THE CONQUISTADORS
The Emperor Charles the Fifth at about the time of signing the convention with Pizarro (Portrait by Vermeyen in the possession of Mr. E. Peter Jones of Chester).
JEAN DESCOLA

The
Conquistadors

TRANSLATED BY
MALCOLM BARNES

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Oceanica Classis

Columbus' flagship: woodcut of the 'Santa Maria' from the account of Columbus' voyage published in Basle, 1494.
PROLOGUE

Terra Incognita

THese words in Gothic letters on mediaeval globes, at the place where the Americas are now shown, serve to remind us that until the end of the 15th century the world came to an end out in the Atlantic Ocean. Like the Sphinx, 'Oceanus Occidentalis' devoured those who were mad enough to try and grasp its secrets. It was in fact Mare Tenebrosum, 'The Dark Sea,' the great devourer of lost paradises and sunken empires. Monstrous sea-creatures disported there ponderously; the waters of the Equator seethed like volcanic lava and sometimes spouted upwards in black jets. The enemy was everywhere, in the air, on the surface of the waves, under the sea, and in the firmament especially, which was filled with the anger of the gods. Indeed, only the wrath of heaven could explain the water-spouts that had pounded caravels to pieces in a few minutes. This was the reasoning of Spanish and Portuguese sailors who had returned from the Atlantic islands.

It is true that as early as the 11th century some hardy Vikings had reconnoitred Iceland and Greenland, and had probably reached the North American coast, without suspecting that it continued southwards. Two hundred years later, the Genoese landed on the Azores and colonised the Canaries and Madeira. Another two centuries and the Portuguese discovered the Cape Verde Islands. But the extreme limit of human daring seemed to have been reached. Beyond an imaginary line drawn from Iceland to Cape Verde darkness lay—a darkness peopled with fantastic imaginings. But the further the sailors advanced into the Dark Sea as they prolonged their voyages from African shores, the higher their spirits rose. At each new point traced on the charts by cosmographers whose hands trembled with excitement, at each new island discovered, they imagined others. For had not Ptolemy suggested as many as 27,000? Here lay the Archipelago of the Satyrs, the Island of Antilia (known also
as the Island of the Seven Cities), the Island of Merops and the island where Briaeus, son of Heaven and Earth, watched beside the sleeping Saturn. And here, most wonderful of all, lay Atlantis.

**ATLANTIS**

Legend precedes history. Dreams give rise to action. By pursuing chimeras, we reach reality. Would the flame of the Conquest have burned as fiercely had it not been fanned by the myths that lured men on? So it was with Christopher Columbus who, setting out to make an alliance with the Great Khan of the Indies, ended by discovering America.

The idea of Atlantis was at the threshold of the Discovery; it was a necessary mirage without which the Discovery would not have taken place. If we wish to enter into the outlook of the Conquistadors, we must first of all share their nostalgias and rediscover their dreams. The enigma of the Atlantic did more for the Conquest than did the politics of princes. The lure of gold would not have provoked such a rush for the New World but for an attraction that surpassed it—a mystery.

Atlantis is discussed in two of Plato's writings, the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. In the first of these dialogues, in which Socrates, Hermocrates, Timaeus and Critias take part, Critias recounts the revelations made to Solon by the priests of Sais during his journey in Egypt. The Atlantic sea indeed was then navigable, and had an island fronting that mouth which you in your tongue call the Pillars of Hercules; and this island was larger than Libya and Asia put together; and there was a passage hence for travellers of that day to the rest of the islands, as well as from those islands to the whole opposite continent that surrounds the real sea. For as respects what is within the mouth here mentioned, it appears to be a bay with a kind of narrow entrance; and that sea is indeed a true sea, and the land that entirely surrounds it may truly and most correctly be called a continent. In this Atlantic island, then, was formed a powerful league of kings, who subdued the entire island, together with many others, and parts also of the continent; besides which they subjected to their rule the inland parts of Libya, as far as Egypt, and Europe also, as far as Tyrrennia. . . . Subsequently, however, through violent earthquakes and deluges which brought desolation in a single day and night the Atlantic island itself was plunged beneath the sea, and entirely disappeared; whence even
now that sea is neither navigable nor to be traced out, being blocked up by the great depth of mud which the subsiding island produced.'

In the Critias, Plato completes this story: 'Poseidon in particular, took as his lot the Atlantic island. . . . Towards the sea, but in the centre of the whole island, was a plain, which is said to have been the fairest of all plains, and distinguished for its excellence. On this plain, and at its centre, about fifty stadia distant, was a mountain with short acclivities on every side. On this dwell one of those men who in primitive times sprang from the earth, by name Evenor, who lived with a wife, Leucippe; and they had an only daughter, Clito. Now when this girl arrived at marriageable age, and her mother and father were dead, Poseidon becoming enamoured, made her his mistress, . . . to the eldest of his sons who was the king, he gave the name of Atlas, from whom, as the first sovereign, both the island and sea were termed Atlantic; and to the twin born after him, who had received for his share the extreme parts of the island towards the Pillars of Hercules, as far as the region which now in that country is called Gadeirica, he gave the titular name, which we Greeks call Eumelus, but which the people of that country term Gadeirus.'

So Atlantis was situated beyond the Straits of Gibraltar, which were known to the Ancient World as the Pillars of Hercules: at its eastern extremity it approached Cadiz, while its western shores were washed by the Caribbean Sea.

Plato records the gigantic works achieved by the Atlantians: temples, palaces, ports, and dry docks for triremes. The outer wall of the island was covered with brass; melted tin covered the inner wall and orichalcum shone on the walls of the citadel itself. 'The temple of Poseidon himself was a stadium in length, three plethra in breadth, and of a height to correspond, having something of a barbaric appearance. All the outside of the temple, except the pinnacles, they lined with silver, but the pinnacles with gold: and as to the interior, the roof was formed wholly of ivory variegated with gold and orichalcum; and as to all the parts—the walls, pillars, and pavements, they lined them with orichalcum. They also placed in it golden statues, the god himself standing on a chariot holding the reins of six winged horses, of such size as to touch the roof with his head, and round him a hundred nereids on dolphins. . . . Round the outside of the temple likewise golden images were placed of all the men and women that were descended from the ten kings.'
The Conquistadors

Each of the ten kings of Atlantis had the power of life and death over his subjects, within the limits of his province. He legislated by taking orders from Neptune which were transmitted to him by sovereign law and figured upon a column raised in the temple, being engraved on the orichalcum.

So long as the godhead from which they sprang lived on in the souls of the people of Atlantis, their conduct remained wise and their government just. But the more they mixed with earthly creatures, so that the human tended to prevail over the divine, the more the sons of the Sea God degenerated. Their virtues were weakened by contact with the children of men. Overwhelmed by such happiness and power, the descendants of Poseidon were corrupted and lent an ear to thoughts of violence and ambition.

Homer, Strabo, Plutarch, Pliny, and many others continued the marvellous story of Atlantis. Some denied that it had existed, and a 20th-century scholar has forcefully stated that 'the Atlantic civilisation did not exist at any epoch; it has its place only outside time, just as it is outside space. It did not exist anywhere. It has never existed.' But nobody in the Middle Ages doubted the Platonic story. No sailor steering west but saw in his mind's eye the drowning of Atlantis or thought he could hear the voice of the gods across the ocean crying: 'People of Atlantis! You must perish.' The divine island had existed for centuries in the memories of the poets and it haunted the minds of the navigators. It gave rise to the Discovery and urged the Discoverers on. In fact, the story of the Conquistadors begins at the Pillars of Hercules.

Although absorbed by his great political plans, could Christopher Columbus forget Atlantis when he took his bearings on the castillo of the Santa Maria? Hardly had he left the port of Palos than he came to Cadiz—the rock of Gadir, the remains of a continent ruled by the brother of Atlas. Then, having called at the Canaries, he steered due west. Running past the peak of Teneriffe, the Genoese knew that he was close to one of the summits of the submerged chains of Atlantis, prolonged by the Azores, Cape Verde and the Bermuda plateau. And he doubtless recognised in the Sargasso Sea that trapped his caravels the sea described by Plato as 'impracticable to navigators, owing to the mud and the shallows, the remains of the submerged island.' In this state of mind, that paradoxically allied an acute sense of reality to something prophetic, dreams quite naturally merged with action. Christopher Columbus sailed in search of the Great
Khan, but did not despair of encountering on his way the island of the Saturnian gods, the empire of Bronze and of Sun.

Similarly, when Pizarro's companions penetrated the outlying parts of Cuzco, the royal city of the Incas, they still thought of the cities of Atlantis, and doubtless considered the Temple of the Sun and the 'metallic garden,' with terraces that ran down in tiers to the Rio Huatanay and were plated with pure gold, an astounding replica of the Temple of Neptune. And when Cortés set eyes on Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec Empire, surrounded by lakes and canals, did he not think that this might perhaps be Plato's Poseidonis?

But we must leave Atlantis. To sum up: it was said that more than ten centuries before the Christian era an enormous continent, stretching from the shores of Portugal and Morocco to the Caribbean Sea, had been swallowed up in a cataclysm singularly recalling the Biblical tradition of the Flood; but this is something which today is no longer of interest except to geologists. Here we have only to imagine what it must have meant to the sailors of Isabella or Charles the Fifth while fitting out in Andalusian ports to sail for unknown lands.

**EUROPE LOOKS EAST**

Europe's vital preoccupation at the end of the 15th century was the East.

Antiquity had left the Middle Ages with an obsession for Asia, and the Middle Ages had passed it on to the Renaissance. The Holy Land and the Holy Sepulchre were there: the focal point of the Crusades and the Apostolate. Further on lay India, Japan ('Cipango') and China ('Cathay') and the paradisial islands of Oceania. To take the Holy Sepulchre from the Musulmans, to conquer the Asiatic markets, and to convert the yellow races to the true faith, was the triple contest that was fought between Europe and the East for several centuries. The capture of Constantinople by Mahomet II, barring to Western Christians the road to the Christian East, had stimulated the enthusiasm for conquest among the navigators. While Vasco da Gama prepared to round the Cape of Good Hope, bold adventurers prospected the Indian and Chinese coasts. The route to the Indies was known long before Marco Polo, and diplomatic contacts had been established between the European powers and the Asiatic princes. But to Europe the West remained a
closed book; Europe took no interest in it and did not believe in it.

Meanwhile, in the last quarter of the 15th century, Europe entered upon an era of knowledge and curiosity. In Italy, Portugal and Spain eyes were turned towards Africa and Asia. These young kingdoms, scarcely freed from Islamic occupation, needed an outlet for their overflowing energy. Further, the light of the Renaissance had just succeeded the noble gloom of the Middle Ages. Gutenberg had perfected his processes, and the printing presses restored honour to the writings of antiquity and simultaneously diffused the most recent discoveries of learning. No one doubted any longer that the earth was round. A certain Pole, named Copernicus, had even revealed the movement of the planets both in respect of one another and around the sun—like a gigantic clock. All Europe took a large bite at the still green fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and its strong flavour turned the coolest heads.

While the printing presses creaked, the furnaces of the alchemists had never known greater activity. Crouched over their retorts and white-hot alembics, the experts still hoped to find the philosopher's stone that would turn base metal into gold. But would it not be easier to go and find the gold where it lay? It was believed at this time that gold extracted from mines was sunlight petrified by the action of time. So the sunny lands had to disgorge their gold.

