CHAPTER VI

Conquistadors in America

SPANISH explorers and conquistadors were by now beginning to penetrate the New World. By Magellan's time a series of sea expeditions had traced the Gulf of Mexico from Yucatan to Florida and proved that Cuba was an island. Besides the original colony on Haiti, the large Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Jamaica were occupied and to some extent settled. Meanwhile, in 1509, a Spanish outpost had been established on the Caribbean side of the Isthmus of Darien. Here the conquistadors had their first sustained contact with mainland Indians and found them somewhat different from the weak and docile inhabitants of the Greater Antilles. They not only resisted conquest more fiercely but revealed much greater powers of survival. In the civilized areas—Mexico, Yucatan, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru—which the Spaniards were soon to encounter, the conquerors cut huge gaps in the population by the ruthless, destructive invasion. But the Indians, with their high birth rate, filled the gaps and, even though conquered, continued to outnumber their masters and to remain the principal racial element.
Discoveries in North America.
The Isthmus and Central America

Vasco Núñez de Balboa, a cunning young Spaniard with a gentleman’s background and some veneer of culture, became the first of the great mainland conquistadors. He began with a shrewd political maneuver in Darien, where he managed to depose the incompetent leaders of the colony and to intrigue his own way to power. Then, knowing that in the eyes of the Spanish government his legal position was shaky, he tried to hold power by finding gold and making important discoveries. Balboa knew how to ingratiate himself with the Indians; in fact he went through the form of marriage with the daughter of an important local chieftain. Thereafter he had the advice and assistance of the natives at his disposal. His desire to accomplish something spectacular caused him in 1513 to undertake the historic march across the isthmus to the Pacific. At that time, before Magellan’s voyage had revealed the thousands of miles between Darien and the Spice Islands, or Moluccas, Balboa believed he was close enough to the Portuguese sphere of operations to be racing Afonso de Albuquerque to these and other rich places east of Malacca. But his attention was now deflected southward by the Pacific and by rumors of a great empire to the south “with more gold than there was iron in Biscay.” This, of course, was the realm of the Incas, and the probability is that Balboa would have been the conqueror of Peru had he not been judicially murdered in 1519 by the aged and jealous Pedrarias, whom King Ferdinand sent out to replace him.

Pedrarias, though ancient, was by no means decrepit. As greedy as Balboa for fame and riches, this cruel old man left a deep impression on the isthmus and Central America. He moved his headquarters to the Pacific side, where he founded
Panama City and launched expeditions in both directions along the coast. Pedrarias gave his personal attention to the north, and sent exploring parties to Costa Rica and Nicaragua. He can in fact be called the founder of Nicaragua, for he followed his agents northward to build cities and govern the country until his death at the age of more than ninety. Pitiless in his Indian dealings, he was equally without mercy for any Spaniard who became his competitor; Balboa's was not the only Castilian head to fall at his relentless orders.

**Mexico**

To the north, on the plateau of Mexico, lay the great Indian cities then dominated and partly ruled by the conquering Aztecs. This area had a cultural history extending back at least to the beginning of the Christian era. Its complex and stratified society was based on intelligent and productive agriculture and fostered many useful arts and crafts. Though lacking large domesticated animals, which were everywhere wanting in the New World, and lacking the ability to work iron ore, the Aztecs and their subjects had clearly progressed to an advanced stage of civilization. While hard working, they lived a social life that was generally happy and often carefree, their accurate calendar including many holidays and feast days. Their cities, of stone and adobe, were well built and in cleanliness and sanitation surpassed most European cities of that time. The Aztec capital, the predecessor of Mexico City, was situated on an island surrounded by a lake; causeways and aqueducts from the mainland furnished easy transportation and insured a water supply. Impressive palaces for the nobility and pyramids for religious rites dominated a scene which, for
sheer beauty and color, rendered the first Spanish beholders spellbound.

The principal weaknesses of the Aztecs were political and religious. Fanatically brave as warriors, they never devised an adequate system for governing the peoples they conquered. The gloomy and bloodthirsty religion that held them in its grip made their ferocious priests the real rulers of Aztec society. The increasing demands of the cruel gods for human sacrifices caused them to draw an ever-increasing number of victims from their subject peoples. While the method of sacrifice sometimes varied, the usual procedure was to place the naked victim upon an altar at the top of one of the religious pyramids. A priest, using a stone or obsidian knife, slashed open the prisoner's breast and inserted his hand to draw out the bloody and quivering heart. So little time did a sacrifice require that frequently hundreds of these offerings could be made in a day. Aztec theory held it a great honor to be thus offered to a god, yet evidence suggests that most of the prisoners would have dispensed with the honor if possible. Therefore, when the Spaniards arrived in 1519, they found an empire ripe for rebellion against its dominant minority.

