PORTUGAL RULES THE EAST

THE extent of Portugal’s diplomatic victory at Tordesillas could now be seen by all. When Vasco da Gama returned from Calicut, Spain’s admiral, Columbus, had for several years been fumbling among the West Indian Islands, under the fond impression that he was in the Far East. Already Spaniards had lost their first enthusiasm for these places, which had seemed to promise so much and had actually yielded so little. Now King Manuel’s voyager had been to lands that everyone knew were the real East. And the beauty of it was that Portugal by the treaty had forever shut her rival out of this long-coveted oriental sphere.

DISCOVERY OF BRAZIL

Eagerly preparations were made in Lisbon to exploit the contact gained with India. In 1500 Pedro Álvares Cabral sailed with a fleet of thirteen ships. Partly following Da Gama’s course in the South Atlantic, but swinging farther west, Cabral struck the Brazilian coast in the region of Porto Seguro. Swarms of naked savages came to greet the Europeans, to look on in wonder as the expedition’s chaplains celebrated the first Catholic mass on Brazilian soil. It was instantly realized that this land lay east of the Tordesillas
line and so belonged to Portugal. Cabral sent one ship back to Lisbon to report the new discovery and with the rest of the fleet proceeded according to orders to India. After losing several ships in a storm, he finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope and, while proceeding up the eastern side of Africa, discovered the important island of Madagascar. Cabral then cruised along the western coast of India, alternately trading with the Indians and fighting with the Arab shippers, who would not tamely surrender to Europeans their monopoly of Indian Ocean trade. He returned to Portugal with a spice cargo but minus so many ships that the whole voyage showed a loss.

For a moment Portugal seemed to hesitate. There were even persons who urged King Manuel to abandon the India adventure, which seemed beyond the power and resources of Portugal. But any hesitation was brief; the king’s decision was to see the matter through.

**Founding the Empire**

During the next few years, the Portuguese made annual expeditions to India. At first they went only for trade, but in 1505 they began a policy of building fortifications and dominating the local princes. Because India was then divided and without great military states, the handful of European invaders were able to establish themselves firmly on the shores of the Indian Ocean before a wave of Turkish conquerors came from beyond the Khyber Pass to build the powerful Mogul Empire that ultimately included most of Hindustan.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese learned eastern geography and the timing of the monsoons that would blow them from East Africa to India. They also learned the routes and centers
of trade—that the city of Malacca was the great spice market at the eastern end of the Indian Ocean and that Ormuz and Aden commanded the entrances to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. They came to know the true shape of Hindustan and something of the Malay Peninsula beyond. East Africa was strategically important to them, and they soon mapped the entire coast from the cape to the Red Sea.

Under Afonso de Albuquerque, King Manuel’s greatest commander and governor in the East, the Portuguese definitely advanced from trade to empire building. This grizzled veteran, with a long career as a European soldier behind him, was aged almost sixty when sent out by his sovereign to manage Portuguese oriental affairs in 1509. It was Albuquerque who most truly appreciated the fact that Portugal could accomplish nothing without solid bases on land. During the six years (1509–1515) that he governed for his king, he strove to conquer the key points of the Indian Ocean, in order to squeeze out competition and render Portugal’s hold invulnerable. Quick in action and ruthless in punishment, he spared neither refractory natives nor rebellious Portuguese. Frequently suffering from illness and the infirmities of age, he dominated the ocean by his iron will and left a reputation that four and a half centuries have scarcely effaced.

On the west coast of Hindustan, he took Goa to serve as the center of Portuguese power. To the east he seized Malacca, which controlled the entry of East Indian spices and other goods to the Indian Ocean. Farther west he captured Muscat and Ormuz, which dominated the Persian Gulf, and made it possible to close that important route to Europe. It was only in his attempt to capture Aden that he failed; here he was beaten off and in consequence could not bar the entrance to the Red Sea, which carried the greatest
spice supply of all. If Aden had fallen, Portugal might have diverted the whole trade around the Cape of Good Hope and gained a total monopoly. As it was, the ancient republic of Venice, aroused to the situation, made every effort to keep the Red Sea open and the old spice trade alive. Then in 1517 the Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt and acquired not only the old route but the Egyptian interest in the revenue from this trade. With Venetian encouragement the Turks kept some eastern commerce flowing through the Red Sea and along the various overland routes as in the years before the Portuguese rounded Africa.