**GOLD FOR HIGH POLICY**

Europe in the 15th century was divided between four kings: Louis XI of France, Maximilian of Germany, Henry VII of England, and Ferdinand of Spain. Each of these monarchs—all by Divine Right—secretly dreamed of reconstructing the Western Empire to his own profit, and from this arose the need to create a grand policy which would be the first step towards the conquest of Europe. The two instruments of this indispensable politics of prestige were arms and finance.

At the end of the 15th century military art had reached its zenith. It was the age when charging armoured cavalry, men and horses in steel armour, began to be seen on the battlefields, while along the roads of Italy heavy pieces of artillery rolled on four wheels. Battles were skilful and fought with carefully chosen mercenaries. Louis XI had his Swiss, Maximilian his
Landsknechte, and Gonzalo de Córdoba created the terrible 'Spanish Infantry,' the Queen of Battles. In truth, never did war have a better instructed or more attentive personnel at its disposal than in the last years of the 15th century.

But an army is the most expensive of luxuries for an ambitious prince. The cannon foundry, the gunsmith's factory, remounting, and especially the soldiers' pay required that the treasury be constantly refilled. 'No money, no Swiss!' No army any more. So gold was needed to maintain the grand policy.

This metal was rare in Europe. When Christopher Columbus embarked for the West Indies, Europe's store of gold and silver did not exceed a thousand million gold francs,¹ that is to say a quantity of metal which, minted in 1914, would have been worth that sum—a heap of silver weighing 3,200 metric tons and equal to two-fifths of the annual world production of silver in 1937, and a heap of inferior gold weighing 90 metric tons and representing a twelfth of the annual world production for the same year. Cast in a single ingot, all Europe's gold would have formed a cube only two metres in each dimension.

So the main aim of the rulers of Europe was to acquire this precious metal and build up as large a stock of it as possible. To have at one's disposal sufficient liquid money to be able to pay ready cash was the great preoccupation of the candidates to the Empire, a preoccupation the more serious as they saw themselves halted in their undertakings by lack of 'liquidities.' No grand policy without a rich treasury: that was the dilemma in which the four princes were caught.

Europe lacked gold. What was looted from Turkish coffers, the few nuggets brought back from Africa by Portuguese explorers, and the melting down of gold plate had only feebly increased the reserves of metal. How could the suppliers be paid? How could the sacks of the recruiting officers be filled, as well as the money wagons that followed the armies? The coin in circulation was not enough for the growing appetites of the continental kingdoms, so on the margin of the open conflicts another battle was carried on: a battle for gold. Localised for a long time to the land routes of oriental caravans and the sea routes along the African coasts, the battle for gold was soon to spread to the Dark Sea. Where could gold be found, indeed, if not in the Indies?

¹ Equivalent Sterling value in 1914: about £40 million.
But science and gold were only the means. Christian Europe, so long humiliated by Arab power, felt a renewed taste and vocation for the Crusades. Two hundred years had passed since St. Jean d'Acre had fallen into the hands of the Saracens and St. Louis had died before Carthage. The defeat of Islam, which was about to abandon Europe, had to be completed. To drive the Moor from Granada and to take him from behind in Africa: to succeed in this double operation would revenge Mansura and Guadalete.

The end of the 15th century in Europe was marked by signs of confusion. Though one might think that the new learning was being substituted for the old, nothing of the kind took place. Never did the real and the marvellous get on so well together. Travellers' tales and the observations of the scholars, far from destroying the legends, helped towards accrediting them. Chimeras are not so easily forsaken!

A confusion of knowledge and a confusion of plans. Europe was like a great famished body long shackled to the earth. Its bonds had just been broken. It stretched its numbed limbs slowly. It rose up and looked around. A fearful and obscure covetousness grew within it. This was the Renaissance—the rebirth.

One Portuguese united in his person the contradictory passions of the age. This was Dom Henrique, the fifth son of King John I of Portugal, himself the natural son of Peter the Cruel and founder of the Aviz dynasty.

In his youth he had been among those who had conquered Ceuta. Though by his bravery he had won his spurs, he turned a fascinated eye upon the Ocean and the violet line of the Atlas mountains. On his return to Portugal, his father appointed him Grand Master of the Order of Christ, founded to fight the Musulmans. From then on he devoted his life to this double objective: the conquest of Africa and the ruin of Islam—a confusion of ends and means. By conquering Africa he would enrich himself. He would use the fabulous gold that was said to abound in Africa to finance an expedition against the Musulmans of Barbary, whom he reckoned to pursue as far as Jerusalem. Who could prevent him, then, from retaking the Holy Places?

Dom Henrique, called 'Henry the Navigator,' was never to navigate. He did better: he became the educator of Portugal.
Appointed by his father as Governor of Algarve, the southern province, he stayed there all his life. Close to Cape St. Vincent, on the Sagres promontory that thrusts far out into the ocean, he set up an astronomical observatory and founded a cosmographic school. Men who were learned in marine matters came to him from all parts. Portuguese, Catalans, Majorcians—even Jews and Moroccan Moors—installed themselves at Sagres and set to work.

So here indeed was the great brotherhood of learning! Speaking different tongues and following different religions, the students of Sagres for a time forgot their lands and their gods. They deliberately turned their backs on Europe. They wanted to forget what was happening there. Meanwhile, in Spain the favourite, Alvaro de Luna, confiscated royal power to his own benefit and led the nobility a hard life. Portugal alternately flattered and bullied her Spanish neighbour. Italy was a jigsaw, and foreign princes fought over the pieces; while Florence, the Medici capital, was about to give birth to the Renaissance. In France, Charles VII, le Bien Servi, galvanised by Joan of Arc, drove out the English. The Hundred Years War had ended, and Europe entered a new era. But the scholars of Sagres paid no attention. The future of Europe, they reckoned, would be settled on the sea. Africa had to be reconnoitred and its furthest point had to be turned so that the way to the Indies could be found. Sagres was not merely a scientific seminary; it was also a naval dockyard. Under the direction of Italian experts, caravels were armed and took to sea. They went as far as they could, then returned laden with strange merchandise, but more than that, with astonishing information. During the half-century that Henrique devoted to his folly the Portuguese navigators had covered more than half the route that separated Lisbon from the future Cape of Good Hope. A half-century to effect this African circuit: Madeira, the Canaries, the Cape Verde Islands, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea and its gulf. Thus they had reached the equatorial region that Aristotle and Plato had declared uninhabitable.

Henrique's death did not extinguish the eager curiosity of the explorers. The drive went on. While the merchants landed on the coasts, penetrated inland and boldly ascended the rivers, the Portuguese sailors continued their southward way. Diego Cão, accompanied by the astronomer Martin de Behaim, discovered the Congo in the year that Christopher Columbus presented himself to the Catholic monarchs. Two years later,
Bartolomé Díaz reached the southern point of Africa. This was the Cabo Tormentoso (a fearful storm there had nearly smashed his vessels) which King John II of Portugal later named the Cape of Good Hope.

Bartolomé Díaz returned to Lisbon. He reported his expedition to the King. He was complimented. But was he quite sure that this cape marked the end of Africa? Had he really turned it? For everything was before them, including the eternal objective, the way to the Indies.

Bartolomé Díaz never returned to the Cape of Good Hope. He died in a storm. Had not Adamastor, the Spirit of the Cape, declared: 'I will bring vengeance upon him who is the first to come and disturb my peace?' Díaz was certainly the first. The second was Vasco da Gama, who rounded the Cape of Good Hope ten years later.

**TWO FASHIONABLE AUTHORS: MARCO POLO AND JEHAN DE LA BARBE**

Two hundred years before the death of Henry the Navigator, two Venetian merchants had travelled the road to the Indies, but by the overland route. A young man of seventeen years went with them on their second journey: Marco, son of the elder brother and the future historian of their travels. Their itinerary was: Constantinople, Baghdad, Ormuz, the Indian coast, Ceylon, Sumatra, Malacca, Cochin-China, China (Han-Kow and Pekin); and Tibet; then once again China, India, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Arabia and Persia. This fantastic journey—in the 13th century, moreover—was interrupted by long sojourns in the countries they visited and lasted twenty-four years. When the three Polos returned to Venice, no one recognised them. Indeed, they spoke Venetian with difficulty, and their costume, like their manners, was Asiatic. Then they gave a great banquet at which members of their family and the city worthies were present. During dessert, the Polos ripped open the seams of their garments of coarse cloth. A flood of precious stones—sapphires, emeralds, rubies—tumbled out, and the flood opened the eyes of the guests. Men so rich could not lie! All Venice then recognised the Polos. Marco became 'Messer Millione,' and he undertook to write the tale of their journeys.

When the 15th century ended, the book had not lost its fascination. It made the simple people dream and the scholars
reflect. It was the bedside book of the lovers of marvels, and it was the Bible of future explorers. It was in the baggage of the Conquistadors and in the captains’ chests. What does this book, which is at once a novel, a piece of reporting and a treatise, relate?

Marco Polo’s Itinerary

It concerns the time when Kuhlai, grandson of Chengis Khan, reigned over the immense Mongol Empire that stretched from Poland to the China Sea. A formidable warrior, like his grandfather, he had invaded Chinese territory at the head of a powerful Mongol army. It took him only a few years to subdue the whole country and to create a state three times vaster than Europe. Founder of the Mongol dynasty of the Yuans, he and his successors governed China for a century, until the advent of the Mings. His residence was at Pekin, not far from the Great Wall, in the very heart of China. He was called the Great Khan. His palace, which was decorated with gold and silver, was as large as a town. The banqueting hall could hold six thousand guests. As he suffered from gout, the Khan went to the hunt lying on a litter hung with lion skins and cloth of gold, and drawn by four elephants. Ten thousand falconers were his
escort. Roads, canals and causeways of astonishing dimensions cut through the Chinese Empire. Laden with spices and commodities unknown to Europe, thousands of boats passed up and down rivers that were as wide as the sea. Marco Polo knew how to please Kublai. He remained seventeen years in his service.

Vested by the Great Khan with diplomatic and commercial missions, Marco Polo travelled throughout China. He witnessed battles fought between lancers on elephants and archers on foot. He visited Quinsay (Han-Kow) on the river Yang-Tse-Kiang and felt he was back in his native city, for Quinsay was built on a group of islands. Twelve thousand marble bridges spanned the canals. There were six hundred thousand houses and four thousand bath houses, and—an extraordinary fact—Christian churches that were ministered over by Nestorian priests, followers of Nestorius the originator of the doctrine attributing two persons and two natures to Christ, divine and human. Three times a week the market attracted more than fifty thousand persons.

After China came the wondrous island of Cipango—Japan. Marco Polo had not been there. But he had been told about it, and about its gold and its rose-coloured pearls. Java, homeland of nutmeg and clove; Sumatra, peopled with monkeys called by Marco Polo 'men with tails'; Ceylon, where the pebbles were rubies and topazes.

No one, before Marco Polo, had told Europe that beyond the nameless deserts were towns as imperial as Toledo, ports as flourishing as Seville, and dynasties as noble as the Medici.

There was another book that stirred the men of the 15th century. It was a novel, attributed to a certain English gentleman, John de Mandeville, though the real author was an astronomer of Liège, known by some as Jehan de la Barbe and by others as Jean de Bourgogne. Written fifty years after Marco Polo's story, Jehan de la Barbe's book is a condensation in novel form of the geographical knowledge of the period. It concerned India, China and the Malayan islands. The fabulous ruler was no longer the Great Khan, but Prester John, a mysterious person who seems to have reigned over Central Asia before Genghis Khan. He was confused in tradition with the priest-king, the Negus of Abyssinia.

