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## AMERICA'S DISCOVERY

ITS RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

BY MANUEL PEREZ VILLANIL.

Honorable titles have been given to

few sovereigns, if any, more deserv-

edly than that of "The Catholic" to

Isabel I. of Castile and Don Ferdinand

V. of Aragon. For, in their private as

well as public life, in their private en-

terprises as well as their political re-

forms, in all the acts of their pattern

and faithful rule, they ever proved

themselves to be loving members of

the church, vigorous defenders of the

faith, and zealous for the glory of God

and the spiritual advantage of their

subjects.

Never has political action appeared

more exalted in character than at that

time, nor been more resplendent with

abundant results of true progress. If

the condition of Spain during the fif-

teenth century be studied, and in par-

ticular that early part of it during

which Henry IV., Isabella's brother,

reigned, we shall find anarchy ruling,

demoralization spreading, all classes

of society disturbed and unsettled, and

the entire social edifice seemingly fol-

lowing the throne in a headlong course

to destruction. By contrast, the mar-

velous regeneration brought about by

"the Catholic sovereigns" will be thus

duly appreciated; it was due to their

reforms, their conquests, and, more

than all, to their example and virtues.

The mind is filled with wonder at their

having accomplished so much in so

short a time, at their multiplying them-

selves, as it were, to promptly attend

to every need of their realms. While

they brought to consummation the work

of the reconquest, they reformed courts

of justice, regulated the laws, corrected

evil customs, prepared the development

of agriculture and trade, favored arts

and letters, subdued the nobility, and,

without neglecting foreign policy

abroad, through which they added the

kingdom of Naples to their dominions,

they still found time to examine into

and consider the plans, apparently chi-

merical, of a poor adventurer which

were to result for them in the discovery

of a new world. These glories were

the result of heroic valor, of unswerving

resolve, of clear understanding, of

signal prudence, and of an inspiration

which could have only come to them as

a reward for their great virtues.

Isabella's Sympathy for Columbus.

That piety was the soul of all their

undertakings has been said and repeated

by many historians—a piety so deep,

so active, so exalted that, while adding

to the merit of their works, it made

them resplendent with extraordinary

marks of grandeur. But if these qual-

ities were unitedly possessed by both

sovereigns, they shone especially in

the great Queen of Castile. "To her,"

indeed, says a historian, "are due the

larger part of the glories of that

reign; to her the highest conceptions

and all the elevated inspirations be-

long. Wherever her spouse put in ac-

tion his arm, or at most, his brain,

she brought the assistance of her heart.

This is shown in the events which led

to the discovery of America. Without

calling into question Ferdinand's effi-

ciency part in the enterprise, the

magnanimous heart of Isabella, alone

could welcome with sympathy the

poor adventurer, habited in his thread-

bare cloak; listen to his plans, in which

correct information was mingled with

marvellous fables; afford him generous

assistance of means at a time when the

resources of the royal coffers were

low; keep up his hopes for not less

than seven years, until after the cap-

ture of Granada, and then devote her-

self to realizing one of the most risky

ventures ever undertaken by men.

Now, what could have been Isabella's

motives for examining into and pro-

jecting the project of Columbus? A

Protestant writer, Washington Irving,

who studied and knew how to avail

himself, not always impartially, of the

documents collected by Navarrette, de-

clares that "Isabella had nobler in-

ducements. She was filled with pious

zeal at the idea of effecting such a

great work of salvation." Truly did

the admiral exclaim, when he got the

news of his patroness' decease, "that

her life was always Catholic, holy and

active in all matters appertaining to

her service."

But the most positive evidence that

the great Catholic queen was inspired by

a deep religious sense in this grave busi-

ness is to be found in the very negotia-

tions which, during so many years,

were going on between the court of

Castile and the wandering Italian navi-

gator. It is true that the sovereigns

preferred to learn the judgment of the

most competent cosmographers and

physicists of the kingdom on the mat-

ter, and to that end they were called

together in council at Cordova under

the presidency of the queen's confessor,

Fray Hernando de Talavera. But af-

ter the deliberations of the council had

resulted so unfavorably for Columbus

project as to declare it to be impossi-

ble and deserving to be wholly rejected,

how came it that the queen would not

give up her purpose of befriending the

undertaking proposed by the needy

Italian adventurer?

Notwithstanding that men of science

(such as cosmographic science was at

that time) rejected the project, judged

it to be preposterous and impossible,

the queen ordered assistance to be

given to Columbus to induce him not to

leave her realms, but to hope for bet-

ter times under the shadow of the

banner of Castile.

There are some who have sought to

fabricate from the result of the delib-

erations held at Cordova a charge

against Father Hernando de Talavera.

Irving considers him to have been an

avowed enemy of Columbus. This view

is unjust; the father's course in the mat-

ter was in accord with his patriotism

and loyalty to his sovereigns.

"What was it that Columbus pro-

posed," asks Father Cappa with singular

directness: "to find a way to Asia by

sailing west—a course the very reverse

of that which the Portuguese were try-

ing to find by sailing east. 'The search was,

of course, deserving of consideration

and action; but of what value to the

great Spanish nation could be the dis-

covery of Cipango of the Great Khan,

Columbus' dream, in comparison with

the kingdom of Granada? Could the

Spanish sovereigns divert vessels and

treasure for an undertaking which did

not meet at all, as that relating to

Granada did, the traditional and se-

cular requirements of the entire nation?

"Could a religious," we continue quot-

ing from the learned Jesuit, "could a

prelate like Talavera, who was the

soul of the war against Granada, con-

sent to weaken the undertaking by ap-

plying the nation's resources for any

purpose other than that of dragging

down at once and forever the banner

of the crescent from the Mussulman

towers of Granada? Columbus' pro-

ject, in this light, was of secondary im-

portance, because of the doubtful pos-

sibility of carrying it out; of the prob-

lematical aspect of the results, and of

the scant interest which it excited,

while the attention of the sovereigns,

cities, and magnates was concentrated,