Portugal in the Far East

Albuquerque was responsible for his nation’s first push into the East Indian Archipelago, the Pacific, and the Far East. After his conquest of Malacca in 1511, he sent a fleet beyond the Malaccan Strait to the Banda and Molucca Islands in quest of the nutmeg and clove which came from these distant places. The commander of this expedition, Antonio de Abreu, can truly be called the discoverer of the Pacific, since he entered the mighty ocean in 1512, months before Balboa sighted it from the peak in Darien. Abreu himself turned back at the Bandas, but one of his officers, Francisco Serrão, reached Ternate in the Moluccas, where he spent the rest of his life. It was he who, in a letter, put into the head of his friend, Ferdinand Magellan, the idea that the Moluccas, richest of all the spice islands, lay over 180° east of the Tordesillas line and so belonged to Castile instead of Portugal. Serrão proved to be mistaken, but his error had a substantial impact on the course of future discovery.

Albuquerque established contact with Siam and Java; the Portuguese soon coasted Formosa and in 1514 succeeded in
getting an agent to Canton. By 1542 a group of them had
made a visit to Japan, and in 1557 their country acquired the
lease of Macau, the oldest European possession in China.

Prester John Again

The search for Prester John had by now slipped a little
into the background, but Portugal did not entirely forget the
earliest objective of her explorations. A Portuguese mission
visited Abyssinia in 1520 and brought back a description
that reduced the Prester's celebrated empire to the status of
another backward African kingdom. It was Christian, how-
ever—the old report had contained that much truth. Pero de
Covilhã, King John's former emissary, who had been mar-
ooned in Abyssinia for thirty years, was still alive and glad
to see his countrymen, even though he refused their invita-
tion to accompany them home. He decided that he would
now be an utter stranger in Portugal and foresaw complica-
tions as the result of having left one wife and family there
and of having since acquired another in Abyssinia. The
curtain now fell forever on this stalwart pioneer, as the Por-
tuguese left the patriarch amid the rugged African moun-
tains to be buried at some future date with different Christian
rites from those of Catholic Portugal.

The Profits Fade Away

For all her effort, Portugal never gained effective mastery
of the Indian Ocean. Her navy and merchant marine, though
large by the standards of the sixteenth century, were small
in relation to the enormous water area and its almost endless
coasts. Some dozen ships a year ordinarily rounded the cape
from Portugal, and many of these straightway returned with
cargoes, leaving a small resident force to contend with the
ever-present enemies in the East. Though repeatedly defeated by the Portuguese, these enemies always rose again to baffle the lesser men who succeeded the great Albuquerque after his death in 1515.

For the first few years the Portuguese seemed to be making enormous profits from their eastern trade. Private fortunes did mushroom, the king’s chests did swell, and Lisbon took on an air of luxury and ostentation. But as Portugal expanded in the East, expenses tended to outrun the revenue, and soon most of the profit faded away. Many costly ships were lost; forts and trading posts required large investments; governors had to be well paid, and many—with their subordinates—found grafting so easy that the royal treasury suffered.

The Portuguese, though unrivaled as explorers and pioneers, never became able merchants. Their small, poor country had previously been mainly agricultural and had never produced a substantial middle class. The persecution of the Jews on the eve of Da Gama’s voyage crippled the one group that might have risen economically to the new occasion. To replace them, the bankers of Italy, Belgium, and Germany seized the opportunity for investment and drew most of the profits from the eastern trade.