John de Mandeville was present at ceremonies the splendour of which was allied to the eastern liturgy. He saw mountains studded with diamonds, men with dogs' heads, and fights between pygmies and cranes. Near the sources of the Ganges the
natives fed exclusively on perfumes and the odour of apples. Others had enormous ears which they wrapped round themselves like cloaks. He also saw one-eyed tribes. Finally—it was here that the book excited the geographers—he stated that a European, setting out in the direction of the Indies, and having visited more than five thousand islands, found himself in a country where his own language was spoken, where the farmers, dressed like himself, drove their cattle along with familiar words. He had come back to his starting-point. So the earth was round. Europe, Asia and Africa formed a single continent, washed by a single ocean.

The world, as conceived by this supposedly English gentleman, was a single continent, surrounded by a little water. A few archipelagos lay in the scanty water.

The 15th century ended in a stirring atmosphere. Intoxicated by books whose ink had scarcely time to dry, following step by step the progress of the navigators, the minds of men could not distinguish between truth and legend. For the geographer the second half of the 15th century was like the first half of the 20th for the technician: a period of sudden progress. The world opened in a rush. Everyone was in a hurry to turn the pages of the great book. To the caravels they whispered: 'Faster and farther.' They were eager to replace the broken line of the cosmographers by the firm line of certainty. An island reconnoitred, an anchor dropped at a new shore, and for a time the thirst for the fabulous was quenched. Then the dream took on the solid consistency of reality. Everyone marvelled at how the discovered lands surpassed in splendour the lands that had been imagined.

The icy glow of Samarkand silks; the scent of burning sandalwood in Java; the pepper and nutmeg of Malabar; the glittering gems of Cipango; were these not the means to intoxicate the contemporaries of Leonardo da Vinci and Pico della Mirandola, the one symbolical of prescience and the other of science? This time, what was known surpassed what had been foretold.

But gold and spices were not everything. The cupidity of the merchants, the ambition of the navigators, and the imagination of the poets concealed political ulterior motives of the widest extent. It was certain, first of all, that the conquest of the
'Ultramar' would assure its authors the mastery of Europe. Would it be Spain or Portugal? Both were well placed. But Italy was watchful. As for the papacy, the arbiter of princes and spiritual ruler of the lands that had been discovered and were still to be discovered—was it not the guarantee of the part that God would play?

The domination of Europe was fine; but why not that of the world? It was only a matter of renewing the alliance with the Great Khan that was outlined two centuries earlier by the brothers Polo. It was thought that he favoured Christian ideas. Once in association, would these two forces permit a third force to continue? Certainly not. The armies of His Catholic Majesty and those of the Tartar Emperor would set out to meet one another and make contact at Constantinople. Thus the jaws of these formidable pincers would close upon Islam. They would crush the old enemy of Europe like a nut-shell.

The first essential of this grandiose plan was to find a way to the Great Khan.

For the moment there was only one route to the Indies; the eastern route, Marco Polo's, involving thousands of miles across hostile lands. Many started out, but few got beyond the Caucasian plateaus.

It was said that Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese, was about to try the route to the Indies by circling the Cape of Good Hope. But what a voyage!

It was said also that in a western direction...
I sent His Majesty a map drawn by my own hand. In it was defined the whole western part of the known world from Ireland to Guinea, as well as all the islands one encountered on this route. Immediately facing them, due westwards, were reproduced the beginning of India, with its islands and cities.

Letter from Toscanelli to King John II of Portugal’s Confessor, with a copy to Christopher Columbus; Florence, June 25, 1474.
Islands discovered by Columbus; from the 1494 account of his voyage.
CHAPTER I

In Search of the Great Khan

A CASTILLA y a Leon—Nuevo mundo dió Colón. Though it was Christopher Columbus who gave a new world to Spain, the first Conquistador was not himself a Spaniard. A propagator of the Christian Faith, he was probably of Jewish descent. A geographer, he was not sure that the world was round, for no one had ever given proof that could be shown on the map. A mathematician, he could barely count, and his astronomical knowledge was no better than Ptolemy's. Almirante Mayor de la Mar Oceana, an admiral in fact, he made errors in charting his course and reckoned his sea-routes by guesswork. Discoverer of America, he actually thought he was in Asia.

These fundamental contradictions throw an obscure light on the peculiar character of Columbus. This man at first sight shows signs of inconsistency, even perhaps of imposture. But does this mean that Christopher Columbus was an imposter?

Actually, he was at one and the same time more simple and more complex. There is no way of describing him in one word. It is by following him step by step throughout a career that was by turns extremely lucky and extremely unlucky that we gradually succeed in isolating the essential elements of his personality, which are so varied that their synthesis seems impossible. He is a man with a hundred faces: visionary and practical, candid and crafty, a sage and a man of business, an ascetic and a voluptuary, Columbus can only be grasped in his details. His characteristics are superimposed one on another; they are not complimentary. His defects set him off rather than debase him. The mere adding of one characteristic to another does not form the whole. Yet something in the moral aspect of Christopher Columbus imposes itself on one forcefully. Inversely, as the curve of his fortune fell, the spiritual curve rose. This continuous progress began with his third voyage, a progress towards asceticism, towards a sort of heroic wisdom,
a superhuman serenity which serves to make almost a saint of this boastful and adventure-hungry Genoese.

This unlucky man's reward was not of this world—this world that he only glimpsed and that others would steal from him. But after so many failures on the way, for there was not one of his victories but was followed by a bitter morrow, his was a great moral triumph, for his greatest discovery was himself.

His Mysterious Origin

One day, accompanied by a child, a vagabond presented himself to the prior of the monastery of La Rabida. Exhausted by hunger, he had fallen upon the steps of the cross that stood before the portal. The door-keeper lifted these two unfortunate creatures up and took them to the Superior. The vagabond and his child were Christopher Columbus and his son, Diego.

At this time Christopher Columbus was well past his thirtieth year. What had he done until then? Whence had he come? He was at an age when men of his calling already have a past, are already in mid-career, while some had even ended it. Columbus seemed only at the beginning of his life.

Eleven Italian towns claim that he first saw light within their walls: Genoa, Savona, Cuccaro, Nervi, Pradello, Oneglia, Finale, Quinto, Palestrina, Albissola and Cosseria. Melodious names, of which we need only remember one: Genoa. But that is not all, for at Calvi they will show you the house where he was born, while some Spaniards claim, with supporting evidence, that he was born in Estremadura, that his ancestor was Pablo de Santa Maria, Rabbi of Carthagena, who was converted to Catholicism and became Archbishop of Burgos. Possibly, also, he was born in Galicia of a Jewish mother, in the province of Pontevedra. Fourteen birthplaces, but the most likely is Genoa. 'Essendo io nato en Genova...' Columbus said in his testament. His Jewish origin, on which much evidence is agreed, is probable, and it is to be found in many aspects of his behaviour. A Ligurian with a touch of the Semite? Very probably, although it cannot be said for certain.

His father's name was Domingo. He was a wool-carder and kept a wine-shop. His mother bore the lovely name of Susana Fontanarosa, and he had two brothers: Bartolomé and Diego. His early childhood was spent with his parents, but it seems that he went to sea at a very early age: 'at the age of fourteen years,'
he was to say later. Between two short voyages along the Italian coasts he came ashore again, helped his father in his modest business with wool and wine, and then set off again. Aboard ship his job was unpretentious: while he scrubbed the deck or assisted the carpenter, he educated himself—though not in practical matters alone. For this ship's apprentice was a dreamer. Lying on the scorching quayside at Genoa, or leaning on his elbows at a gangway's rail, he read such books as Cardinal d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, which had just been printed, Pomponius Mela's *Chronographia*, Ptolemy's *Astronomy*, Marco Polo's *Travels*, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's *History*, and Plutarch's *Lives*. Such was his insatiable appetite for knowledge that he read everything that came into his hands. He was self-taught, and he lacked a teacher to direct and co-ordinate his ill-assorted reading. This amalgam of confused knowledge was the first leaven to ferment his dreams. But what gaps there were in this too voraciously swallowed knowledge!

'De muy pequeña edad, entré en la mar, navegando....'

So he sailed, still very young. After his lessons in sail, he travelled on business. At Chios, the little island in the Greek archipelago where Homer first saw light, he went in search of that kind of resin called mastic, esteemed by Andalusians: they rubbed the bottoms of their jars with it, and as a result their wine was sweeter than honey. For several years Christopher Columbus sailed in the Mediterranean, selling merchandise or carrying cargoes; obscure years they were, filled with one knows not what and about which Columbus was later discreet or reticent.

Is there any truth in the statement that he may have visited the British Isles? Later he was to tell of an expedition to Thule, the end of the world in a northerly direction and in reality one of the Shetland Isles, and of the adventure that befell him in the neighbourhood of Cape St. Vincent. As he was on his way to England, the vessel on which he had sailed was attacked by pirates and set afire. He threw himself into the sea and, bestriding a piece of timber, was able to reach the Portuguese coast. But was he perhaps one of the pirates?

Another adventure is recorded and this time a warlike affair. He was in command of one of the Duke of Anjou's ships, the *Bon Roi René*, and was struck down under his flag in Tunisia. He also served Portugal against the Venetians, and Spain against the Moors. But there is no proof of these often contradictory feats of arms.

Was he a condottiere or a commercial traveller? Undoubtedly,
he was both. A complete mystery envelopes the youth of Columbus, and he did nothing to disperse it; on the contrary, it might be said that he took care to confuse his tracks. Loquacious as he was, he knew how to hold his tongue when necessary.

**A BALCONY ABOVE THE DARK SEA**

Having been lost to sight for several years, Christopher Columbus turns up again at Lisbon. What was he doing there? Probably he was on business. He was very nearly thirty years old. Each morning (for his piety was very great) he went to hear mass in the chapel of the monastery at Lisbon where the penniless orphans of men who had served Portugal were brought up. There he met the young Felipa Muñiz de Perestrello, whose father had been a sailor in the service of the Infante Dom Henrique and had helped in the discovery of the island of Porto Santo, close to Madeira.

What did these two young people talk about at the beginning? Doubtless, the famous island of Porto Santo. The Infante had given it to Perestrello, thinking to favour him, for it seemed easier to cultivate than nearby Madeira, which was covered with the immense woodlands from which its name derived. Perestrello’s companions, not knowing how to clear Madeira, decided to set it afire. The fire lasted for seven years, and when the island was no more than flat open country and ashes, the settlers planted sugar-canies and vine-stocks brought from Portugal. The fine Madeira wine made the fortune of those whom the Infante thought to injure. As to Perestrello, lord and master of Porto Santo, he obtained excellent results at once, but an imprudent act destroyed his labours. It occurred to him to take a couple of rabbits to Porto Santo, and these and their progeny multiplied at such a rate that in a few years all the crops were destroyed.

Felipa tearfully told Christopher of these events; her father had died a hopeless and ruined man. Her brother governed the desolate island, which was henceforth the poor relation of its powerful neighbour.

Christopher Columbus married Felipa and went to settle with her at Porto Santo, beside his brother-in-law, the governor.

Why did Christopher Columbus marry Felipa? She was young and pretty, no doubt, but not at all rich. Though he had an eye for beauty, the Genoese had a greater regard for wealth.
What rhyme or reason was there, then, for this apparently purely sentimental marriage? Columbus saw further, far beyond love and immediate profit: he reached out for his wife's dowry, the marine maps, observations and documents of Perestrello, who was a poor administrator but an excellent navigator. This heap of manuscripts and yellowed parchments contained the sum total of the navigational and geographic knowledge of the time. There were also personal notes and observations, the fruit of a long career, and these were solid nourishment for a man hungry for knowledge, which the hasty and muddled reading of his youth had been unable to satisfy. Felipa brought her husband something more precious than gold: she brought him the road to gold itself.

