

ern latitudes. When tidings arrived from the coast of California that the expedition of Cortez had perished, the wife of the hero, Juana de Zuñiga, the beautiful daughter of the Count d'Aguilar, caused two ships to be fitted out and sent forth to ascertain its fate.\* California was already, in 1541, recognized to be an arid, woodless peninsula—a fact that was forgotten in the seventeenth century. We moreover gather from the narratives of Balboa, Pedrarias Davila, and Hernan Cortez, that hopes were entertained at that period of finding in the Pacific, then considered to be a portion of the Indian Ocean, groups of islands, rich in spices, gold, precious stones, and pearls. Excited fancy urged men to undertake great enterprises, and the daring of these undertakings, whether successful or not, reacted on the imagination, and excited it still more powerfully. Thus, notwithstanding the thorough absence of political freedom, many circumstances concurred at this remarkable age of the Conquista—a period of overwrought excitement, violence, and of a mania for discoveries by sea and land—to favor individuality of character, and to enable some highly-gifted minds to develop many noble germs drawn from the depths of feeling. They err who believe that the *Conquistadores* were incited by love of gold and religious fanaticism alone. Perils always exalt the poetry of life; and, moreover, the remarkable age, whose influence on the development of cosmical ideas we are now depicting, gave to all enterprises, and to the natural impressions awakened by distant travels, the charm of novelty and surprise, which is beginning to fail us in the present well-instructed age, when so many portions of the earth are opened to us. Not only one hemisphere, but almost two thirds of the earth, were then a new and unexplored world, as unseen as that portion of the moon's surface which the law of gravitation constantly averts from the glance of the inhabitants of the earth. Our deeply-inquiring age finds in the increasing abundance of ideas presented to the human mind a compensation for the surprise formerly induced by the novelty of grand, massive, and imposing natural phenomena—a compensation which will, it is true, long be denied to the many, but is vouchsafed to the few familiar with the condition of science. To them the increasing insight into the silent operation of natural forces, whether in electro-magnetism or in the polarization of light, in the influence of dia-

\* See my *Essai Politique sur le Royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne*, t. ii., 1827, p. 259; and Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York, 1843), vol. iii., p. 271 and 336.