



The Spanish Conquest of the Americas

Irving Richman

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The Spaniard of the fifteenth century is recognizable by well-defined traits: he was primitive, he was proud, he was devout, and he was romantic. His primitiveness we detect in his relish for blood and suffering; his pride in his austerity and exclusiveness; his devoutness in his mystical exaltation of the Church; and his romanticism in his passion for adventure.

After printing had spread in Spain, the romanticism of the Spaniard—to confine our observations for the present to that trait—was fostered by a wealth of books. *Amadis of Gaul*, *Palmerín of England*, *The Exploits of Esplandián*, *Don Belianis*—all these works were filled with heroes, queens, monsters, and enchantments; and all, it is needless to remark, held an honored place upon the shelves of Miguel de Cervantes, that Spanish romanticist *par excellence*, the author of *Don Quixote*.

But prior to 1500, or down to 1492, let us say, the romanticism of the Spaniard, like that of other Europeans, was ministered to not so much by books as by tales passed from mouth to mouth: tales originating with seamen and reflected in the names on mariners' charts; and tales by landsmen recorded in the relations, reports, and letters of missionaries, royal envoys, and itinerant merchants...

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