Hernando Cortés, landing on the Mexican coast from Cuba with a few hundred Spanish adventurers, soon learned both the strength and weakness of the Aztecs. He played his cards to perfection, making his alliances cleverly and taking advantage of every local superstition and prophecy. He was at first allowed to enter the Aztec capital in peace; there, relying on sheer audacity, he made the Aztec emperor his prisoner. Compelled next by a ferocious uprising to abandon the city, Cortés retreated only as far as the homes of his
native allies. From there, after recruiting thousands of Indians and receiving Spanish reinforcements from the West Indies, he returned to Mexico City and laid siege. The Aztecs, rallying around a new emperor, fought with savage fury, but Cortés cut their communications with the mainland and shut off their water supply. Disease and hunger contributed as much as Spanish weapons to the Aztec downfall, and in 1521 Cortés found himself master of the city and in a position to extend Spanish rule over the outlying parts. From Mexico City, now his headquarters and residence, he sent expeditions to the west, south, and north. One invaded Guatemala and subdued its civilized inhabitants, whose culture was only slightly inferior to that of Mexico. Other Spaniards, after years of effort, conquered Yucatan, home of the once-brilliant Maya civilization, which had, however, considerably declined by the time of their arrival.

These Spanish conquests were partly, but only partly, the result of superior weapons. Gunpowder had long been known in Europe, but the conquistadors made only sporadic use of firearms; most of their victories were with cold steel. The horse, an animal never before seen in the New World, gave the Spaniards a far greater psychological advantage than did the few muskets and small cannon they brought. Superior leadership on the white side and lack of unity on the Indian side counted for even more.

The Northern Mirage

For years the mysterious but almost empty lands of the far north dazzled the Spaniards with the promise of riches and marvels. Curious names began to be heard—Amazon Island, the Seven Cities of Cibola, and Golden Quivira—each referring to some imagined wonderland in the unknown
north. There was the dream of another Mexico, as rich as the first, or the fountain of youth that the elderly conquistador Juan Ponce de León (John of the Lion’s Paunch) sought in Florida in the hope that its magical properties might enable him to repeat the adventures and sins of his early years.

Then, too, there was the hope of a strait, somewhere to the north but more convenient than Magellan’s. This hope grew along with the opinion that North America and Asia were separated after all. Asia, the theory now ran, swung far to the east above North America but was divided from it by the Strait of Anian, which offered a passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Thus, in an inaccurate way, the existence of Bering Strait was anticipated two centuries before it was discovered.

Most of the early inland explorations of America were treasure hunts or expeditions to find the strait. The northward rush was started by the shipwreck of a party of Spaniards on the Texas coast. Several years later four ragged survivors turned up in Mexico, with tales of hardship at Indian hands and a remarkable account of having walked all the way from Texas. Though they had seen none of the wonders of the north, they had heard stories aplenty and felt sure the fabled riches could be found. They also bore tales of vast herds of wild cattle, which must have been American bison.

Responding to these reports, Hernando de Soto, governor of Cuba, landed on the coast of Florida in 1539 with a splendidly equipped expedition of 600 men and disappeared inland. During the next few years De Soto’s party roamed over much of the southeastern United States, finally discovering and crossing the Mississippi River near what is now the northern boundary of the state of Mississippi. A little
later the commander died; his followers sank his body in the great river he had discovered and tried to make their way overland to Mexico. Compelled to retreat to the Mississippi, they built crude boats and, still several hundred strong, descended the river and coasted the gulf to a Mexican port.

Other adventurers struck directly north from Mexico. A Franciscan friar returned from a reconnoitering expedition, on which he had been accompanied by a single Moorish slave, and reported having sighted the first of the Seven Cities of Cibola. Always the incorrigible optimist, this friar was prone to make the most of anything he found, but it is likely that he had beheld an Indian town from a distance. The Spanish viceroy who had succeeded Cortés in Mexico took this seriously enough to send out a large expedition under Francisco Vásquez Coronado. At the head of 1,000 Spanish soldiers and Indian auxiliaries, Coronado advanced into Arizona and New Mexico before abandoning hope of finding the Seven Cities. He did reach the place the friar appears to have seen, and found it to be nothing but a dirty Indian village. Meanwhile, a branch of the expedition discovered the Grand Canyon, but the Spaniards had small interest in scenery. Coronado now turned his thoughts toward Golden Quivira and sought it eastward in Texas and then to the northward, finally reaching a wretched Indian village near Wichita, Kansas. Dispirited and suffering from injury, Coronado led his bedraggled forces back to Mexico.

Before his return, however, the viceroy had sent Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo and a small fleet up the Pacific coast with orders to get in touch with the land party if possible and to look for any signs of the Pacific entrance to the great transcontinental strait.

Failing to find either the nonexistent strait or Coronado's
expedition, which was traveling far inland, the seafarers did follow the coast northward to San Diego Bay and then past the forty-second parallel to the Rogue River in Oregon. By the time of their return to Mexico, minus Cabrillo, who died on the voyage, the idea of northern treasure had waned. Many years went by before anyone seriously followed up the claim they had given Spain to California.

South America

In South America, Spanish exploration was both faster and more thorough than in the north. From several directions the continent was pierced by expeditions seeking various goals. But all incentives were reducible to one—the search for wealth. The spell of the legendary and the marvelous worked as well here as in the north; Meta, Omagua, El Dorado, and the City of the Caesars were among the strange names that lured the explorers and conquerors on. Each expedition was an epic in its own right; to do justice to each requires the full narratives of Prescott, Helps, Means, Merriman, and other noted historians who have dealt with these adventures and whose works are available to all.