Columbus ransacked this mass of papers, hugging it to his bosom, as a miser his treasure, and took it with him to Porto Santo. He stayed there for three years, a strange honeymoon on an island swept by the Atlantic winds. But it was an important period in the life of Columbus, for it was at Porto Santo that his confused dreams took shape. Thanks to his father-in-law's documentation, he was to complete and enrich his stock of knowledge, which until then was rudimentary. Moreover, this scrap of storm-tossed earth was a fine advance post in the ocean, a balcony above the New World of the future. The Portuguese had already taken possession of the Azores, the Canaries and the Cape Verde Islands. The westerly invasion was on the march. It deployed itself fan-wise from the Portuguese coasts to the African littoral. The volcanic archipelagos were conquered. Where would the next stage in this race towards the unknown lead? From this moment Columbus's gaze upon the Dark Sea was that of a master: for three years it was to be as from a promontory, embracing the sky and the sea and the bronze-coloured massing of the waves and clouds, seeking how to tear the mystery apart. This avid, aching contemplation of the Atlantic was for Columbus a sort of novitiate. He needed the rough bite of the Atlantic breeze and, above all, the constant view of that fluid desert to complete and vitalise the lessons he had drawn from his books. Doubtless, too, the docile presence of Felipa played its catalytic role.

**FAILURE IN PORTUGAL**

Three years had passed. The dream took shape. The idea had
become a plan, then a project. It had to be realised. And the project was this: to reach the Indies by the westward route.

The idea was not a new one. It had been discussed for a long time, and was already inscribed upon the maps of the time.

Toscanelli’s map
The 'Catalonian World Map,' Toscanelli's map, Martin de Behaim's globe and Cardinal d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi* were in agreement on one point, that Portugal was very near to the eastern extremity of Asia, that is to say Cipango—Japan. The world was not nearly so big as had been thought, and Asia formed its largest part. As to the sea, it occupied only a seventh of the globe. Moreover, Toscanelli had exactly calculated the comparative dimensions of the European and Asiatic lands and of the ocean: no more than 700 leagues, about 2,500 miles, separated Lisbon from the empire of the Great Khan. It had all been proved by mathematics; it was only a matter of taking to sea and steering westwards. Provided a straight line was strictly followed along the 28th parallel, not deviating by a single degree, one could be sure of reaching the first Indian port after a crossing of several weeks.

This, then, was the true route to the Indies, swift and direct, and economic too, free from natural and human obstacles. It would supplant Marco Polo's out-of-date route. It would also supplant the route that Vasco da Gama dreamed of tracing on the sea by turning the Cape of Storms, assuming that he would ever succeed in achieving that crazy circuit.

To reach India by the west: what, in short, could be simpler? Actually, it had been under consideration for a long time, but the inventor of the idea, who had put it on the map for the first time, was a Florentine doctor, Paolo Toscanelli. Columbus knew of the existence of this map. It seemed that its author had sent it to John II, King of Portugal. Columbus needed it most urgently, so he wrote to Toscanelli, who made no difficulty about sending him this famous map; one admires his disinterest. Trembling with joy, the hermit of Porto Santo spread it out, and it was just as he imagined. With his finger he followed the 28th parallel from east to west: from Lisbon to Cipango was no distance at all! The figures were there: Europe and Asia together occupied 270 degrees, while the ocean which separated the western point of Europe from the eastern extremity of Asia filled only 90 degrees.

With his map Toscanelli had sent a copy of his request to John II through the latter's confessor. 'Do not be astonished,' he wrote, 'to see that I name as the Occident the places where the spices grow, for it is generally said that they flourish in the East. But he who continues to sail westwards will encounter these places in the west. And he who travels by the land route
in an easterly direction, without stopping, will reach these regions by the east.'

Columbus did not fail to thank the Florentine and took the opportunity of revealing his plan. Toscanelli replied: 'I am very pleased that you regard the voyage as not only possible, but certain and that there is no doubt about its realisation... This route leads to powerful kingdoms, and famous cities and provinces, where will be found in masses all those things of which we have read, for example all sorts of spices in plenty and precious stones in superabundance,... These princes and kings to whom we shall have access should rejoice, even more than ourselves, to enter into relations with the Christians of our lands, since many of them are Christians....'

Nothing could be better in the opinion of Christopher Columbus: gold and souls. For in the seething mind of the Genoese the desire for lucre was already inseparable from apostleship. It was not enough that some subjects of the Great Khan were Christians already: all must be so. The route to the Indies led to the possession of the world, but it came back to Christ.

It is good to conceive an idea, but better still to know that it is realisable. Christopher Columbus now needed someone of rank to be the confidant of his dreams. Above all he needed a partner, but not an active one. Where could one be found, except at Court?

In the year 1483 Columbus succeeded in obtaining an audience with John of Portugal. The new monarch—he had just ascended the throne—continued the work begun by Henry the Navigator. Having doubted it for a long time, he had been convinced that Portugal's future was on the sea. In his palace at Lisbon he busied himself less with diplomacy than with astronomy and navigation. Like the Infante of Sagres, he had gathered a group of scholars about him. He was in correspondence with foreign experts, especially with Abraham Zacuto, a Jewish professor of mathematics at Salamanca. It therefore seemed that Columbus should find a favourable reception at Court.

Walking across the palace flagstones with rapid steps, his head held high, and tightly grasping a roll of papers, Christopher Columbus advanced to meet the King. His appearance was good: of medium height but well-proportioned, with eyes that were light blue, and a skin that was very pale, with a few scattered freckles. He was bearded, and his hair was long and fair, tending towards red. One curious feature—especially as he does not
Magellan (Fernando de Magellanes) who finally discovered the sea-route into the Pacific
Two portraits of Christopher Columbus
appear to have been much more than thirty—was that he was already white at the temples. His nose was aquiline, while in the middle of his broad and clear brow was a vertical furrow, the sign of an uncommon will. His worn but tidy costume was that of a man of rank. In his hand he carried a plush cap slashed with silk, and he was wrapped in a tabard of green cloth, that short mantle with a turn-down hood, worn over armour and made fashionable among Christians by the Moors of Granada. Blue breeches could be seen beneath its skirts. On his feet were red boots of Cordoba leather, and at his belt hung the wide short sword customary with sea captains.

The exalted and learned assembly before which he appeared did not intimidate Columbus. Like an advocate at the bar, he opened his brief, spread out his maps, and displayed his plans. Above all, he talked, and his fluency was staggering. He piled up his figures and his references; he cited texts; he invoked Aristotle, Seneca, Ptolemy, and the masters of yesterday and today; and he poked fun at the Reverend Cosmos Indicopleustes, the ecclesiastical traveller of the early Middle Ages who represented the earth as a disc around which the sun turned. Cautiously, because the Church was suitably represented in the gathering, he deplored the mistakes of St. Augustine and certain doctors. How was it that these absurd theories had for so long received the approval of official cycles, and were even treated as dogma, when for several centuries the Muslims in their academies, the Jews in their synagogues and simple monks in their monasteries had shown that they were false? Was it not an Arab, Alfragan, who, in the 9th century, had proved that the earth was round? Christopher Columbus recited by heart whole passages from authors formerly rejected by the Church.

This exordium was not to the taste of the royal assembly. The bishops scowled, the scholars tightened their lips. John II repressed a smile and drily interrupted Columbus. 'What are you getting at?' he asked.

Columbus's tone then became pompous. He had not come as a beggar, but as a donor. His clothes told against him. Nevertheless, he had a secret that was worth gold. This secret he did not wish to keep to himself. He intended to offer it to Portugal, his adopted country. Triumphantly, he flourished his plan of a route to the Indies.

The Portuguese sovereign, the scholars and ecclesiastics leaned over Columbus's parchment, stretched out on the marble table. Martinez, the King's confessor, exclaimed: 'But this is
Toscanelli's map! In fact, the measurements were the same and on Columbus's sketch could be found the contours outlined by the Florentine doctor. The project was not a new one! Nevertheless, it was discussed, but without much conviction. Actually, the King had never taken Toscanelli's plan seriously. What faith could he place in this Italian, who was versed in the natural sciences but had never studied geography, and had navigated even less? The Toscanelli affair was well-known: his family—one of the richest in Florence—had made a fortune in the spice trade. By capturing Constantinople and thus by cutting the land route to the Indies, the Turks had ruined the Toscanellis. Paolo was now an old man, but his thirst for gold was greater than ever and he did not want to die without renewing contact with his warehouses. So, in retirement he had invented a new route for reaching the lands where, he said, 'there was much to gain'—the dreams of a miser, delirious and senile, that a serious mind could not take into consideration. The royal mathematicians leaned scornfully over Columbus's map; his measurements were wrong, he had confused Euclid's degrees with Ptolemy's, and the Arab miles of Alfragan with those of Behaim. But Christopher Columbus did not admit defeat. He stood up to the assembly. Even if the measurements were inexact, would it not yield gold? Not only gold, but also an alliance with the most powerful ruler on earth, which would mean the end of Islam.

The Royal Chancellor cut Columbus short. His plan had been in the archives for a long time. It had been fully dealt with in the bull sent by Pope Nicolas V thirty years earlier to King John II's predecessor, regarding the conquests of Henry the Navigator. The royal official delivered a lecture about it: 'The Infante, recalling that no one had ever, in the memory of man, been known to navigate this ocean... believed that it would give God the greatest evidence of submission if, through his care, this ocean could be made navigable as far as the Indies that were said to be obedient to Christ. If he should enter into relations with these peoples, he would move them to come to the aid of the Christians of the West against the Saracens and the enemies of the Faith. At the same time he would with royal permission subdue the heathens of these countries, not yet infected by the Mohammedan plague, making them recognise the name of Christ...

This time it was Christopher Columbus's turn to smile. Now they were drawing upon Henrique for evidence! During
Henrique's lifetime he was regarded as mad and they had nearly shut him up. What was madness yesterday was wisdom today! Columbus bit his lips and kept the reflection to himself.

The Portuguese Court knew what it had to do: it needed no foreigner to remind it of its duties. The material and political interest of the route to the Indies had never escaped it. This contact with the Great Khan, which was highly desirable both for Europe and for Christianity, would be achieved on the day when the ships turned the Cape of Good Hope and reached the eastern tip of Asia. The studies were already far advanced. Portugal was rich enough in men of courage and talent to expect that soon some navigator would extend and complete Bartolomé Díaz' exploit. But the western route was madness. Columbus said nothing, but thought of Henry and of other madmen who had been proved right.

The audience was drawing to an end. Half serious and half amused, John II asked Columbus what would be his conditions if he was given command of a westward expedition. Imperturbably, the Genoese named them: the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea, the viceroyalty and the government of all the lands discovered and to be discovered, transmissible to his heirs, the tenth part of the prize and the exclusive right to legislate in the territories conquered.

Columbus's claims were received with a burst of laughter. Someone remarked that Portuguese were not in the habit of making money out of services to their country. His tales, moreover, were grotesque. Already he had abused the royal patience enough. The audience was ended.

Christopher Columbus picked up his papers, bowed to the King and, without a glance at the assembly, left the room. As he crossed the threshold, he lightly shrugged his shoulders. If Portugal did not want his plan, he would suggest it to some other nation. Should it be France or Spain?

**VICTORY AT GRANADA**

He decided upon Spain.