It also turned out that Lisbon, though excellent as a point of departure for the distant voyages, was neither a good center of distribution nor an adequate market. It lay too far from the main trading centers of the continent, too far from the well-to-do Europeans who could buy the luxury products Portugal now had to offer. Antwerp served the purpose much better, and within a few years this city on the Scheldt had nearly supplanted the city by the Tagus. The Portuguese brought their spices from the East to Lisbon,
only to have most of the cargoes sent on to Antwerp at once. Later, with the rise of the Dutch Republic, Amsterdam superseded Antwerp as the focus of European eastern trade.

Portugal held grimly to her oriental empire through the sixteenth century and on into the seventeenth, but in the long run held a losing hand. Albuquerque had been right in deciding that the Portuguese could dominate the trade only by building a land base, but he did not foresee that an eastern empire would become a dead weight on his tiny nation. Gallant the Portuguese had indeed been in blazing the trail into the unknown, and as Camões, their poet, says, “if there had been more world they would have found it.” But when commercial skills and energies were called for, Portugal began, slowly but inevitably, to revert to the humble position dictated by geography, poverty, and lack of manpower.

For a brief historical moment the Portuguese had astonished the world, and the importance of their work has never been clearer than it is today.
European explorations and settlements in South America.
Spain and the West

Spain started overseas discovery later than Portugal. Not until the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1469 were the two main Spanish kingdoms of Aragon and Castile finally united, and not until the capture of Granada in 1492 was the last Moslem stronghold in the peninsula destroyed. But long before the Spaniards could turn their attention to distant adventure, they were developing qualifications for their future work as empire builders. The seaports of Biscay, Galicia, and Andalusia produced good seamen. Centuries of fighting with the Moors and with one another had endowed the Spaniards with a proud bravery and a religious fanaticism which were to serve them well when they bore the cross against the new unbelievers overseas. While recovering their peninsula and the Balearic Islands from the Moors, the Spaniards had gained some experience in dealing with subject peoples. Since 1402, when the Castilians had begun the conquest of the Canary Islands, they had faced, on a miniature scale, many of the problems they were to encounter in the New World. Even so, until Columbus appeared at the Spanish court, there was small reason to think that Spain was about to carve out a vast empire in unknown lands.
Christopher Columbus

There is no point in adding here to the debates regarding the origin and birthplace of Christopher Columbus. He was born, it would appear, in 1451. He called himself a Genoese Italian, and in his lifetime no one seems to have doubted his word, though in recent years many nations have claimed him as their own. Early in life he left Genoa and sailed on ships in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, visiting England certainly and perhaps reaching the latitude of Iceland. He married the daughter of the wealthy Portuguese donatary of Porto Santo, an island in the Madeira group, and after her death moved to Lisbon to make plans for a westward voyage of discovery in the Atlantic. He collected stories of lands to the west, including the curious legend of Antilia, which was supposed to be a rich and luxurious island populated by Christians who had once migrated there from Europe. Confused reports of the Norse Greenland colony may have provided the basis of the Antilia myth and in this way have furnished indirectly the only influence the Scandinavian voyages could have had on the discovery of America. Columbus already knew about Marco Polo's book by hearsay, even though he did not read it until later. What interested him most was the account of Cipangu (Japan), which Polo had never visited but described as very rich, and of Cathay, the home of the Great Khan.

Columbus believed the earth to be a sphere, though that made no significant contribution to his plans, since everybody of any learning believed the same. More important are the facts that he underestimated the circumference of the globe and simultaneously exaggerated the size and eastward extension of Asia. These miscalculations combined to place
the east coast of Asia much nearer the west coast of Europe
than it actually is. Columbus' errors, plus Marco Polo's mis-
take in locating Japan too far east of China, promised a rela-
tively short voyage to golden Cipangu. Along the way,
moreover, the pleasant island of Antilia could be expected
to break the journey.