The Inca Empire

The fame of Peru had reached Balboa on the isthmus, and from the moment its existence became known Peru constituted a major goal for Spanish greed and ambition. The mighty Inca Empire, stretching from southern Colombia to central Chile, represented the culmination of an Andean civilization older than that of western Europe. From their capital, Cuzco, the supreme rulers of the empire governed millions of souls including magnificent builders, skillful craftsmen, and expert farmers. The realm abounded with
precious metals, though the Incas had no coinage and valued silver and gold only for their ornamental properties.

The Incas proper were but a conquering minority and their empire had been built with the sword. Most of the inhabitants were subject peoples whose ancestors had achieved advanced civilizations before the days of the empire. This whole Andean culture, being an old one, had perhaps already passed its peak and showed signs of becoming static. It was more sophisticated than the Mexican, and human sacrifice had become almost a thing of the past. A well-organized priesthood directed a religious worship involving many gods, but these dieties were placated by prayers, hymns, and offerings of a harmless nature. Society tended to be socialistic in structure; land ownership rested in the state and every person or family had a well-defined position in the system; a position which was hereditary and could rarely be altered. Inca government was centralized; too centralized for its own good, since the forces of the empire could be paralyzed if the supreme ruler died or became helpless.

Into Peru came a handful of Spaniards in 1532, led by the four Pizarro brothers and dominated by Francisco, the grim and elderly head of the family. Francisco Pizarro had spent years serving under Balboa and Pedrarias on the isthmus, and only now was seizing his chance for fame and fortune. Unlettered and without family background, he quickly showed that native ability could compensate for these deficiencies.

Fortunately for his enterprise, he found the Inca Empire torn by a fratricidal war of succession to the throne. Turning the situation to his own advantage, he posed as arbiter between the two rival brothers. Seizing and holding the suc-
cessful one, he used this man as a puppet to gain control of the empire for himself and to amass an enormous treasure. Then deeming his victim’s usefulness at an end, he invented a flimsy pretext for ordering his execution. The Pizarros had counted their gains too soon, for a dangerous Inca rebellion followed. Hard pressed as they were, the Spaniards held firm; although they were outnumbered a hundred to one their skill as soldiers and their steel proved too much for the badly commanded Inca masses armed only with copper and stone implements. Having restored order, Pizarro could proceed with the work of organizing his conquest, of founding Spanish towns, and of distributing the best Inca lands among his followers.

The conquest of Chile followed as a by-product. Pedro de Valdivia, a subordinate of Pizarro and the ablest professional soldier among the conquistadors, invaded the country and, though finally halted by the fierce Araucanian Indians of the south, had by 1550 made the northern and central districts Spanish territory. Here again the land was parcelled among the conquistadors, and as Chile had little gold or silver, the Spaniards exploited local Indian labor and settled to a life of farming. The Araucanians, in their remote southern land, proved an obstacle too great even for conquistadors and held out not merely for generations but for centuries. Possessing no culture worth mentioning, no weapons save the most primitive, and no political organization above the tribal level, they relied for defense upon their fanatical bravery, physical strength, and unbelievable cunning. They surrendered at last to the modernized armies of the Republic of Chile in 1884.
Descent of the Amazon

Other Spanish parties, starting from Peru, took possession of Quito and lesser Indian cities in Ecuador. Gonzalo, the youngest Pizarro brother, crossed the Andes in search of forests where cinnamon was said to grow, but found himself, after months of wandering, on a tributary of the Amazon with a band of starving men. His cousin and chief lieutenant, the opportunistic, one-eyed Francisco de Orellana, was dispatched further downstream by boat to search for food. Whether through premeditated treachery or through inability to reascend the river, Orellana and his fifty followers, after finding some supplies, sailed on down to the mouth of the Amazon and thus became the first white men to cross the South American continent. During the months spent in following the mighty river, the Spaniards encountered many hostile natives, and in one place they found, or thought they had found, warrior women. The region through which they sailed was thus called “Land of the Amazons,” and the name Amazon in time was transferred to the river itself. Eventually the wanderers made their way to a Spanish port on the Caribbean, where Orellana sailed for Spain. There he raised an expedition to colonize the shores of the great river; but although he returned, the colony was never founded, and his death caused his survivors to abandon the attempt.

The Chibchas

In the highlands of modern Colombia, around Bogotá, there existed another advanced New World culture, that of the Chibchas. While not as rich as the Aztecs or Incas, the Chibchas were well supplied with jewels and precious metals. One branch of this people, dwelling around Lake Guataiba,
had once practiced a religious rite that gave rise to the legend of El Dorado, or Gilded Man. Every year they determined the fitness of their chief for further rule by smearing his naked body with adhesive substance and coating him with gold dust from head to foot. To the accompaniment of chants and prayers by the throngs on shore, priests paddled the chieftain in a raft to the deepest part of the lake and cast him overboard. He had then to rid himself of the gold encumbrance and rise to the surface before drowning, thus winning for another year the right to be the ruler. This custom had been discontinued almost a century earlier, but so deeply had other Indians been impressed that they preserved a garbled report of it until Spanish times. By then El Dorado had come to mean a living man of gold, and it was this rare personage whom the conquistadors sought. What they expected to do with such a curiosity raises speculations better left unuttered.