His repulse at the hands of the King of Portugal had cruelly wounded his self-esteem, for he was very impressionable despite his outward hardness. For some months he wandered about the streets of Lisbon like a lost soul. Would it be true to say that he was a vagabond? What did he live on? Very little, certainly,
and even that was borrowed. His position in Portugal became untenable. He could expect no more of that ungrateful kingdom but further affronts and perhaps imprisonment for debt. So he fled.

For it was in reality a fugitive who one winter evening fell at the foot of the cross that stood before the monastery of Santa Maria de la Rabida. He was exhausted, half dead with hunger. He held a child of four years by the hand: his own son, Diego. What had he done with his wife, the gentle Felipa? Why had he left her in Portugal? Was this premeditated desertion, or was she perhaps dead? So far as we are concerned, she was, for the touching bride of Porto Santo was from that moment effaced from the tale of Columbus.

The Franciscan monastery of La Rabida, which is the Arabic for 'watch-tower,' lay some sixty miles from Seville, and two hours on foot from Huelva. With its white-washed walls and its trees bent by the ocean breeze, it was more a granja than a monastery—or rather, a family mansion. The monastery comprised only two inner cloisters, a small church and scarcely more than a dozen cells. But its dome could be seen far out at sea and served as a guide to pilots. Around the monastery grew aloes and palms, though the terraces, supported by walls of dried earth, had collapsed beneath the weight of the orchards: vines, lemon-trees, fig-trees, and caper-bushes. It was an African landscape. Built on a shaded hill, the monastery overlooked the mouth of the Odiel and of the Rio Tinto, and from its high windows could be seen the Gulf of Cadiz. Four miles further on lay Falos de la Frontera, whence Columbus eventually set sail.

At that moment he was thinking of setting out for France, where Charles VIII had just succeeded Louis XI. It was said that he was a man of great imagination. Columbus would bring him something that would satisfy it. While he mused sadly as he leaned against the stone stylobate, the gatekeeper came towards him. Columbus pointed to Diego and murmured simply: 'Bread and water for my child!' Moved by such misfortune and struck by the nobility and bearing of the stranger, the monk went off to inform the prior, Juan Perez. The prior left his cell, came out of the monastery door, looked at Columbus for a moment and laid a hand on his shoulder. He drew him towards the monastery. The door closed behind them.

Antonio de Marchena, a monk well versed in geographical knowledge, was present at the first interview between Juan Perez and Christopher Columbus, and the two men lent an
attentive ear to the vagabond's words. The old books were opened, the maps were unrolled, and it was something like an examination that the Franciscan made Columbus undergo. It seems to have been decisive. The plan was worth study. The adventure was perhaps worth an attempt, but support and enormous subsidies would be needed. Juan Perez was Queen Isabella's former confessor and not so retired from the world that he had not maintained contact with the Court. In short, he was so affected by the man and his words that he was inclined to use the contacts in Columbus's favour.

What was it that developed from this three-sided conversation? Nothing precise and nothing immediate, except for an agreement on principle and a formal promise of support. For the moment Christopher Columbus needed nothing more. He was one of those who, always poised between dream and action, knew how to be content with the one provided that it prepared the way for the other. He entrusted his child to the Franciscans and vanished.

Once again there is an obscure gap in his life. For two years only glimpses of him can be had. He made frequent trips between La Rabida and Seville, sojourned at Huelva (with a sister-in-law?) and then is lost to sight once more. Anyway, it seems that his affairs were in a better way. The intervention of the Prior Juan Perez must have born fruit. In fact, he frequented the great lords of Seville, the Andalusian business magnates, always in search of the subvention which would make it possible for him to pass at last into the realm of reality. First of all, he was received by the Duke of Medina Sidonia, a rich ship-owner of Seville, who had the tunny-fishing monopoly in the Gibraltar region. Then, having been unsuccessful with this gentleman fisherman, he approached another, the Duke of Medina Celi: in his domain—at Puerto de Santa Maria, this duke had a flotilla of caravels and three-masters with a dual purpose: they were used for commerce and also for pursuing the war against the Moors of Granada. Medina Celi allowed himself to be convinced by Columbus. At the end of the western route to the Indies, the duke could catch the odour of spices. The adventure was worth the risk of two vessels.

At the last moment, Medina Celi changed his mind. On reflection, the business was beyond him. It was within the province of the Court. Furthermore, the most urgent matters demanded his attention, for he was called to Cordoba with his men of arms, where King Ferdinand had need of all the available
forces in Christian Spain. The final assault on Granada had begun. God knew how long it would last!

In Spain the question of the day that excited public opinion and preoccupied the princes was to complete the Reconquest. Ferdinand II, the Saint, King of Castile and Leon, had carried his frontiers to Cordoba and Seville. James I of Aragon, the Conqueror, took possession of the Balearics and Murcia. But two centuries had passed since then. Incredible as such a halt may seem, more than two hundred years passed between the capture of Cordoba and the capture of Granada. Civil wars, dynastic rivalries and local particularisms explain the interval. Almost all Spain had become Christian again, except the Kingdom of Granada, which stretched along the Mediterranean coast from Gibraltar to Almeria and in the north reached to the sources of the Guadalquivir. Two centuries to cross a mountain, the Sierra Nevada!

Isabella and Ferdinand, who simultaneously united their loves and their kingdoms, had put the expulsion of the Moors at the top of their political programme, and they had forced the Cortes to vote the credits necessary to the success of the campaign. It was to cost the Treasury a million silver ducats. Pope Sixtus IV had granted them a Bull of Crusade and had thereby given a religious character to the undertaking. A hundred thousand soldiers were drawn up. The final liberation of Spain had its price.

Malaga, Almeria and Cadiz had just fallen into the crusaders' hands. But Granada held out, a thorn in the heel of Christian Spain. It had to be torn out.

The southward movement of the centre of gravity in the battle against the Moors had forced the Court to move. It was Cordoba, for a long time a frontier city, constantly menaced by Arab incursions, which had now become the capital of warring Spain. Deserting Valladolid for a time, the Catholic monarchs were established in Cordoba, a hundred miles from Granada. It was a battle position rather than a royal residence.

Abandoned by the Duke of Medina Celi, his protector, Christopher Columbus left Seville for Cordoba. There he made the acquaintance of Gabriel de Acosta, a strange man, a doctor, astrologer and geographer. Acosta was interested by the enigmatical character of Columbus, but in the person of Acosta Columbus made contact with the one who was to open a way for him to the throne of the Spanish sovereigns. For it was
now Columbus’s fixed idea to reach the Catholic monarchs, so as to submit his plan to them.

Tenaciously and by stages, Columbus began his task of approach by way of the clerks of the Royal Chancellery. This stubborn man’s reserves of patience were inexhaustible. In a few months he had brought into action the Master of the Accounts, Alfonso de Quintanilla, the Grand Chamberlain, Cabrero and King Ferdinand’s secretary-accountant, Luis de Santangel. Passed on from one to another, he ended by being received by the Cardinal of Spain, Gonzalez de Mendoza, ‘the third monarch.’ This prelate, a skilful politician, a valorous warrior and grand seigneur, did not understand much of practical science, so he leant a willing ear to the discourses of Christopher Columbus. He was enchanted by the prospects opened up to him by the Genoese. An alliance with the Great Khan seemed to him desirable; it would complete the decisive action which the armies of Their Catholic Majesties were preparing at that moment around Granada. As to the purely scientific arguments advanced by Columbus, the soldier-cardinal was in no position to discuss them, but he understood enough to be persuaded that they merited examination by the experts. Anyway, the matter was one of importance: it could and ought to be submitted to royal authority.

The year 1486 was a significant one in the life of Christopher Columbus, for it was then that he appeared before the Catholic monarchs. In the same year he met Beatriz Enriquez de Arana, the woman he was to love above all others. Isabella of Castile and Beatriz were respectively the mistress of his destiny and the mistress of his heart.

It was in the former Alcazar of the Arab kings, that had now become the palace of the Spanish sovereigns, that the interview took place between Christopher Columbus and Isabella and Ferdinand. Never was the Genoese more eloquent. He well knew that he was playing his last card. He laid stress on the political and religious aspect of the enterprise. He recalled that the Great Khan had for two centuries been touched by grace and that Marco Polo had occupied himself with establishing diplomatic relations between the ‘King of Kings’ and the Papacy. But it had not been possible completely to effect the liaison, for the road from Rome to Pekin was long and difficult. The pontifical envoys and those of the Great Khan came to a stop en route. Only two ambassadorships had succeeded: Marco Polo’s, in the name of Gregory X, to Kublai and, in the opposite
direction—half a century ago—that of Kublai’s successor to Eugene IV. Since then no one had know what was happening at the Court of China. Columbus stated forcefully that it behoved Their Catholic Majestics to resume contact with the Asiatic emperor, to ally themselves to him and thus form the most formidable confederation of peoples that had ever been seen. The Musulmans would no longer weigh heavy on the scales, where on one side was Europe and on the other Asia. And what a harvest of souls for the Church of Christ! Christopher Columbus was not afraid of taking up the crusaders’ cry: ‘Dieu le veut.’

Isabella and Ferdinand listened attentively to the musical voice which flowed endlessly like the waters of a stream. After having rung like a trumpet while evoking the service of God, it became insinuating regarding the riches of Cathay. Then Christopher added gesture to his words, and with his prophet’s hands described the marble quays, the gold-plated palaces, the ships with multi-coloured sails and prows ornamented with dragons, the endless lines of men carrying on their shoulders cases filled with diamonds and pearls...a theme that had now become familiar to Columbus and which he developed with the ease of an actor at his hundredth performance.

Isabella dreamed, for she was a woman, and her love of finery and taste for dress were touched by the stranger’s evocations. Precious stones and silk! She had not forgotten her almost poor childhood at Madrigal de las Altas Torres, in the ‘black lands’ of Old Castile. Christopher Columbus was softened at seeing the reflection of gold in the pupils of the pale queen. Would he end by completely believing the story himself?

Ferdinand of Aragon was dreaming too. He thought of the Portuguese, of their forward march along the African coasts, of their slow and painful penetration of unknown lands. For a long time the Spaniards had laughed at this point-to-point race; what a lot of money had been swallowed up for nothing, by Henry the Mad, the paper navigator! But in recent times the business had become a paying one. The gold of Sierra Leone and the maleguetta pepper of Guinea were in a fair way to repaying the expenditure of thirty years, and the cosmographers of Lisbon were forecasting the early opening of the route to the Indies by the Cape of Good Hope. The lead which the Portuguese had achieved over the Spaniards was incontestible, but Columbus’s project, if it could be effected, would permit Spain not only to
recover this gap, but also to surpass her rivals. The way to the Indies, immediate and direct, was an exciting prospect.

Alliance with the Great Khan, the ruin of Islam, the ousting of Portugal, the spiritual and material annexation of hundreds of millions of men, the conquest of the sources of gold and riches,—these amounted in all to the possession of the world. The proposition was tempting, too tempting in fact. For, though Ferdinand was ambitious, his prudence was greater. This vagabond who stood before him as wise man and preacher, was perhaps right, but he might also be a hoaxer. Moreover, the moment was not propitious for effecting such a new drain on the Treasury, already sorely tried by the war against Granada. Inch by inch the Catholic monarchs were in process of reconquering the last refuge of the Arab occupiers, and each inch cost the royal purse dearly. So Ferdinand decided to submit Columbus's plan to a commission of scholars. The monk Talavera, prior of Santa Maria del Prado at Valladolid, the Queen's confessor and later Archbishop of Granada, presided over this commission.

