Epilogue

AN EARLY eighteenth-century map compared with one made three centuries before would reveal at a glance how much man had learned about his earth. In 1400, a few years before Prince Henry’s captains started sailing, the accepted picture of the world had not changed much from the one held by Seneca at the beginning of the Christian era. By 1700 the outlines of all the continents, except Australia, were known, and the seacoasts of the New World had been almost entirely explored. Circumnavigation of the globe, first accomplished by El Cano’s Victoria in 1522, had grown so commonplace a century later as to call for no comment at all.

True, a great deal remained to be learned. The interior of Africa was mysterious, and many dark spots existed in giant Asia. The Antarctic continent, to the best of our knowledge, had never been seen by a human being and more needed to be known about Australasia. Vitus Bering would soon find the strait parting America from Asia, and even later Captain Cook would banish the concept of Terra Australis. Though these and other details of unfinished geographical business remained and though some would not be wholly cleared up by the mid-twentieth century, no future discoveries could possibly equal those already made. By 1700 the great un-
known, the world of Prester Johns, Antilias, and Fountains of Youth, had vanished. Seneca might have reveled in the new knowledge, but he might also have regretted the passing of something that could not be recaptured; the belief in a wonderful world, populated by the more preposterous hopes and fears of the human mind.

Thus Europe had already gone a long way toward preempting the vast lands and populations made available by the white man's discoveries. Imperial powers, working amid distractions and at differing speeds, had persevered. The two original ones, Spain and Portugal, simply because they were the first, had built their empires in comparative leisure; but France, the Netherlands, and England had struggled to build theirs in an era of colonial rivalry and bitter international jealousy. During the first century of imperialism the Iberian nations had the outside world almost entirely to themselves. Then, around 1600, Frenchmen, Hollanders, and Englishmen surged forth to seize what they could of the prized Iberian possessions and to grasp at any new places that seemed worth the taking. Minor efforts at colonizing were made by Sweden, Scotland, and Denmark, but these were either brief or insignificant. And while western Europe reached beyond the ocean for empire, Russia stalked across Siberia to the Pacific and even temporarily beyond to Alaska. This Russian *drang nach osten* looms today as one of the decisive movements of history, but certainly it did not originate in the same background as the voyages of discovery and imperialism nor did it develop as a part of that movement.

Though the term "colonial empires" is loosely used here to designate all overseas dominions, conquest and colonization were not the same. Into such empty places as South Africa, Brazil, and North America, Europeans could freely
move as settlers. In the Far East, Portuguese, Dutch, and English remained to the last a corporal's guard of palefaces, living and ruling amid the teeming native millions, whose essential way of life remained very little changed. In Spanish America both situations existed. There were the lonely pampas of Argentina offering opportunities to colonists, and there were also the rich and heavily populated regions of Peru and Mexico, ripe for the swords of the conquistadors.

Europe's far-flung dominions were the product of many different needs and motives. Individuals pushed to the farthest corners of the Old World and the New to seek gold, adventure, freedom from tyranny, or escape from justice. They went to spread the true faith, or sometimes to escape the toils of what others considered the true faith. Or else they went merely to trade, to farm free land, to grow rich, or to live in the hope of growing free and rich.

The rulers and governments that fostered and regulated all these efforts were motivated largely by a hope of profits, a hope conceived in mercantilistic theories and developed along mercantilistic lines. The different European powers formed their companies and built their empires in different ways, but across the gap of several hundred years it is the similarities in their methods that now stand out most clearly.

European governments felt always more interest in the quick profits promised by trade or treasure troves than in the more solid investment of colonies. For this same reason they liked to avoid the burden of colonization wherever possible. Taking a page from the feudal past, they often escaped the expense of colonies by throwing the responsibility of pio- neering and development upon private individuals. The Por- tuguese called these entrepreneurs donataries, the Spaniards called them adelantados or encomenderos. To the French
they were seigneurs, to the Dutch patroons, and to the English proprietors. These territorial lords at times stimulated colonization, yet often blocked it either by failing to understand the needs of the colonists or by insisting on terms that prospective colonists were unable to meet. One after another, with very few exceptions, these proprietarial dignitaries were removed by their governments and were replaced by varying combinations of local and royal administrators.