In 1538 Jiménez de Quesada, a Spanish lawyer turned conquistador, left the Caribbean settlement of Santa Marta to seek supplies for that half-starved colony. Advancing up the Magdalena, continually scourged by sickness and by the attacks of wild animals and hostile Indians, his party finally reached the Chibchas. The reputed courage of this people seemed to evaporate in the presence of the desperate Spaniards, who, though out of gunpowder, rapidly made the conquest with steel alone. Quesada occupied Bogotá, and from the Chibcha cities subsequent Spanish expeditions explored the wild interior of southeastern Colombia.

Venezuela

Columbus, on his third voyage, had discovered the Pearl Coast. Later explorers called the territory Venezuela (Little
Venice) because they found Indian habitations built over water which brought recollections of Italian Venice and its canals. In 1527 the Spanish ruler Charles V leased Venezuela to the German banking house of Welser as security for a debt. For almost twenty years the Welsers had the country to themselves, and the pioneering explorations of the interior were carried on by their employees, who brought such unfamiliar names as Alfinger, Speyer, Von Hutten, and Federmann to the New World. Even against the formidable competition of the Spanish conquistadors, the Welsers won a name for cruelty and ruthless exploitation of the natives. But though they left Venezuela a heap of ruins, they did explore the upper Orinoco hinterland—a region little visited even in recent times—in search of gold and the fabled civilizations of the interior. Finally, to save his property, Charles abrogated the Welser grant, making Venezuela a fairly normal Spanish colony.

The Atlantic Coast

In 1535 the first Spanish settlers of the Río de la Plata founded Buenos Aires, drawn there by false reports of silver. Two years later they built Asunción, up the river in Paraguay, to be nearer the true silver source in Bolivia and Peru. It was from Asunción that the first Spanish expeditions took off across the pampas and the Chaco to learn what lay between the great river and the Andes. Even here the Spaniards sought gold and silver and, finding none, concocted wonder tales for their own stimulation. At least one expedition traversed the pampas in search of the mythical City of the Caesars!

By the Treaty of Tordesillas Portugal had received rights to the Brazilian coast, but during the sixteenth century her
people confined their occupation of Brazil to a thin line of settlements located on the various bays and harbors. Portugal had all she could manage in Asia and Africa, hence she did not begin the real exploration of the interior until the seventeenth century.

*The Spanish Work in America*

The explorers and conquerors sought wealth and marvels, and to them geographical knowledge was distinctly a secondary aim. Yet their greatest significance lies in the amount of New World geography they revealed. Soon after 1550 maps were being drawn that presented not only the recognizable contours of South America but, in spite of many blank spots, the basic features of the interior; the Andes, the Amazon, the Orinoco, the Magdalena, and the major tributaries of the Río de la Plata. It took much longer to bring North America into cartographic focus. Much was still unexplored, and apparently the De Soto and Coronado expeditions traveled too fast to do much mapping.

In its next phase, Spanish activity in America was turned to the organization and administration of the vast empire won by the conquistadors. The Spaniards wanted to evangelize the millions of Indians, adapt them as far as possible to civilized life, and diffuse as rapidly as possible the Castilian language. These undertakings were accompanied by heavy emigration from Spain; the old charge that the Spaniards failed to colonize is quite without foundation. In Mexico alone, the Spanish population exceeded one million at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The conquered Indians, dismal as was their fate under the conquest, did not lack Spanish champions. Antonio Montesino, a Dominican living in the West Indies, denounced the
ruthless exploitation and decimation of the island population as early as 1511, and secured the passage of a few halfhearted laws to curb the worst excesses. More famous and more effective was another Dominican, Bartolomé de las Casas. This great priest devoted fifty years of his long life to the defense of the Indian victims of Spanish lust and violence. Matching his compatriots' passion for gain and courage under arms with an equal passion for the salvation of human souls and the courage of his Christian convictions, he waged a tireless struggle with soldiers and royal officials to save the Indians from their conquerors. It was he also, more than anyone else, who attempted to preserve the record of the conquest of America, satisfied that the story, if accurately told, would speak for itself. The library he collected for his own use forms the keystone of our knowledge of New World history. Indian rights could not be safeguarded either by the agitation or the writing of Las Casas, but the force of his character and example left an impression that has made him to this day an uncanonized patron saint of the Indian population of Spanish America.

Spain, once the empire had taken shape, governed its economy by the theory of mercantilism, which held that wealth, or at least the most reliable form of wealth, was gold and silver. Since the colonies were supposed to exist for the benefit of the motherland, their principal purpose was to enrich Spain by purchasing her products exclusively and by producing nothing themselves that competed with Spanish goods. In this way, once the loose gold supply of the Aztecs and Incas had been drained off by the conquistadors, Spain expected a constant influx of precious metal from her colonial trade.

The system she erected never functioned well. Although
gold and silver continued to pour across the Atlantic, the trade monopoly could not be wholly maintained, partly because Spain proved unable to supply all the goods her colonists needed, and partly because those she did furnish were sent under such adverse circumstances and were taxed so heavily as to make the prices very high. The colonists evaded the laws when they could, and in the later years of Spain’s American regime a large part of their business was done with smugglers.

Mercantilism must not be thought of as a Spanish invention. Most Europeans from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century believed in it, and all the nations building colonial empires during that time tried to put it into practice. But because the Spanish empire was so much larger than the rest, the failure there to enforce mercantilism to the hilt was the most conspicuous failure of all.

