

History of the United States From the Discovery of the American Continent, Vol. 4 (Classic Reprint)

George Bancroft



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Excerpt from History of the United States From the Discovery of the American Continent, Vol. 4

The great maritime powers, weary of hopes of conquest and ignorant of coming reform, desired repose. To restore possessions as they had been, or were to have been, was accepted as the condition of peace; and guaranties were devised to keep them safe against vicissitude. But the eternal flow of existence never rests, bearing the human race onwards through continuous change. Principles grow into life by informing the public mind, and in their maturity gain the mastery over events; following each other as they are bidden, and ruling without a pause. No sooner do the agitated waves begin to subside, than, amidst the formless tossing of the billows, a new messenger from the Infinite Spirit moves over the waters; and the bark which is freighted with the fortunes of mankind, yields to the gentle breath as it first whispers among the shrouds, even while the beholders still doubt if the breeze is springing, and whence it comes, and whither it will go.

The hour of revolution was at hand, promising freedom to conscience and dominion to intelligence. History, escaping from the dictates of authority and the jars of insulated interests, enters upon new and unthought-of domains of culture and equality, the happier society where power springs freshly from ever-renewed consent; the life and activity of a connected world.

For Europe, the crisis foreboded the struggles of generations. The strong bonds of faith and affection, which once united the separate classes of its civil hierarchy, had lost their vigor.

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