These misconceptions were further reinforced by a letter
which the Florentine scientist Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli
had a little earlier written to a Lisbon priest and which some-
how fell into Columbus' hands. The scientist not only
rehashed familiar stories and legends and reached the con-
venient conclusion that a voyage from Europe to Cipangu
and Cathay would prove easy; he also recalled that Kublai
Khan had once expressed an interest in Christianity and had
asked the elder Polos to bring missionaries back to China.
All in all the document represented more wishful thinking
than Florentine science, but it seems to have helped Colum-
bus somewhat in clarifying his ideas.

About 1484 Columbus asked John II of Portugal to send
him on a voyage of discovery to the west. After some con-
sideration, the king turned the proposal down. Columbus,
though an impressive-looking man who talked well, came
of a poor family and had little formal education. These facts
were perhaps apparent to the king and to the Portuguese
scientists who discussed the plan with him. The price Colum-
bus demanded for his services was high, and King John was
just then awaiting the return of Diogo Cão from the Congo
and had a heavy commitment to reach India by rounding
Africa. The vulgar and ridiculous opinion has persisted,
however, that John was dissuaded by the fear that his ships
might fall off the edge of a flat earth.

Columbus next carried his proposal to the court of Spain.
Everyone knows he had to wait nearly seven years; not everyone knows that from the start he had powerful friends to urge his cause. The ingratitude of Spain toward Columbus, which is a part of our modern tradition, is an idea originally implanted by the discoverer himself. He had a persecution complex, and his last complaining letters, written near his death when he was discouraged and sick, show far greater remembrance of his detractors than of his many loyal friends and supporters.

When Moorish Granada fell in January 1492, the tide of royal favor turned quickly in his direction; the money was somehow raised, although the story that Queen Isabella pawned her jewels to help Columbus is untrue; they had already been pawned for another purpose. Even Columbus’ extreme demands for rewards and titles were accepted. At the little port of Palos the famous Santa Maria, Pinta, and Niña were fitted out and manned with crews numbering about 120 all told. Less certainty exists about the architecture and equipage of this fleet than is sometimes loosely supposed. The Niña was certainly the smallest, the Pinta the fastest, and the Santa Maria the heaviest and slowest. All three vessels were caravels, though varying somewhat as to rigging; the Niña had lateen (triangular) sails, while the Santa Maria and Pinta bore square ones except for their mizzen masts, which were lateen rigged.

The Discovery of America

Leaving Palos in August 1492, Columbus touched at the Canaries long enough to repair slight damages to the Pinta and then sailed westward into the Atlantic. Although there was grumbling aboard the Santa Maria, no serious case of mutiny occurred, and the voyagers enjoyed the finest
weather. The historic landfall at Guanahani (San Salvador) took place on October 12, according to the log of the expedition which says:

Soon they saw naked people, and the Admiral [Columbus] went ashore in the armed ship's boat, with Martín Alonso Pinzón and his brother Vicente Yáñez. . . . Stepping ashore they saw very green trees and many streams, as well as fruits of different varieties. . . . They took possession for the King and Queen their Lords, with all the customary formalities.

Since Columbus calculated he had already passed Antilia, he cruised southward through the Bahamas to Cuba, which he took to be a part of Cathay, the home of the Great Khan. No Khan was forthcoming to be sure, but the discoverer consoled himself with the thought that this powerful ruler would soon be found. Next the expedition turned eastward and explored the northern coast of Haiti. (The name Haiti will be used here for the entire island, which includes the modern Haitian and Dominican Republics. Haiti is the original Indian name, and although Hispaniola is technically correct, it is somewhat archaic today.) The assumption that Haiti must be Cipangu was strengthened in Columbus' mind by the gold trinkets the Indians wore.