The story of Spain in America opened with the shattering impact of European civilization on the less-potent civilization of the Indians, but it was not long before the tide of influence turned and Europe began to experience the effects of the great discoveries and conquests across the seas. Gold and silver from Mexico and Peru funneled into the European economy through Spanish ports, vastly increasing the amount of specie in circulation, precipitating a universal rise in prices, and indirectly affecting major political and social developments of the seventeenth century. The introduction of such products as tobacco, chocolate, and potatoes, as well as the vast increase in the production of sugar, rice, cotton, and livestock altered the diet and habits of most Europeans. And while coffee is not an American product by origin, its major entry into Europe was made by way of the New World. It was largely this unlimited expansion of
American agriculture that led to the introduction of Negro slaves. Imported first in small numbers and then by the hundreds of thousands, the colored peoples from Africa became the predominating elements in many parts of the Americas.

With the discovery of the Western Hemisphere, man finally connected the two halves of his world, beyond question the most dramatic and portentous achievement of his recorded efforts. It was Spain that made the first discoveries and the greatest explorations, linking the Old World and the New, and Spain that dominated the exploitation of the New World for a century and more. For these deeds alone the Spanish place in history will be forever secure.
FRANCE, by contrast with the Iberian countries, was slow in expanding overseas. Portugal lay on the edge of Europe, largely untouched by the crossovers of continental strife, and Spain, while less isolated, could pour much of her energy into empire building. But the central position of France caused her embroilment in every major European political or religious feud. When America was discovered, the French king was on the point of armed intervention in the troubled affairs of Italy. This aggressive Italian policy, which he bequeathed to his successors, finally merged into a great struggle with Spain which dragged far into the sixteenth century without a decisive conclusion. Although Spain seemed able to pursue both a European and a colonial policy at the same time, France concentrated on the struggles nearer home, sparing only occasional and spasmodic energies for colonization and exploration overseas.

The Protestant Reformation and ensuing wars of religion consumed French energy for years. Only when Henry IV (1589–1610), the first ruler of the House of Bourbon, came to the throne and stopped the religious struggle could France give serious thought to an overseas empire, and by then many
of the best colonial sites had been pre-empted by other powers.

Spasmodic Beginnings

It has been seriously asserted by some French historians that shippers from Normandy explored and traded on the Guinea coast in the fourteenth century years ahead of the Portuguese, and that a French captain, Jean Cousin of Dieppe, discovered the mouth of the Amazon in 1488. But all efforts to verify these legends have come to nothing, and the fact is that patriotic Frenchmen forged evidence of these voyages to give their country a fictitious priority which history denied it.

Still, at the time Spain discovered America and Portugal opened the sea route to India, the French showed some interest in the western and southern Atlantic. Ships of theirs were visiting Brazil soon after 1500 to trade with the natives, to cut the interesting dyewood (pau brasil) that gave the country its name, and sometimes to intercept Portuguese spice ships returning from the East. In those early years, when Portugal regarded her great future colony as a worthless land of parrots, reptiles, and cannibals, France appeared likely to claim Brazil for itself. It was largely this dangerous competition that moved the Portuguese government to take the first steps for colonizing Brazil in 1530.

Jean Ango, a shipping proprietor of Dieppe, became the French equivalent of Henry the Navigator. For years he sent out ships, sometimes to seek discoveries but usually to prey on Portuguese vessels in the South Atlantic. In his time the line between legitimate sea enterprise and piracy was hard to draw, and Ango doubtless considered his operations
respectable and himself an honorable servant of France. And indeed there was something to be said for him, because he reacted chiefly against the Spanish-Portuguese effort to monopolize the seas. His king, Francis I, complained bitterly against the Treaty of Tordesillas and declared that he would send his ships where he pleased. "I should like to see Adam's will," exclaimed Francis, "wherein he divided the earth between Spain and Portugal."

*French Pioneers in America*

Though one of Ango's expeditions turned the Cape of Good Hope in 1529 and managed, with the aid of a Portuguese pilot, to reach Sumatra, the French directed most of their early efforts toward America. In 1524 the Italian Giovanni da Verrazano, backed by a group of Frenchmen including Ango, hastily surveyed the North American coast from the Carolinas to Nova Scotia. The purpose of the Verrazano voyage was to find the strait, so much sought by the Spaniards, leading through the American land mass to Marco Polo's Cathay. Since none existed to be found, the next French effort, by Jacques Cartier, naturally was made farther north.

Cartier, a hardy and experienced mariner of St. Malo, though not the first white man to set eyes on Canada, was in every important sense its discoverer. He sailed from France in 1534, being officially in the service of his king in contrast to the earlier private adventurers. On the first voyage he explored the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador before entering the Gaspé Basin, which he claimed for France. This looked promising as a strait, and so the next year Cartier sailed directly from France to the Gaspé and ascended the
St. Lawrence. He passed up the river to the Indian town of Hochelaga, which he renamed Montreal, and where he found his way blocked by rapids which, significantly, he named Lachine (China). After spending a winter in the St. Lawrence, suffering from scurvy and learning from an Indian of a miraculous juice that effected a cure, Cartier and his men returned to France in 1536. A few years later this captain tried to plant a colony, with the financial support of a gentleman of Picardy, the Sieur de Roberval. Cartier now built a temporary fort on the site of Quebec, but hunger and hardships drove him with his colonists back to France. Roberval tried to hang on a little longer in Canada but soon gave up and went home himself. So far, French colonization efforts had failed miserably.

