

DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

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Discovery of America by Warren Holden

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WARREN HOLDEN

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OF AMERICA**

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BY

WARREN HOLDEN.



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1890.

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MAN

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

In every tongue the school-boy reads the tale,
How, free from doubt, "The Admiral" set sail
Upon the unknown, boundless "Ocean Sea,"
Where never viking ventured wittingly.
Not Jason searching for the golden fleece,
Nor wise Ulysses wandering far from Greece,
Nor famed Æneas wrecked on Libyan shore,
Conceived the terrors Ocean had in store.
Wide-weltering waters,—land long lost to view,—
No friendly shore to save a struggling crew
When yawning waves engulf their fragile bark;
The flood sweeps over them and leaves no mark.

After long, weary years of hope delayed,
By king and courtier craftily betrayed,—
Oft-answered arguments compelled to meet,
Which ignorance and prejudice repeat
With grave persistence: If the world were round,
How could antipodes maintain their ground?—
A wandering mendicant from court to court,
Of pity, scorn, and ridicule the sport,
At last he speeds. Castile's illustrious queen,
Inspired by Heaven with faith in things unseen,
Pledges her jewels for an unborn age,
And history turns her most eventful page.

Alone amid the treacherous ocean tides,
Confronting mutiny, alone he bides
The symbol of indomitable will,
What urgent purpose has he to fulfil?
What motive can sustain such steadfast mood,
The crucial test of human fortitude?

Is it ambition for a deathless name,
The generous infirmity of fame?
Or is it the ignoble thirst for gold,
The soul's birthright to sordid mammon sold?
Or seeks he to advance the holy cross,
And rescue heathen from eternal loss?
Who can adjust the claims upon his heart,
To God, to man, to self, their proper part?
Letters he bore to Tartary's Grand Khan,
Commissioned to unfold salvation's plan;
And, reaching India by the shortest way,
How easy to bring riches from Cathay!
What holy vows may with such wealth be paid!
May not the king equip a new crusade,
And rescue from the hand of infidel
The sepulchre where Christian memories dwell?

Though surface motives seem to shape men's course,
They feel the under-current's silent force;

And, spite of choice, there is a special rôle
That each must fill to harmonize the whole.
Columbus was the unconscious hand of fate,
Predestined to unlock the golden gate
Of this wide, hospitable hemisphere,
The future home of all that is most dear
To human hope beset by tyranny,—
The rights of conscience and of industry.

Search history throughout. You scarce shall find
A firmer heart, a more self-centred mind;
Nor may you think earth's common motives can
Evolve and discipline this type of man.
When nature undertakes a grand assay,
She deftly mingles with our common clay
Some rare ingredient from a higher sphere,
To temper well her chosen pioneer.

Calm, many-sided, self-reliant soul,
When first the needle varied from the pole

And filled the boldest pilots with affright,
His fertile genius proved the compass right.
As each new danger threatened to devour,
He quelled the monster with a quiet power.
Ominous signs that wakened natural fear
To his quick sense revealed new cause of cheer.

In vain the anxious seamen looked for land:
A waste of waters spread on every hand.
The loneliness of the deserted sea,
With only silent stars for company,
Oppressed their homesick souls with strange dismay,
And made them melancholy's helpless prey.

At such a time how towered that master-mind
Above the common weakness of mankind!
Even as a mother soothes her children's fears
With tender voice, and gently dries their tears,
He stoops from lofty contemplation's height
With cheering words to chase away their fright.