Clumsy work by the pilots wrecked the flagship Santa Maria on the Haitian coast. Since no lives were lost, the admiral, for Columbus now bore this title, founded a small colony called Navidad with the surplus men, and then returned to Europe with his remaining ships. Columbus, in the Niña, made a brief stop at the Azores and next was compelled by heavy weather to sail into the Tagus and anchor near Lisbon. He could evidently not resist the temptation to strut a little in the presence of King John. The Portuguese
monarch listened to the story of the man he had rebuffed less than a decade before, asked many questions, and then made his astonishing claim to ownership of all the new lands. Columbus, taking alarm, rushed an overland messenger to warn Ferdinand and Isabella. The Spanish rulers, as already mentioned, in their turn, rushed an appeal to Pope Alexander to support their claims. Thus began the diplomatic maneuverings that ended in the Treaty of Tordesillas and its line of demarcation.

Columbus had a brief spell of glory on his return to Spain; his royal patrons accepted all his theories about the discovery of Cipangu and Cathay and overlooked the fact that beyond a few trinkets and gewgaws he had no wealth to show. A few American Indians, brought as exhibits, aroused great interest. Being obviously human and yet unlike any men Europeans had seen before, these strange creatures were easily accepted as having come from the Orient.

Later Voyages of Columbus

In September 1493 the admiral, at the head of a large, well-manned expedition, sailed west again, this time by a more southerly route which took him through the Lesser Antilles, a name derived from that of the old legendary Antilia. Discovering Puerto Rico, he made his way to Haiti, only to find that his colonists at Navidad had disappeared—killed, as he later learned, by the normally peaceful natives, who had been goaded to this violence by Spanish cruelty.

After founding a new colony farther east along the coast, Columbus quickly put to sea again, determined to prove that Cuba was part of mainland Asia and the empire of the Great Khan. Coasting the southern shore, with a side expedition to Jamaica, he followed the Cuban coast almost to its western
limit. Having stopped just short of proving it an island, he made his officers and crews take a solemn oath that they believed they were following the Asiatic mainland. With his own confidence thus buttressed, he returned to Haiti to explore the interior for gold and slaves. He found no gold worth mentioning but did ship a few cargoes of natives to Spain, where they proved utterly unsatisfactory as laborers. Feeling his influence with the Spanish rulers to be ebbing, Columbus returned in 1496 to try to win their confidence again.

Since this is not a biography of the admiral, it only remains to summarize his two last voyages. Ferdinand and Isabella still had faith or hope enough to send him out in 1498 with a fair-sized expedition. He approached America on this third occasion from the Cape Verde Islands, and discovered Trinidad and the adjacent Venezuelan coast. Venezuela had pearl fisheries, the best source of ready wealth the Spaniards had thus far found. Though Columbus scarcely knew what to make of the mainland, he recognized its continental character. Somewhere to the west, he reasoned, there must be a strait between this great land and the Malay Peninsula he had seen on the maps modeled after Ptolemy. Ptolemy's original map did not show a strait, for on it the Indian Ocean was a landlocked sea. But this idea had been corrected by Marco Polo and others who had gone by water around Malaya from China to India. This strait, Columbus thought, would lead into the Indian Ocean. But he could not seek the strait just then and had to postpone the search until his fourth voyage, which began in 1502. On this last expedition, he sailed from Spain to find the strait and by means of it the route to southern Asia. With this end in view he explored the coasts of Central America and the Isthmus of Panama, think-
ing that he was following Ptolemy's Malay Peninsula. From the Indians he learned of the Pacific, not far away, and judged it to be the eastern Indian Ocean, which Ptolemy called the *Sinus Magnus*. Finally, however, he reached and passed the point where the isthmus joins South America. No strait had appeared, so something was obviously wrong with the theory. Columbus now revised his calculations to fit the newest facts. His last opinion was that the Malay Peninsula extended farther south than he had first supposed and that South America was part of it. This meant that the passage into the Indian Ocean must be sought far to the south, because by now other voyagers had traced the continent well into the Southern Hemisphere.

The admiral, whose health had failed, could make no more voyages and was almost forgotten until his death in 1506. Queen Isabella had died in 1504, and Ferdinand, who survived her, had lost interest in discovery, but the story that Columbus died in poverty is a legend. His final will and testament shows that he divided a substantial amount of property among his heirs.