The next attempt was made in Brazil and but for stupid management might have succeeded. Though the Portuguese had several coastal colonies, their hold on Brazil was still weak and they had overlooked the choicest harbor, Guanabara Bay, the future site of Rio de Janeiro. In 1555 a French soldier named Nicolas Durand de Villedaignon sailed into Guanabara and established a settlement on an island in the bay. His hopes ran high at the moment; he had visions of a great French empire in the south, to be called Antarctic France. But he made the mistake of introducing the religious issue. Thinking, no doubt, to strengthen Antarctic France by an influx of Protestant Huguenots, who were out of favor at home, he wrote John Calvin asking that Protestant theologians be sent to Guanabara. Two Huguenot ministers, accompanied by several laymen, arrived and began preaching their faith to the colonists. Villegaignon, a military man to whom discipline was everything, found this more than he had bargained for, as his own hold on the colony began to slip.
He turned against the Calvinists, everybody took sides, and
civil war raged in tiny Antarctic France. Villegaignon, now
worried about his future standing at the French court, took
ship for home, and the Portuguese quickly put an end to the
feeble remnant.

The French Calvinists now tried a colony under their own
management. This time they had the backing of the great
Huguenot Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France. After
one abortive attempt, they built a fort in 1564, called Caro-
line, at the mouth of the St. John's River in northern Florida.
They intended, among other things, to use this place as a
base for attacking Spanish silver ships homeward bound from
Mexico.

Philip II (1556–1598) of Spain could not fail to meet this
challenge and sent Menéndez de Avilés to deal with the
French heretics. Menéndez, as haughty, bigoted, and brave
a Spaniard as ever lived, began by establishing a fort at St.
Augustine, a little to the south. Watching his chance, he
suddenly fell on the Huguenots, putting all but a few to
the sword. Though a few years later one Dominique de
Gourgues, an adventurer and slaver from France, destroyed
the little post the Spaniards had built on the Fort Caroline
site, his act was merely one of revenge. He straightway
departed and Spain continued to hold the coast of Florida;
St. Augustine survived and is today the oldest city in the
United States.

In 1598, when Henry IV of France ended the religious
civil wars with the Edict of Nantes, his country was still
without American colonies. As the new century opened,
however, the French showed signs of entering the colonial
arena-in earnest.
Serious Efforts in the North

Once more the scene shifted to the north. Around 1600 the French re-explored Acadia (Nova Scotia) and the mouth of the St. Lawrence. Several small and short-lived companies were formed to carry on fur trade with the Indians. The principal consequence of these ventures was the arrival, in 1603, of the famous Samuel de Champlain, who proved to be France's greatest pioneer and explorer. While a French settlement was being made at Port Royal (now named Annapolis) in Acadia, Champlain ascended the St. Lawrence and in 1608 founded Quebec on the old Indian site of Stadacona. A year later he made an alliance with the neighboring Algonquian tribesmen, marched with them against the Iroquois, or Five Nations Confederacy, in central New York, and in a skirmish near the southern end of Lake Champlain defeated one of their war parties. This small engagement had grave historic consequences for France, because the powerful Iroquois, completely alienated, became allies first of the Dutch and then of the English.

Champlain, who lived until 1635, worked hard for the development of Canada, exploring westward to Lake Huron and making many treaties with the Indian tribes. But his Quebec settlement remained poor and struggling. Frenchmen showed little desire to migrate to the New World, and while the fur trade could build a few private fortunes it could not support large numbers. Nor was there gold and silver to attract conquistadors and prospectors in the Spanish-American manner. Though agriculture eventually flourished in the St. Lawrence Valley, many years were required to make it prosper.
The French Jesuits

Even in Champlain's time France made efforts to convert the Indians. A small band of Récolet (Franciscan) friars arrived in Quebec in 1615. Their manpower proved inadequate for the work at hand, and ten years later the main missionary effort was assumed by the Jesuits. The story of the French friars in the heart of North America is an inspiring chapter of courage, adventure, and frequent martyrdom. But compared with the missionary effort in Spanish America the French attempt in the north was not conspicuously successful. This relative failure may be traced to several causes: the smaller numbers, migratory habits, and lower degree of culture of the northern as compared to the southern Indians, the small number of missionaries available to the French, and the general hostility of the French fur traders to the Jesuits. The Spaniards undertook conversion as part of a systematic policy of civilization accompanied by the fostering of agriculture and handicrafts; the French appeared to regard baptism as an end in itself.

Typical of both the heroism and the futility of French missionary labor was the career of Father Isaac Jogues, who after falling prisoner to the Mohawks was taken to their savage abode. There he lived patiently and precariously, subject to every ill treatment at the hands of his brutal hosts, who regarded him as an alien medicine man. He lost no opportunity to splash water on the heads of uncomprehending Mohawk children, whose parents took this for some new species of witchcraft. When at last the tribal leaders decreed his death, Jogues was assisted to escape by kindly Dutch traders at considerable risk to themselves. After a spell of recuperation in France, he returned to the Mohawks and
quickly gained the martyr's crown. The Indians remained as heathensh as before.