Columbus's cause was once again referred to the experts, which amounts to saying that it was postponed sine die. The Genoese expected nothing good from the scholars. They were dogmatists in whom the one master quality, imagination, was lacking. The first meeting of the commission at Cordoba confirmed his fears, for it ended by rejecting his plan, 'which did not rest on a firm enough base for the good name of Spain to be exposed in such an enterprise, nor the lives of those who would accompany it.'

For this new failure Christopher Columbus consoled himself in the arms of Beatriz Enrique de Arana, whom he had just met. She was blue-eyed and fair, like Isabella of Castile. He was soon to have a child by her, whom he named Fernando.

The months passed. The war against the Moors of Granada dragged on and on. Christopher Columbus lost heart. He could be seen at the monastery of San Esteban at Salamanca, among the Dominicans whom he strove to convince; he could be glimpsed at Malaga, which had become Christian again, in search of available vessels; and despite the unpleasant memories he retained of Portugal, he wrote to John II to offer him his plan a second time. He sent Bartolomé, his brother, to England. But neither the Portuguese sovereign nor Henry VII took Columbus's project seriously. He fell back again on the Spanish sovereigns. Thanks to the friendships he maintained at the court of the
Catholic monarchs—particularly that of Father Diego de Dieza, tutor to the heir to the throne—he succeeded in getting himself summoned to the camp at Santa Fe, under the walls of besieged Granada.

It was granted to Christopher Columbus to be present at the death throes of Arab rule. What a battle and what a scene! On the three hills where the buttresses of the Sierra Nevada come to an end, the city of Granada rises in tiers: the Vermillion Towers, the Alhambra, the Alcazaba. The vega stretches all around, washed by the river Genil. The perpetual enchantment of the Andalusian huertas, the profusion of arbutus trees, and the sweet scent of orange trees, were in striking contrast to the uproar of a people in arms. Isabella and Ferdinand were of course too busy to give audience to Columbus, but they informed him that his business would be examined after the fall of Granada.

After the fall of Granada? Columbus noted those words. Meanwhile, he decided to stay in the Santa Fe camp. Lost in the crowd and wandering for several months among the fifty thousand Spanish infantry, the Genoese became bored. He ascended the Zubia, which overlooks Granada. The three hills reddened in the sunlight. On the highest of them, the Alhambra rose like a torch. In the shadows he saw in his mind’s eye the Court of the Myrtles and the Hall of the Ambassadors. What colours there were, violent and voluptuous at once!—but less violent and less voluptuous than those he saw beyond the Dark Sea.

In the end Boabdil, the last of the Moorish kings, capitulated. The dawn of January 2, 1492, rose over Granada, and the Catholic monarchs, preceded by the banners of Santiago and the Virgin, moved out of the camp of Santa Fe. Beside them rode the Grand Cardinal of Spain. Boabdil, accompanied by fifty knights, came out to meet his conquerors. When he reached the banks of the Genil, the Moor stepped down and handed Ferdinand the keys of the Alcazar. Then, while the Christian advance guards penetrated Granada, Cardinal Mendoza raised the silver pontifical cross and the standard of Castile at the summit of the Comares tower. ‘Granada to the Catholic monarchs!’ a herald proclaimed from the top of the Vela tower. Arab domination, which had lasted for almost eight centuries, was broken, and Musulman Spain was no more.

Christopher Columbus watched this historic scene from afar. He shrugged his shoulders. What a din over such a small affair! It had taken the Catholic monarchs more than ten years and a
million silver ducats to make an end of a usurping kinglet, and though it was fine to see the blackamoor weeping at his mother's skirts, he, Christopher Columbus, was asking but a few weeks and one caravel in order to seek an empire and the alliance of the Great Khan!

The hour had come for Columbus to confront the Spanish sovereigns once more and for them to keep their word. Granada had fallen. So one morning, when all were still agog with the Christian victory, Columbus made his way to the camp at Sante Fe and to the tent that Their Majesties still inhabited, for they found it preferable to the Alhambra.

He who had been derisively named 'the man in the threadbare cloak' presented himself to the Catholic monarchs, for the second time, like a master. Was he not after all a purveyor of kingdoms? And the conversation that had begun at Cordoba six years before was resumed in the same style, for his plan had not changed, nor had his demands. They were those that he had always formulated and of which he was determined to relinquish nothing. He recited then to a stupefied Ferdinand: the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea, the viceroyalty of the territories discovered, ten per cent of the riches he acquired. . . . The King did not let him proceed. Such demands were insanel Isabella, despite her sympathy for Columbus, shared her husband's irritation at such presumption. The Genoese was dismissed coldly, as he had been by John II of Portugal.

This time Christopher Columbus lost patience. Since neither Spain, nor Portugal, nor England wanted his plan, he would go and offer it to France. He had held this last card in reserve. He was about to play it.

Where could he find the money to go to France? At the monastery of La Rabida. He left Granada, went to Seville and Huesca and then, one evening, knocked at the monastery door. Eight years had passed since his first visit, and he had made scarcely any progress since. There he found Perez, Father de Marchena and his friends the monks. He told them of his rebuffs and of his resolve. Juan Perez was moved: Columbus perhaps was mad, but it was a greater madness to let him go. The prior had maintained considerable influence over the Queen, so he did not hesitate to write to her at Santa Fe to beg her to give consideration to Columbus's plan. He did not hesitate to invoke the interest of the Crown and of Christianity, of which Spain, and not France, was the guarantor. Was it desirable that Charles VIII of Valois should accept what Isabella of Castile had refused?
The Queen's reply was not long delayed. She agreed to resume the discussions with Columbus. Would Juan Perez come to Granada with his protégé? The young sovereign's heart and mind were easily persuaded by the former confessor's arguments, for she had been won over to Columbus's cause ever since the first encounter, but Ferdinand had still to be convinced, which was why the Franciscan's presence was required.

Juan Perez was not the only one to lay siege to the King of Aragon, for he had found allies in the immediate entourage of the Spanish sovereigns. Besides Santangel, the 'Grand Treasurer,' who had long been favourably disposed towards Columbus's ideas, there were all those who from far and near managed the royal chest and hoped that the discovery of the route to the Indies would enrich the Treasury. The gold and spices of Cathay would re-establish the State's finances, and those honest stewards doubtless thought that there would be a pinch left over for themselves.

In short, it was the men of the Church—except for a few cautious theologians—and the Jews who supported Columbus's cause. The former—Juan Perez, Marchena, the Cardinal de Mendoza, Diego de Dieza, Talavera—saw that the success of Columbus would mean also the success of a vast political and religious project; the domination of the world under the symbol of the Spanish Christ. The Jews—Cabrero, Santangel, and a certain influential official named Sanchez, all of them 'converted,' but Jews nevertheless—by upholding Columbus gave evidence of their Christian feelings, since an evangelising enterprise was involved. It was, in fact, a fine opportunity to display their zeal—not forgetting that there was gold at the end of the road.

Fervent though these monks and Jews were in their support of Columbus, neither party succeeded in securing Ferdinand's adhesion, nor did Isabella. As for the great political plan of which Columbus spoke, it was the Queen who bore it within her like a child; she adorned it with all the strange colours of the unknown, for this capable woman had imagination. She coldly computed the risks and chances of the business; she estimated the assets and the liabilities; but at the same time she could not prevent herself from dreaming.

Gradually, under pressure from his entourage, Ferdinand was convinced by Columbus's arguments. He agreed that the voyage might succeed. He agreed to the idea of an alliance with the Great Khan. He believed in the virtues of gold, which, said Columbus emphatically in a letter written to the sovereign later,
was the finest thing in the world. 'Gold,' he declared somewhat heretically, 'rules everything. Its power is such that it is able to deliver souls from Purgatory or open to them the gates of Paradise.'

But Ferdinand was not going to decide yet. He certainly agreed to give Columbus his patronage, to facilitate things for him and to provide all or part of the funds necessary for equipping the fleet. He was ready to sign the contract. But he could not bring himself to give Columbus the honours he demanded. Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy for life, transmissible to his heirs! It would amount to making this adventurer the second personage of the realm—and he was not even Spanish! Perhaps the first, if his discoveries were to put the Spanish Crown in peril. Ferdinand's pride bled at the thought of this overseas empire which might absorb his own. He was not going to make a potential rival with his own hands.

Ferdinand asked for time to think, but Columbus was firmly determined to abandon none of his claims, and it seemed that the matter was postponed yet again. Columbus then staked everything. This consummate actor staged a show-down. He pretended to abandon his plans. He told those nearest him that the discussions had been broken off and that he was preparing to leave the country. He went even further: he mounted his mule and rode out of Santa Fe, but not without first informing Santangel.

This false departure was certainly Columbus's finest gamble. It was a risky business, for his whole destiny was involved in the subterfuge. What if they did not fetch him back?

Two leagues out of Granada, at the place known as Puente de los Pinos, Columbus heard a horse behind him galloping. It was Isabella's courier! The clatter of hoofs on the dry earth was to Columbus like the sound of a fanfare, and before the royal messenger had even caught up with him, he knew that he had triumphed.

On a fine April morning, three months after the capture of Granada, Christopher Columbus and the Catholic monarchs signed the Santa Fe convention. To the Genoese they gave complete satisfaction—and more!

'Columbus, for the duration of his life, his heirs and successors, for ever, will enjoy, on all the lands and continents he may discover or acquire in the Ocean, the office of admiral, with the honours and prerogatives similar to those enjoyed by the Grand Admiral of Castile.'
He shall be Viceroy and Governor of all the aforesaid lands and continents, with the privilege of nominating three candidates to the government of each island or province, one of whom shall be chosen by the Sovereign.

He shall have the right to retain for himself, during his Admiralty, the tenth part, after deduction of expenses, of the precious stones, gold, silver, spices and all other articles of trade by whatever means he obtain them: by purchase, barter or conquest.

He and his lieutenant shall be the sole judges of all the suits and causes which might be occasioned by trade between Spain and these lands.

Finally, he may at all times contribute an eighth part of the costs of arming vessels destined to the discovery and to receive an eighth part of the profits.*

Such was the exorbitant contract that Christopher Columbus signed with the Catholic monarchs. Nothing like it had ever been seen or would ever be seen again. Surely, this was trafficking with the unknown. Doubtless, too, the Spanish monarchs secretly speculated on the hazards of the undertaking. If Columbus found nothing, or perished at sea, the Crown would have made a bad investment, but the cost would be very small. If he won, the Catholic monarchs would know how in practice to limit the scope of the agreement. And besides, was it conceivable that Columbus would be able, with a few hundred men and two or three caravels, to defeat the innumerable army of the Great Khan, if there should be a battle?

Thus neither Columbus’s undertaking nor Isabella’s and Ferdinand’s was entirely sincere. Both sides had made mental reservations. Columbus was not sure of success; while the Catholic monarchs reckoned on keeping only part of their promises. Nevertheless, in this mad contest against nature, rulers and men, begun eight years before, Columbus had won the first round.
BETWEEN the mouths of the Guadiana and Guadalquivir the Andalusian coast forms a continuous curve, wide open to the Gulf of Cadiz. Huelva, the property of the Dukes of Medina Sidonia, stands on a peninsula formed by the Tinto and the Odiel. Following the palm-fringed left bank of the Odiel, La Rabida is reached in an hour, and in another hour Palos de la Frontera, while in yet another Moguer. The Río Tinto, which means 'the red river,' because it is saturated with copper, waters and colours the land. But the province of Huelva was rich not only in minerals; the shipbuilders had made it the centre of their activity. The regular lie of the coast and its admirable aspect lent themselves excellently to the construction and launching of ships. Further south lay Sanlúcar de Barrameda and then Cadiz.