*Amerigo Vespucci*

Other explorers had taken up the work of Columbus and, even before his death, had made substantial progress. By a series of coasting voyages, the Spaniards closed up the huge gap between the part of Brazil discovered by Cabral for Portugal in 1500 and the last points reached by Columbus along the Isthmus. They found many breaks and indentations in the mainland, but nothing that on investigation proved to be a strait. Then came the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512) to give new shape and meaning to these ill-digested findings.
Spain and the West

Vespucci, trained from his youth in the Medici Bank of Florence, was directing his firm’s office in Seville when the Spanish explorations first began. Moved by the great discoveries across the ocean, he left loans and discounts for navigation, and with his high intelligence and sound mathematical training became the best geographer and cosmographer of his time. Sailing in the service of both Spain and Portugal, he took part in a number of voyages, the most important being with the Portuguese expedition of 1501-1502, which King Manuel sent to follow up Cabral’s discovery of Brazil. Vespucci sailed past the present limit of Brazil, discovered the Río de la Plata, and turned back at some point on the Patagonian coast. Though the voyagers did not quite reach the end of South America, Vespucci felt sure that a little farther on a strait would be found leading through the continent.

Amerigo described the new lands he had seen in letters to friends which became famous throughout Europe. Versions in several languages had been printed before his death, and from what we can learn, the public bought each edition as fast as it left the press. In one of these letters he called the South American land mass Mundus Novus (New World) thereby registering his conviction that it bore no resemblance to any region described by ancient writers. In 1507 a mediocre German geographer, Martin Waldseemüller, in a rather amateurish scientific treatise proposed that this new world be named after Amerigo, whom he supposed to be its discoverer. Waldseemüller even prepared a map in which the area of Brazil was labeled America. His effort to name the western continent failed to attract much immediate attention; gradually, however, the word America came to be used more often, possibly because it had a pleasant sound. In 1541
the famous geographer Gerardus Mercator made a map of the New World on which he spelled AME across the northern continent and placed RICA across the southern. That as good as settled the issue, though the Iberian countries, where the facts of the discovery were better known, continued to call the New World the "Indies" until the eighteenth century.

Vespucci, after he retired from active voyaging, became pilot major of Spain and in that capacity trained navigators, directed exploration, and fitted the new discoveries into a great official map that was prepared in his office at Seville. Without a doubt it was he who made the discovery of a southern strait the major purpose of later Spanish exploration. Men could see by now that South America hung as an appendage to something, presumably to the continent of Asia, although the little they knew of North America did seem strangely uninviting by contrast with what Marco Polo had led them to expect. The two Cabots had explored the northern coasts for England and had found nothing profitable or promising. Clearly the Spice Islands and the rich Indian Ocean regions lay beyond the enormous land bulk that blocked the Spaniards in every latitude. To reach the Indian Ocean a way through the barrier was needed, so Vespucci's theory of a southern strait was taken up and tested by Juan Díaz de Solís and Ferdinand Magellan.

_Solís and Magellan_

On Amerigo's death Solís succeeded him as pilot major and in 1515 set out in command of an expedition to find this southern strait and a western route to the islands that Portugal was now exploiting in the East. Solís coasted southward along Brazil, passed the Tordesillas demarcation line, and
proceeded into the Spanish sphere as far as the Río de la Plata. Even though Vespucci had found and explored the great estuary years before, Solís turned in to investigate. Somewhere in the present territory of Uruguay he landed with a small party, only to be slaughtered by the arrows of the inhospitable Charrúa Indians, who according to one version then proceeded to dine off the doughty navigator. His discouraged subordinates at once sailed for home, leaving the real geographical question still unanswered.