Cardinal Richelieu

By now the real direction of French policy was in the hands of Cardinal Richelieu, who from 1624 controlled the policies of his king, Louis XIII (1610–1643). A French patriot first and a churchman more or less by accident, Richelieu's main interests always remained European and his chief objective was to weaken the house of Hapsburg, which ruled both Spain and Austria. To do this France must be rich, and getting rich, in Richelieu's mercantilist opinion, meant acquiring a large supply of gold and silver by trade and other means. This program implied the creation of a strong navy, stimulation of French industry and commerce, and acquisition of lucrative colonies.

Richelieu accordingly undertook to do something for Canada, but his interests also turned to the West Indies, where more immediate profit could be expected. By the seventeenth century Spanish sea power was on the decline, and while Spain held the Greater Antilles rather firmly, the Lesser or Outer Antilles remained unoccupied. English merchants and investors had recently begun to push into the Lesser Antilles, followed by a growing stream of immigrants from England. The Dutch, too, had begun to show an interest in the West Indies when France entered the scramble. The main permanent possessions France acquired were the plantation islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, as well as mainland Cayenne, better known today as French Guiana. Some years after the time of Richelieu, the French grasped the western part of Haiti. Like Guadeloupe and Martinique, this rich plantation colony required a large supply of slaves,
and African Negroes were brought in by the thousands. Whatever his intentions, Richelieu did not accomplish much for Canada. In the year of his death (1642), the permanent French colonists there numbered but a straggling few hundred, perhaps a thirtieth of the number who had already settled in the West Indies. Under Cardinal Mazarin, who succeeded Richelieu and governed France during the long minority of Louis XIV, the population increased at the rate of scarcely a hundred a year.

Policies of Colbert

Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the powerful minister of Louis XIV (1643–1715), dominated French colonial policy from 1661 to 1683. More interested in the economic than in the political side of administration, Colbert was perhaps the greatest mercantilist who ever lived. He found Canada in the hands of trading corporations and was not long in judging that experiment a failure. Colbert therefore transferred the huge territory to royal control, under which it remained until the downfall of France in North America. He stimulated some colonization from France, but most of Canada's slight increase in population was the result of a high birth rate among the settlers, many of whom took Indian wives.

In Colbert's time Canada began to take shape as a colony. Much of the land along the St. Lawrence was divided into feudal grants called seigneuries and distributed among proprietors known as seigneurs. The poor French peasants who worked for the seigneurs were called habitants. This policy of land distribution did not make emigration to Canada look inviting to French peasants, who saw small point in leaving home to become habitants for some Canadian landlord. Furthermore, the policy of forbidding Huguenots to go to
Canada cut off immigrants who later poured eagerly into the rival British settlements and helped them to outstrip the French possession. Therefore, while the white population of Canada grew, it increased so slowly that the colony remained weak and in the eighteenth century proved no match for the faster-growing English to the south.

The French in the West

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the French explored the Mississippi River and the heart of North America. Missionaries such as Fathers Allouez and Marquette, pioneered in the western Great Lakes region. In 1673 Marquette, an indifferent missionary but a better explorer, descended the Mississippi (discovered by De Soto over a hundred years before) in company with a trader, Louis Joliet. The party started under the impression that the Mississippi would prove to be the Colorado River and would empty into the Gulf of California. When they reached the Arkansas country, Marquette and Joliet realized their mistake and turned back.

Next came the famous Robert Cavelier de la Salle, an explorer and fur trader who had a flair for publicizing himself and his projects. La Salle descended the great river from the Illinois country, and on the way smoked the peace pipe and made what he called treaties with various Indian chiefs. Finally, proceeding to the mouth, La Salle took possession of the whole Mississippi Valley in the name of Louis XIV, naming it Louisiana in honor of the king.

La Salle had ambitious plans for a North American empire reaching from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gaspé. Such an empire would have hemmed the English colonies into a small enclave on the Atlantic coast, but for all the advertising La
Salle gave his plan in France it was entirely too ambitious for realization. He intended to make a start by colonizing the mouth of the Mississippi, though when he came from France to the Gulf in charge of a new expedition he missed the river and landed on the coast of Texas. He tried to reach the Illinois country overland, but his high and mighty treatment of his mutinous followers caused them to murder him on the way (1687).

A small part of La Salle’s plan was later carried out when the French moved into Louisiana and, in 1718, founded New Orleans. A few posts which they finally built in the Illinois and Indiana country represented a feeble attempt on their part to link Canada closer to Louisiana.

Early in the eighteenth century French traders moved westward and made contact with the Spanish settlements in New Mexico. Farther north other Frenchmen, still ignorant of the mighty mountains that barred the way, sought a path to the Pacific. The Vérendrye brothers came within sight of the Big Horn Mountains west of the Black Hills in 1743 and regretfully abandoned the search for the western sea. Another group of Frenchmen seven years later, approaching by way of the Saskatchewan, was halted by the Rockies themselves. These ventures represented the maximum French advance in North America. Individual achievement had been magnificent, but the net result was insubstantial. The widespread French exploration did little to fortify the French hold, and the mere process of tramping or canoeing over limitless waste areas could be no real substitute for conquest and settlement.

