dire" peopled the waste places of the earth. The anthropophagi or "men who do each other eat," the fiery zone which belted the south, and the icy regions of the far north were felt to be impassable obstacles to exploration. As ships dipped neath the horizon, they were seen apparently to go down hill, and if they went too far it was thought they never would come back. The ships of the time were exceedingly clumsy and unmanageable, and for lack of metal sheathing were apt to be sunk by the terrible boring worm. The astrolabes, "jackstuffs," and rude compasses of the times were very imperfect instruments, and with the absence of good chronometers, made skilful navigation almost impossible.

But slowly, after many attempts, the Cape of Good Hope was rounded six years before Columbus sailed across the "Sea of Darkness" that bound

\**The Discovery of America with some Account of Ancient America and the Spanish Conquest.* By JOHN FISKE. In two volumes, crown 8vo, pp. xxxvi.-516, xxxi.-631. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. Toronto: Wm. Briggs. Price \$5.00.