The Portuguese Magellan (1480–1521) was the next to take up the search. After serving under Albuquerque and other renowned commanders in the East for several years, he became disgruntled with Portuguese policies and with his own failure to achieve promotion. A letter from his friend Francisco Serrão, then living on Ternate in the Moluccas, convinced him that those valuable spice islands, which Portugal still had not seized, lay in the zone assigned to Castile at Tordesillas and led him to offer his services to Spain. Not only did he have the tempting possession of the Moluccas to offer the Spaniards, but he had what he considered an even greater prize. Portuguese seamen, sailing near the Ryukyu Islands north of Formosa, had brought back exaggerated reports of their riches and civilization. Magellan heard and believed these reports, and somehow identified the Ryukyus with the Old Testament Tarshish and Ophir, from which the ships of Solomon and Hiram of Tyre had brought back their celebrated wealth.

His main problem was to reach these eastern islands by water without crossing the Eastern Hemisphere, which the treaty had assigned to Portugal. He soon adopted the theory of a southern strait, though it is impossible to say how much of the plan he took from Vespucci and Solís and how much
he evolved himself. He accepted the now fairly general belief that the Pacific, recently seen from Darien by Balboa, was the eastern arm of the Indian Ocean, since, like others of his time, he did not restrict the Indian Ocean to its actual limits but thought of it as extending eastward past the Moluccas. He believed that the Moluccas lay not far west of the Spanish colonies on the isthmus. Magellan thus failed to take account of the width of the still unexplored Pacific.

In 1517 he arrived in Spain to try his fortunes there. His past career and personal appearance might well have argued against him. There were several flaws in his Portuguese service record; Albuquerque had written a bad report concerning him, and King Manuel considered him a questionable character unworthy of further employment. He looked unprepossessing, being short, squat, and rather ugly; he limped from an old leg wound and had scarcely a coin in his pockets. Despite all handicaps, he was soon to eclipse the fame of Albuquerque and to cost his erstwhile sovereign many sleepless nights.

Magellan first explained his plan to responsible Spanish officials, who hesitated. But the young ruler Charles V, grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella, was attracted by the ambitious idea. He gave an affirmative order and wheels were set in motion to prepare the expedition. Magellan received five ships with suitable equipment and crews. He considered Portuguese seamen generally superior to Spanish, and although there existed some basis for his belief, he enlisted so many that the authorities were obliged to call a halt. With a company finally consisting mostly of Spaniards, he left the port of Sanlúcar in 1519 and headed for South America.

Magellan coasted Brazil, explored the Río de la Plata less fatefully and no more successfully than Solís and passed the
first winter in a Patagonian roadstead. Here mutiny flared, not from the sailors but from Spanish officers whose loyalty had been tampered with by certain opponents of Magellan’s plan in Spain. The commander, taken by surprise at first, quickly learned which men he could rely on and skillfully used them to regain the upper hand and to restore discipline. He dealt punishment to the ringleaders but pardoned their followers and won most of them over. When the weather turned warmer, he resumed the voyage and soon reached the waterway ever since known as the Strait of Magellan. After a brief hesitation, the voyagers entered the strait and explored its many branches. The southern shore they named Tierra del Fuego, for the many fires seen in the distance by night. These were the campfires of the Fuegan Indians, whom the explorers never saw; they kept out of sight in the daytime.

On emerging into the Pacific, which he named because of its apparent serenity, Magellan had three ships left. One had been wrecked off Patagonia; another, in the hands of still recalcitrant mutineers, had deserted in the strait and returned to Spain. The remaining vessels being in fairly good condition, Magellan was free to seek the Moluccas as well as Tarshish and Ophir. He sailed northward for an unknown distance, probably past the equator, before turning west. An Italian passenger, who kept a journal of the expedition, says the voyagers sighted only two tiny islands in the Pacific before reaching the Marianas. Both proved to be uninhabited and totally barren. The real hardships of the voyage now began. Food ran low, drinking water spoiled, and scurvy prostrated most of the men, there being scarcely enough well hands to work the ships. The death rate was appalling; day after day corpses were committed to the Pacific with
whatever slight ceremony the tottering survivors could manage. Rat meat became a luxury and the very maggots that spoiled the dwindling sea biscuit were an article of diet. Brackish and evil-smelling drinking water was avidly consumed, the wine supply having long been exhausted. As month followed month, all thought of mutiny was forgotten; no one had the strength or spirit for it, and the most ignorant sailor could understand that to turn back was hopeless; the only hope of salvation lay in pressing on. The slightest touch of bad weather would have destroyed the fleet during those bitter months, but on that first occasion the Pacific Ocean lived up to its name and remained calm.

Even so, Magellan’s expedition was near its last gasp when the inhabited Mariana Islands were sighted. Dark-skinned Micronesian natives darted from shore in their canoes and swarmed aboard the ships, stealing everything they could lay hands on. These light-fingered propensities caused Magellan to name their islands the Ladrones (Thieves). A clash could not be avoided, and the enfeebled Spaniards mustered strength enough to push the islanders off the ships and to follow them ashore and plunder everything edible from a native village. Then, having taught the savages that two could play at the game of thievery, Magellan continued his westward voyage, leaving the Marianas to enjoy for a while longer the isolation that had lasted since the beginning of their inhabitation.

Strengthened by the island food, the Spaniards were able in a few weeks to reach the Philippines. Magellan had a Malayan interpreter aboard, and as he addressed the Filipinos, it could be perceived that some of them understood his words. This meant that the fleet had entered the region
generally familiar to the Portuguese; in short, contact had been made with the eastern rim of civilization.

Magellan, hitherto distinguished for his excellent judgment, now committed an act of rashness that cost him his life. After converting a Filipino chieftain to Christianity, he with a few of the Spaniards joined this ally in a war against a neighboring chief. Magellan perished in the combat, and his convert quickly apostatized, killing as many of his new white acquaintances as possible and compelling the rest to depart hastily in the ships.

Elected new leaders, the seamen now went on a rather aimless odyssey about the East Indies, until they finally dropped down to the Moluccas. Since the Portuguese had not yet occupied these islands, the Spaniards could fill their holds with a cargo of spice, even though Magellan's old friend Serrão, their expected intermediary, had recently died. Of the three remaining ships, one was now unseaworthy and had to be burned. Another leaked so badly that it was patched up and sent eastward to try the run across the Pacific to the Spanish isthmus of Darién. The third, the Victoria, now commanded by the Biscayan Sebastián de El Cano, was assigned the task of eluding the Portuguese and returning to Spain via the Cape of Good Hope.

The ship bound for Darién, baffled by weather, failed to reach the American coast and turned back to the East Indies, to be captured there by the Portuguese. But El Cano's Victoria, in spite of more starvation experiences, completed the circumnavigation of the globe and returned to Sanlúcar in 1522. The eighteen survivors aboard, who included the Italian chronicler, were at first surprised to learn that they had apparently lost a day in their time reckoning. The dis-
crepancy was explained, however, when “a certayne excel-
lente man . . . who was also a greate Philosopher and
Astronomer, answered that it could not otherwyse chaunce
unto them, hauynge sayled three years continually, ever
folowyng the soone towarde the West.”

Importance of Magellan’s Voyage

The earth had been circled and the width of the Pacific
revealed, even though circumnavigation had not been a part
of Magellan’s original plan. Since Pythagoras, men had
known the earth to be round; now the Victoria, a smaller
ship than any in Columbus’ squadron, had provided a con-
crete demonstration. Men could now have some notion,
however dim, of the true ratio of land to water on the face
of the globe.

The great voyage did not solve all problems or altogether
obliterate traces of past erroneous thinking. Scholars would
not entirely abandon Ptolemy and continued for years to
think of the Pacific as an eastern extension of the Indian
Ocean. Their maps showed Asia bending northeastward
from Malaya and joining America not far north of where
Magellan had crossed the Pacific. In this notion, of course,
there was a crude approximation to the truth, and the voy-
ages of Vitus Bering in the eighteenth century showed that
Asia and North America did in fact miss connection by only
a few miles.