The early empires failed strikingly to live up to the economic hopes and visions that had presided over their founding. Although their impact upon the economy and culture of Europe was tremendous, the impact came in ways not foreseen or planned. The empires had all been started on the mercantile theory, in the expectation that they would enrich the mother countries by causing gold and silver to pour in. Gold and silver did of course enter Europe through Spain from Spanish America, but this could not make mercantilism a sound doctrine. Since real wealth consists of goods, and since silver and gold are but convenient measuring sticks for determining value, the arrival of all this bullion created no wealth but merely brought a rise in prices and a dislocation of European economy. Yet for centuries the governments of Europe stuck to mercantilism; each one trying, by colonial trade monopolies, to restrict commerce so as to pour cash into its own treasury and cut competitors out. The result was to keep trade from flourishing as it might have flourished and to force it into restricted, artificial channels. Europe, to be sure, was enormously richer by 1700 than in 1500, and the overseas world had contributed greatly to the increased prosperity. This, however, was in spite of mercantilism, not because of it. The true wealth consisted of the goods the outside world had sent to Europe, a flow that no mercantilistic
regulations could altogether stop. Mercantilism had slowed the process of trade and wealth production; it could not stifle it entirely.

The colonists, in the meantime, failed to play passively the cut-and-dried role assigned to them. They were expected to buy the products of the mother country, to produce nothing that competed with those products, and to ship home raw stuffs priced much lower than the European goods they imported. The balance they were supposed to make up in cash. In so far as they were able, the colonists declined to do as they were told. When opportunity offered they bought goods, from whatever source, at the lowest price. Likewise, they sold when they could in the best market, wherever it might be. This uncontrollable tendency on the part of their colonial subjects added to the mercantilists' difficulties by making law enforcement very costly, since it required fleets of ships patrolling the seas, revenue cutters patrolling the shores, and many vigilant officials on land. In the contest between the law and the law evader, colonial public opinions tended to be with the evader, and rightly. The smuggler who brought cheap goods into a colony and the local merchant who dealt sub rosa with him were unintentionally greater fomenters of world prosperity than were the sage European statesmen who spent their time planning ways and means of enforcing the laws.

Before the end of the eighteenth century Europeans were realizing, even without Adam Smith, that mercantilism somehow did not pay. This realization came at about the time the old colonial empires were starting to disintegrate. The French empire all but vanished in the smoke of the Seven Years' War, and twenty years later the American Revolution deprived England of her best colonies. The Dutch
empire dwindled under the impact of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; and by 1825 Spain and Portugal had lost most of their possessions through the revolutions in Latin America. Imperialism now reached its lowest ebb, as European statesmen doubted for a time that colonial empires were worth the having. Gladstone, the noted English Liberal, would cheerfully have disposed of Canada as late as the American Civil War. Not until near the end of the nineteenth century, as a product of the Industrial Revolution, was a new, vigorous concept of empire to seize the minds and inflame the imaginations of Europe's leading statesmen.

Although the old empires brought economic disappointment, it is not enough to assess their value in immediate monetary terms. More important than the profits the long-dead merchants failed to amass are the tremendous legacies of human alteration they left. Millions of Latin Americans today speak with the accents of the conquistadors, and the English language was first carried abroad by the sea dogs of the virgin queen. The United States sprang from roots struck in New World soil by chartered companies and proprietary grants. Alongside the failures and faults of early imperialism must be placed the story of millions converted to Christianity, the spread of European civilization to the ends of the earth, and the complete revision of European economy, scientific thought, and moral values. Neither the dark man who was conquered nor the white man who did the conquering survived the process unchanged. Seneca, the Roman philosopher who speculated so wisely on the secrets of the world, would have marveled at all this, but then, as he himself makes clear, he would have expected to be surprised.
# Chronological Summary

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<th>Event</th>
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<td>B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6th century</td>
<td>Pythagorean philosophy; concept of a spherical earth.</td>
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<td>c. 500</td>
<td>Hanno’s voyage down west Africa, possibly to Sierra Leone.</td>
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<td>4th century</td>
<td>Pytheas explores the British Isles. Alexander conquers to central Asia and past the Indus River.</td>
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<td>3rd century</td>
<td>Eratosthenes measures the earth’s circumference.</td>
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<td>A.D.</td>
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<td>2nd century</td>
<td>Ptolemy evolves the “Ptolemaic” concept of the universe: a round earth which is the center of creation.</td>
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<td>7th century</td>
<td>Arab conquests following the death of Mohammed.</td>
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<td>874</td>
<td>Iceland colonized by Norsemen.</td>
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<td>985</td>
<td>Greenland settled by Erik the Red; almost simultaneous discovery of America by Bjarni Herjulfson.</td>
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<td>1001–1016</td>
<td>Norse voyages to mainland America.</td>
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<td>1096–1291</td>
<td>Crusades.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1165</td>
<td>Prester John letter circulates in Europe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13th century</td>
<td>Mongol Empire in Asia; travels of Pan del Cárpine, Rubruk, and the Polos.</td>
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14th century
Improvement of maps and nautical instruments; discovery of Madeiras and possibly the Azores and Senegal.

1415 Capture of Ceuta by Portugal; beginning of Prince Henry's discovery interests.

1434 Portuguese rounding of Cape Bojador.

1460 Death of Prince Henry; discoveries extended to Sierra Leone.

1482 Portuguese discovery of the Congo.

1488 Cape of Good Hope rounded by Dias.

1492 America discovered for Spain by Columbus.

1494 Treaty of Tordesillas; demarcation of Spanish-Portuguese influence.

1497 Discovery of North America for England by Cabot.

1499 Return of Vasco da Gama from India; beginning of Portuguese spice trade.

1512 Discovery of the Pacific by Abreu from Malacca.

1522 El Cano's Victoria completes circumnavigation of globe.

1535-1537 Exploration of St. Lawrence Basin for France by Cartier.

1541 Exploration of Amazon Basin for Spain by Orellana.

1553 Discovery of White Sea by Chancellor.

1580 Seizure of Portugal by Philip II. Completion of first English circumnavigation by Drake.

1588 Failure of Spanish Armada against England.

1595 First Dutch voyage to Far East.

1600 Formation of English East India Company.

1602 Formation of Dutch East India Company.

1607 Founding of Jamestown by Virginia Company.

1608 Founding of Quebec by Champlain.

1616 Discovery of Cape Horn by Schouten.
1620 Settlement of Plymouth by Pilgrims.
1621 Formation of Dutch West India Company.
1628 Beginnings of Massachusetts Bay Colony.
1630 Dutch West India Company invades Brazil in earnest.
1640 Portugal restored to independence.
1642–1643 Exploration of Tasmania and New Zealand by Tasman.
1654 Dutch expelled from Brazil.
1655 Conquest of Jamaica by England.
1662 Bombay acquired for England by royal marriage.
1664 Conquest of New Netherland by England.
1669–1687 Explorations in central North America by La Salle.
1682 Founding of Pennsylvania by William Penn.
1707 Breakup of Mogul Empire in India, opening the way for European conquest.
1713 Treaty of Utrecht; stabilization of old colonial empires for many years.
Suggestions for Further Reading


A good idea of the geographical attainments of the Greeks and Romans may be gained from M. Cary and E. A. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers* (London, 1929), and from H. F. Tozer, *History of Ancient Geography* (Cambridge, Eng., various eds.).


A true picture of what Marco Polo and contemporary European travelers found in the Orient is given by Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960). The likelihood that adventurous Europeans other than the Norsemen reached America in the Middle Ages is upheld by Frederick J. Pohl, *Atlantic Crossings before Columbus* (New York, 1961).

The peak period of European maritime discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is described, though with different emphases, by Paul Herrmann, *The Great Age of Discovery* (New York, 1958), and by J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (Cleveland and New York, 1963).

A fine survey of Portuguese explorations, with emphasis on the
Suggestions for Further Reading


Good works on Dutch activity and colonization have become more plentiful. Hendrik Willem Van Loon, _Golden Book of the Dutch Navigators_ (New York, 1916), is chatty and inimitable in style. D. W. Davis, _A Primer of Dutch Seventeenth Century Overseas Trade_ (The Hague, 1961), covers the world known to the
Dutch at that time. George Masselman, *The Cradle of Colonialism* (New Haven and London, 1963), concentrates on the home Netherlands and the building of the Indonesian empire. C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil* (Oxford, 1957), covers in detail the material briefly presented on pp. 106-108 of this book. Since 1909 the Linschoten Society of the Netherlands has published original narratives of Dutch voyages and discoveries. These are all in Dutch, but many have been translated and published by the English Hakluyt Society.


In addition to the works above, the following biographies will be of interest: Germán Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World* (New York, 1955); Herbert E. Bolton, *Coronado on the Turquoise Trail* (Albuquerque, 1949); Henry H. Hart, *Venetian Adventurer: The Life and Times of Marco Polo* (Stanford, 1943) and *Sea Road to the Indies* [Vasco da Gama] (New York, 1950); Samuel E. Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* [Christopher Columbus] (2 vols., Boston, 1942); Charles McKew Parr, *Ferdinand Magellan, Circumnavigator* (New York, 1964); and Elaine Sanceau, *Henry the Navigator* (New York, 1947) and *The Perfect Prince* [John II] (Oporto, 1959).
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