French government in Canada, once the royal agencies had taken control, was arbitrary, paternalistic, and cumber-
Versailles, whose personal interest in these faraway matters was usually slight. In Canada jurisdiction was divided among local officials by a system of checks and balances which worked to cancel positive action. Under such handicaps initiative faded away and the French colonists, even before their conquest by the English, had begun to lose their loyalty to France.

**France in the Old World**

In the Old World as well as the New, France expanded. The Senegal country of West Africa had been an important source of slaves ever since its discovery by Prince Henry's Portuguese. In 1626 Richelieu chartered the Normandy Company with a ten-year monopoly of the slave trade. Several quick changes in name and company status followed, but the French kept a foothold in the Senegal. The merchants did not explore the interior very far, but ascended the river annually to barter with the natives for slaves, gold dust, ivory, ostrich feathers, and gum. An attempt in the eighteenth century to extend the French operations to Dahomey failed because of English competition.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries France tried to gain a substantial footing in the great island of Madagascar. After a brief and unsuccessful attempt by French missionaries to work there in the reign of Henry IV, the island coast became an international hangout for pirates, mostly French, Dutch, and English. Though some trade was mixed with piracy, several attempts by French merchants to establish small posts upon the island failed. Even so, France always looked upon Madagascar as her potential property, though before the nineteenth century no successful settlement was made. Meanwhile the French did move into several small
near-by islands of the Indian Ocean, principally Ile de Bourbon (Réunion) and Mauritius.

It was in India that France ultimately made her main bid for oriental power. By the seventeenth century the Portuguese hold on the Indian Ocean was under attack and weakening fast. Portugal herself had been seized by Philip II in 1580 and virtually annexed to Spain. Though under this new arrangement the Portuguese had the theoretical right to govern and exploit their own colonial empire, the Spanish connection made this empire a natural target for the enemies of Spain. Furthermore, the weakening of Portugal came just at the time when the French, Dutch, and English were ready to build empires of their own.

France had begun to send trading ships around the Cape of Good Hope to India with some regularity as early as 1601. For many years no possessions could be acquired in Hindustan, principally because of the military power of the Mogul emperors, who governed most of the peninsula from their capitals at Delhi and Agra. Under Richelieu and Colbert, attempts were made to extend French trade in the East, accompanied by land explorations across Persia, Asia Minor, and Arabia. French merchants meanwhile secured the right to trade in various Indian cities on the sufferance of the Moguls. Gradually Pondichéry on the east coast became the French headquarters, and the French East India Company, which was in charge of operations, began to assume outright jurisdiction there. After Aurungzeh, the last powerful Mogul emperor, died in 1707, his vast empire commenced to disintegrate, and in the chaos which followed the French found their needed opportunity. From simple trading they passed to politics and constructed a system of alliances and power balances among the petty rulers who had arisen on
the ruins of the old empire. Besides Pondichéry, other French posts were developed, such as Chandernagor, Mahé, and Masulipatam.

The English, spearheaded by their own East India Company, were also in India and rivals of the French; but up to about 1750 France seemed to have the upper hand. The French dream of an Indian empire, which came near to being realized under the governorship of Joseph François Dupleix, was dashed forever in the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763). Superior English sea power and the genius of Robert Clive, the English East India Company leader, ended all important French influence in Hindustan. The Treaty of Paris (1763) not only expelled France from mainland North America but reduced her to impotence in India. Pondichéry and other posts were retained by the French, but they became in the future insignificant holdings existing by English tolerance.

The Importance of France’s Role

In summary, although France came on the colonial scene late, she had an approximately equal start with the Dutch and the English. The French laid the groundwork for a fine empire in North America and India but never proceeded beyond the foundations. Since the reasons for this early French failure have been analyzed many times, only the major points need to be stressed here. In North America, France failed to make immigration desirable to any great number of her people, and as a result the interior of the continent was merely claimed and never held. The ready wealth that came from the West Indies seemed more desirable than the slow, laborious progress to be anticipated from colonization in Canada and Louisiana. French sea power could have become as great as any in Europe, and
did flourish for a time under Louis XIV. It was allowed to
decay, however, following a naval defeat at English hands in
1692, although, ironically, when the French did build war-
ships their construction was the best in the world. But by
neglecting her navy France virtually handed the future to
the English, even as her earlier neglect of the sea had worked
in favor of the Iberian countries and the Dutch. The great
role in continental European politics that France played
from the time of Richelieu meant that only in the intervals
of peace could the nation attend properly to its colonial
affairs. French empire building became a matter of fits and
starts; brief spells of energy alternating with periods of
neglect. England and the Netherlands, both with less ham-
pering connections on the continent, devoted themselves
more wholeheartedly to their territories overseas.

For all that, the part France took in early imperialism was
far from insignificant. She bequeathed her language if not
her flag to the several million Canadians who are descendants
of the seigneurs and habitants of the old regime. Not all the
French colonies were lost, and some footholds, such as the
one on the Senegal, could be used as bases for expansion in
the nineteenth century when the next great wave of im-
perialism came.
Abel Janszoon Tasman's route around Australia, seventeenth century.