Palos, Moguer, La Rabida: blinding white houses, old Arab palaces in Mudejar style, the remains of Roman fortresses and, on the sandy pine-fringed beaches, immense nets drying in the scorching heat of the Andalusian sun. This was the brilliant scene that witnessed Columbus's final anxieties before departure.

To give an order is one thing, but to carry it out is another, and Columbus was to prove this bitter formula to his cost.

Money had been found to finance the expedition. Isabella had not needed to pledge her jewels with the Jews, for by scraping the bottoms of drawers, and by one means or another, it had been possible to get together the million maravedís in gold that were required to cover the initial cost. It had been foreseen that more would be needed. A month after the agreement of Santa Fe—Columbus had meanwhile secured from the Catholic monarchs the transmission to his descendants of the dignities and prerogatives of the viceroyalty, as well as the title of Don—the new Admiral arrived at Palos. He was in possession of royal ordinances commanding the municipality to equip and
arm two caravels. A period of ten days was given the inhabitants of Palos to carry them out, and Columbus immediately placed an embargo on the two caravels which seemed to him the best rigged among the vessels anchored in the port. He had now to recruit the crews.

The ten-day period slipped by. The weeks passed. The summer arrived. No one had come to present himself at the enrolment table. What was the reason for this mistrust of Columbus? First, he had no standing in the eyes of the sailors of Palos, for everyone knew that he had done more navigating through the royal antechambers than upon the ocean. Further, he had been seen earlier at La Rabida, dressed in rags and sponging on the monks, but now he was wearing an embroidered cloak, with a sword at his side and on his chest a double necklet of amber beads. None could forget the vagabond of yesterday. What right, moreover, had this foreigner to invoke the name of the Catholic monarchs in this crude fashion. Further, these old sea-dogs—there were some who had even been as far as Guinea—did not believe in Columbus's speeches. They remembered with terror that Sea of Weeds, that liquid prairie which seized the caravels in its grip. Cipango? The Great Khan? Why not the Earthly Paradise? The experienced captains shook their heads.

Columbus was in despair. He had the ships, the money and the royal guarantee, but now he had encountered an unforeseen obstacle. In fact, not for a second had he thought that crews would be hard to come by. Angrily he had the enrolment table, which had stood before the church of Palos, taken away. Although it had been covered with golden coins, no one had approached it, except at a distance and in order to laugh.

Once again Columbus found help and consolation in Juan Perez. All hope was not lost. Martin Alonso, the most influential and the most successful of the Pinzon family (by its wealth it ruled Palos and Moguer) had left for the port of Ostia with a cargo of Andalusian wines. He would soon be back. He was a man worth consulting. He was of the country; he was interested in geography; and, above all, he was richer than all the Andalusian dukes put together.

It was at the monastery of La Rabida that Columbus met Martin Alonso Pinzon. It happened that this traveller had been to Rome, where he had been the guest of a friend of Pope Innocent VIII. Turning over the maps in the Vatican Library, Pinzon's attention had been attracted by one in which Cipango
figured to the west of the Spanish coast. The Andalusian had not imagined that Europe was so close to the Indies, perhaps only 1,000 leagues from the Canaries, by the sea road. He compared the facts he brought back from Rome with those given by Columbus. The similarity was striking, Pinzon was enthusiastic; Columbus was too, but he concealed his pleasure. He needed Martin Alonso, so much was clear; but it was unnecessary to make it too obvious. Inactive partners, shareholders, collaborators, certainly; but associates, no.

Meanwhile, Columbus drew in his claws. He showed himself conciliatory, even humble, for he wished to win Pinzon over. By flattery he easily succeeded. The Andalusian agreed in the end to take over the technical direction of the preparations, in matters of personnel and material. It might be said that at the right moment Columbus always found the one man to save the situation, for he expressed his plans, needs and even his despair with an eloquence that seems to have derived its unction from the monks, its brilliance from the Italians, its nervous strength from the Spaniards and its subtlety from the Jews. To know how to talk, that is everything.

**PREPARATIONS**

Martin Alonso was the head of the Pinzon family, of which there were two branches. His own comprised three brothers: Francisco Martin, Vicente Yañez and himself, with their numerous children. The other branch, headed by his cousin Diego Martin, known as 'the Elder,' had a vast progeniture. All of them, father and sons, were sailors. Furthermore, the Pinzons were allied through various marriages to the most notable families in the land. In brief, it was a dynasty of captains and merchants which reigned over the ports of the Rio Tinto and the Rio Odiel. Their trade prospered. They trafficked with Guinea and the Canaries and even pushed as far as Sicily.

Martin Alonso's first concern was to examine the two caravels selected by Columbus. A glance sufficed to assure him that they were unsuitable for the expedition. He procured two other caravels, doubtless the best among all those that swung gently on the waters of the port of Palos. They bore the names *Pinta* and *Niña*, since their proprietors were named Pinto and Niño.

A glance at these caravels is indispensable to anyone who wishes to follow Columbus on his mad expedition. They were
the same ships as those which, from the beginning of the 15th century, had carried the first discoverers safely to port. What could the artisans of the Conquest have done without this splendid instrument?

The caravels were a Portuguese invention. Simple merchant vessels by origin, they had been designed for coasting and carrying merchandise. But during increasingly distant cruises they won their title to nobility and became the vessels of the Discovery.

All the nations, including the Turks, had adopted this type of vessel—fast, light and easy to handle. Essentially, they comprised a hull of which the bottom was flat for a third of the length of the keel, with very full extremities. Projecting bulwarks and vertical bulwarks (bularcanas) strengthened the external structure. Aft of the deck was a castle (tolda), surmounted by the poop (toldilla). The forecastle (castillo) overhung the stem. The two castles, fore and aft, were very high in relation to the deck. The captain’s cabin (chopa or chupeta) was situated below the toldilla. As for the crew, officers and men, they were lodged as best they could under the tolda, protected from the spray by awnings. The rigging comprised three masts and a bowsprit. The main mast, firmly planted in the kelson and held by guys, carried a large square sail or treho. The foremast, fixed to the deck, bore a smaller sail, but also square, called the trinquette. The mizen mast, near the poop, bore a lateen triangular sail. Finally, foreward and leaning towards the horizon, was the bowsprit which carried the cebadera.

The shallow draft of the caravels facilitated manoeuvre. Fearing neither reefs nor mud-bottom, they could navigate along reputedly dangerous coasts, negotiate channels and enter rivers.

The caravels took about forty crew. Their speed—fast for the period—scarcely exceeded five or six knots. They are sometimes shown covered with gold and carving; but this is false, for caravels were cargo vessels and did not normally carry passengers. Moreover, they were devoid of all comforts, and lacked even an inner surfacing. Life on them was hard and the risks were constant. It is a miracle that such ships—nutshells that danced at the will of the waves or that a wind could carry away—had been able to conquer the ocean.

The caravels were the vehicle of the Discovery. But besides the maps, the Conquistadors had instruments to steer by. To orientate themselves, they used compasses, astrolabes, portulans and astronomical tables.
The compass, unknown to the ancients but used by the Chinese for more than a thousand years before the Christian era, had been passed on to the Spaniards by the Arabs. It consisted of a needle floating on water in a wooden case. The astrolabe, invented by Hipparchus two centuries before Christ and perfected by the German astronomer John of Koenigsberg, served to plot the position of the stars and their height above the horizon.

Besides the astrolabe and the compass, the sailors consulted the documents drawn up by the geographers and astronomers. On the portulans elaborated by scholars or monks they could locate the seaports, the currents and the tides; in brief, it was a coloured calligraphy of the known world kept scrupulously up to date and modified with every discovery. Finally, the astronomical tables gave an approximate picture of the sky. It needed much learning and patience to extract any practical information from these scribblings, unintelligible as they were to the common people.

Such were the technical means available to the navigators when Columbus was preparing to cross the Dark Sea. Yet it should be recorded that the pilots who could use these means properly were few. Audacity did not always go hand in hand with learning. It will be seen that Columbus was incapable of explaining to his crew the variations of the compass, yet the men of his day knew the phenomenon of local declination, that is to say, the angle made by the magnetic needle with geographical north under the influence of terrestrial magnetism.

The *Pinta* and the *Niña* swung gently in the port of Palos. Columbus could only confirm Pinzon’s choice, Pinzon’s competence being indisputable. But for his own part he found these caravels very modest for an ambassador of the Catholic monarchs. They would make a poor showing beside the vessels of the Great Khan, with dragons and unicorns carved on their timbers. So, in order not to strain the susceptibilities of the Andalusian captain, he accepted the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, suggesting at the same time that they add a third caravel for the commander of the fleet, the Commander-in-Chief of the expedition, that is to say himself. On his arrival at Palos, Columbus had observed a vessel which was distinguished from the rest by its great dimensions: a cock among the chickens. It was certainly more than 120 tons, while the *Pinta* and the *Niña* did not exceed 100 tons. Moreover, its speed was nine knots. It was exactly what suited this commoner, for whom nothing was too noble.
For this vagabond and son of a wineshop-keeper was constantly obsessed by the matter of appearances. As at Lisbon, Cordoba and Santa Fe, he was to give evidence in the little city of Palos of the same lofty demands. Caravels? Certainly; but for himself one that was bigger than the rest.

The ship coveted by Columbus bore the gay name of Mariagalante. As it had been built in a Galician port, it was also called 'the Galician.'

The captain of the Mariagalante (he was also its owner) was Juan de la Cosa, a native of Santona, a little city half-way between Bilbao and Santander. From the very first he pleased Columbus. This Basque seemed to have all the virtues of his race: seriousness, sobriety and a quiet earnestness at work. He spoke little, smiled often and noticed a great deal; in appearance he was gentle, but his strong jaw and his deep-sunken eyes revealed that this quiet little man could show himself merciless in grave circumstances. Moreover, the whole crew of the Mariagalante were after the pattern of its skipper. All of them were Basques and accustomed to rough voyages in the Bay of Biscay; they were thick-skinned and did not know how to take a joke. They distrusted everything that was not Galician or Basque. Excellent sailors, but hot-tempered, they obeyed Juan de la Cosa without question. Would they accept another captain? Columbus knew how to find the words to win Juan de la Cosa to his side. Quite simply, glory and fortune were what he put before him. The Basque agreed to surrender his ship to Columbus, and to it he added himself. Although proprietor and captain of the Mariagalante he wished while on board to remain simply master of the crew and pilot. This would give confidence to his men, who would never consent to enlist under the orders of a stranger. Columbus had done an excellent job; a reliable ship—and one that was bigger than the rest!—an experienced pilot and a trustworthy crew, all without spending a maravedi. Indeed, Juan de la Cosa refused to discuss money. There would be plenty of time, when they got back from Cipango, to claim repayment of the costs of the expedition from the Catholic monarchs. Columbus was troubled by one last scruple. The name Mariagalante was a tiresome reminder of those ladies of light morals who sold their charms to the soldiers. Was it a fitting name for the flagship of a Christian fleet? It should not be forgotten that Columbus's embassy was also apostolic. So a few strokes with a brush put an end to the profane inscription, and the Mariagalante became the Santa Maria.
The problem of armament was settled. There remained, so far as the Pinta and Niña were concerned, the problem of crews. That was Martin Alonso's business. Like Columbus, the elder Pinzon was also persuasive, though his method differed from that of the Genoese. There was no contempt, no conceit in his attitude to his men. He treated them with a mixture of familiarity and respect. 'Señor Marino,' he addressed the swarthy, hairy fellows that stank of grease and tar while they mended their nets on the beach at Palos, and he doffed his hat to them as if at Court. 'Come to Cipango, the city of golden roofs!' he added, leading them gently towards the enrolment table. Gradually the heap of gold shrank, and at this point Columbus began to grow anxious. The Queen's million, to which Santangel had spontaneously added 140,000 maravedis, had been seriously broached, for the payment of advances to the crews, the refitting of the vessels, and the purchase of munitions and supplies had consumed a large part of the royal subsidy. To be exact, a further half-million maravedis in gold was still needed, but there was no question of asking for Isabella's help a second time. When Columbus spoke to him of his anxieties, Martin Alonso smiled. If 500,000 maravedis were still needed, he would find them! In a few days the Pinzon family had got them together. To those of his family who were alarmed at being involved without security of any kind, Martin Alonso replied. 'The word of a sailor is worth more than the scribbles of a notary!'

Martin Alonso's infectious enthusiasm, the contribution of a further half-million, and the example of the Santa María's crew had their effect. In the space of three weeks the personnel of the flotilla was complete: 120 men in all, natives for the most part of the localities along the Rio Tinto and Rio Odiel. The rest, other than Juan de la Cosa's Basques, came from every direction. There was one from Valencia, Juan Martinez de Azogue, four who had been under sentence of death and taken from the prison at Huelva, an Englishman, an Irishman, and a few Castilians who happened to be at Palos.

Columbus, 'the man in the tattered cloak,' having become Admiral, took over the Santa María. Juan de la Cosa, assisted by Sancho Ruiz, was her pilot. Juan de Lequeitio, known as Cacho, was mate, and Gil Perez, an old campaigner of the seas, steward. Columbus's friends took their places aboard the flagship; those who flattered him because he required it, and those who flattered him because they hoped for everything by doing
so. Among the former were Rodrigo of Escobedo, notary attached to the fleet, and Rodrigo Sanchez of Segovia, royal comptroller. Among the latter was Diego de Arana, a cousin of Beatriz, who had been promised the office of chief alguazil, that is to say Chief Justice. Pedro de Terrenos was appointed private steward to the great man.

Martín Alonso Pinzon kept for himself the command of the Pinta, reputed to be the best sailer of the three vessels. Both pilot and boatswain were his kinsmen, and the sailors and apprentices were all from Palos and Moguer.

Vicente Yañez, younger brother of Martin Alonso, commanded the Niña, and the crew was made up of cousins, nephews and childhood friends of the Pinzons. All, moreover, were excellent sailors, among them Bartolomé Roldan and Juan Bermudez who, a few years later, discovered the islands that bear his name.

The two caravels and the flagship were anchored in the port of Palos, at the spot called Estero de Domingo Rubio. This was the deepest part of the Rio Tinto. La Rabida could be reached by following the bank.

Never had the little port of Palos known such activity as during the month of July, 1492. The three ships had to be provisioned for a whole year. The quays were alive with the continuous movement of people. The sailors rolled the barrels to the fontanilla to fill them with fresh water. Men laden with boxes and trains of mules came from inland carrying dried vegetables, dried meat and all the articles needed on a long crossing. But the animation was not only in the port; it was in the hearts and minds of them all. In the evening, when the crushing heat of the day began to decline, the inhabitants of Palos and Moguer got together in the wineshops or at the house of that old pilot, Pedro Vasquez, who had been as far as the Sea of Weeds thirty years before, quite close to the reputed Island of Seven Cities (as the Portuguese knew it), or Antilia (to use its Spanish name). All night—for it was too hot to sleep—they talked about the West. Seven bishops, Spanish and Portuguese, fleeing from the Moors in the 8th century, set out upon the ocean with a great number of Christians, and after months of navigation had discovered Antilia. Each bishop had founded an island kingdom, of which nothing was now known, except that the soil of these islands was gold dust. Later, some Portuguese, having determined to explore the Dark Sea to its limit, had landed on some strange islands: the island of 'sheep with bitter flesh,' of the 'red men,' and of 'Saint Brendan,' which was the realm of
a giant converted to Christianity. And they finished by recalling Cipango, and its palaces, with gold-plating as thick as a two-real piece, and the innumerable pearls which the fishermen carried away by the basket-full.

Lulled by the deep voice of old Vasquez, the children dozed. For Columbus's sailors it was like a vigil of arms. The old man's tales, the heavy Andalusian wine, the nervousness of impending departure, and the burning sun of the day fired their already hot heads. But when they thought of the perils to which their husbands, brothers and sons would be exposed, the woman paled—or rather, they called upon the Virgin of Miracles. How could the companions of Columbus ever come back except by a miracle? And although the night was far advanced, none had any desire for sleep. Each, as he watched the bright strip of the rising sun glimmer upon the Andalusian sky, thought of the golden fringe of the Dark Sea far away in the West.

CAST OFF! IN THE NAME OF GOD

It was August 2, 1492, and just seven months since Granada had fallen. On the morrow Columbus's caravels would steer for Cipango. Thanks to Martin Alonso, no time had been lost. A review of men and materials had been completed. It happened that this day was also the traditional feast of the Virgin of Miracles, and the entire people were on their knees to pray. During high mass at the monastery of La Rabida, the Commander had taken the sacrament.

The next morning, shortly before sunrise, all were aboard. The boats had been hauled on to the decks. The sailors were at their posts. No thing or person was missing. Columbus had even thought to bring with him two interpreters who knew Chaldean, Arabic and Hebrew. He had thought of everything, except a priest, a strange oversight on the part of an ambassador of the Catholic monarchs.

On the river bank, at the front of the crowd, was Juan Perez, prior of La Rabida, surrounded by his monks; his eyes never left the flagship. Was it not he who had instigated this unique moment? Beside him stood old Pedro Vasquez and young Diego Columbus, and the families of all those who were leaving. Would they ever return? In the Andalusian fashion, the women raised piercing cries. Words of farewell were exchanged. Martin Alonso
promised a golden tile to each of his friends. In the sonorous air of early morning—the *madrugada*—the voices blended into a soft murmur. The creak of the cables around the capstans, the slapping of the sails as they were freed from the yards, covered the sobbing murmur of the town of Palos. Motionless at their sterns, their faces lit by the gleam of the lanterns, the three captains surveyed the manoeuvres. Columbus wore the Admiral's uniform: the breeches, coat and short fur-trimmed cloak were garnet-red, the colour of the admirals of Castile. He had just been conducted round his fleet to the sound of trumpets, in accordance with tradition. He wanted all the honours.

Something glistened in the waters of the Rio Tinto. A reflection quivered on the tarred sterns of the vessels. The sun! Then Christopher Columbus doffed his cap, bowed, looked towards the mastheads and in a voice of thunder cried: 'Cast off! In the name of God!' And the two Pinzon brothers repeated: 'Cast off! In the name of God!' Then all the sails, now unfurled, gave out a thunderous report, and so strongly blew the wind that, as they were launched upon the Rio Tinto, the three caravels looked like three white sea-birds. They were awkward and rolled heavily. But they drew away. The Admiral's flag, bearing the image of Christ nailed to the Cross, flew over the *Santa Maria*, and from the mainmasts of the *Pinta* and *Niña* flew the banner of the expedition: a green cross and the royal initials surmounted by a crown. This fleet, although it had no chaplain, was nevertheless truly under the sign of God. Its parting hymn was the *Salve Regina*.

The prior of La Rabida had returned to the monastery and from its terrace he blessed the caravels. Carried along by a strong breeze, they were beyond the confluence of the rivers Tinto and Odiel. Then they crossed the bar of Saltes, and in a great shower of foam they entered the ocean. For a long time the crews could see the wide brown sleeves of Juan Perez forming a living cross against the sky. They could hear the moans of the women back in their homes. And, born along by the swell, the *Salve Regina* would envelop Palos almost to the moment when the high sails of the caravels sank into the sea.

**THE CROSSING**

Christopher Columbus headed for the Canaries, the first stage. From there he reckoned to turn due west and sail straight on,
following the 28th parallel. This was the route on which he had always been determined.

Three days passed without event. The caravels sailed on at a good pace. The weather was fine and the men seemed contented. On the morning of the fourth day news reached the Admiral that the Pinta’s helm had broken loose. This was bad news indeed. Without a rudder, the Pinta was like a carcase at the mercy of the waves. Moreover, she was the flotilla’s best sailer and, as such, led the Niña and Santa Maria. Martin Alonso tried as best he could to put the helm back in its pintles. He succeeded. It would hold out as far as the Canaries. There Columbus wanted to get rid of the Pinta, and to change it for another vessel, but Martin Alonso opposed him. The ship was excellent; it had only to be repaired. For the four weeks that these labours occupied—from August 9th to September 6th—the Santa Maria and the Niña sailed from one island to the other: Fuerteventura, Lanzarote and Hierro. Columbus spoke with the natives and derived new assurances from what they told him. It seemed that on certain evenings mysterious summits were outlined above the sea towards the west. And what was the terror of the Spanish sailors at seeing the peak of Teneriffe spitting out its flames! The Admiral reassured them. There was nothing about this volcanic phenomenon that was not perfectly natural. For Columbus’s skill lay in dividing the marvellous from the real according to circumstances. Things were terrifying or normal, according to what he had decided they should be.

The Pinta was made good. The rudder steered again. The bow was repaired. The sails too had been changed: on the foremast and mainmast, the lateen or triangular sails had been replaced by square sails. Putting this enforced halt to profit, they had reprovisioned with water and salt meat. Now everything was ready, and Columbus gave the order to depart. It was September 6th.

Now renovated, and all spick and span, with her new sails flapping in the wind, the Pinta once again took the lead. The real voyage now began and it was time. Three Portuguese caravels cruised in the vicinity with the task of delaying—even of preventing—the Spanish expedition; but Columbus outstripped his adversary, gave himself plenty of room, then, forcing the pace, steered due west. Soon the Canaries were lost to sight. Farewell to the Fortunate Isles!

From very vague indications Columbus reckoned the distance from the Canaries to the shores of Cipango at 700 leagues. But
he was not certain. Furthermore, from the start he compiled two records of the course, one for his own use, made up of the real figures, and the other for the crew, showing lower figures. This childish trick, which did not escape the notice of the Pinzon brothers, nor Juan de la Cosa, deceived the sailors throughout the voyage; or so Columbus thought. Tricks and falsehoods were his chief weapons in difficult moments: when he did not know, he invented, and his assurance was such that he convinced the most sceptical. Thus, when on September 13th his men came to him stricken with terror at observing that the compass needle varied from north towards east, the Admiral was not disturbed: it was not the needle that had been displaced, he said, but the Pole Star. The needle was infallible, but the stars were wayward. This explanation satisfied the crew, but it was in improvisation, for in fact the phenomenon had astonished him, as his log-book shows: 'At nightfall the needle inclined towards the south-west, the point being turned towards the left of north. The next morning it was directed north-eastwards, the point being to the right of north.' He observed and was surprised; but he did not argue. This compass needle, torn between the opposing attractions of the two poles, seemed to him to be mad. He had no idea why it behaved in this way. What did it matter, anyway? The main thing was to follow the 28th parallel rigorously.

On September 14th the sailors on the Niña saw a heron fly over and a bird that was believed never to go further than 25 leagues from land and was evidence of its proximity. It was warm, like 'the month of April in Andalusia,' