


Plan of the  
Work.



that small number of the elect, predestined before all ages, amid so many savage tribes, which, till the French entered their country, had lain buried in the thickest darkness of infidelity. Lastly, I have had in view to rescue from oblivion many illustrious personages, whose names deserve to go down to posterity, and to show that the obscurity in which they have remained till now, does not spring from any mediocrity of merit.

I shall easily concede to the Spaniards that we have not had in the New World explorers, conquerors, founders of colonies, to be compared with those of their nation who have appeared with most renown on the theatre of the New World, if, with their personal merit, we put in the scale the greatness of their conquests and the wealth of the provinces wherewith they have enriched their kingdom. But if we divest them of all that is foreign to them, and what they owe to the favorable circumstances of their position; if, in these famous men, we distinguish what is properly theirs,—their virtues, talents, valor, good conduct,—we shall perhaps be able to bring forward navigators as able, bold, and persevering as their Columbus, Americus Vesputius, Magellan; and conquerors, who, with all the bravery and intrepidity of the Balboas, Cortez, Almagros, Pizarros, and Valdivias, were not stained with their vices. I will not push this parallel further; it is for the public to judge of the merit of those whose actions are portrayed to them. The historian's duty is to give a faithful account, and furnish accurately and without bias the authorities on which he bases his judgment; and this I will here endeavor to do with all the care and sincerity in my power.

It has always been regarded in France as one of the dreams of William Postel, that a large part of the North American coast had been frequented, even before the Christian era, by the people of Gaul, who abandoned it, said he, only because they found there nothing but uncultivated lands, and vast regions without a city, and almost without an inhabitant; as if the fisheries, from which, as he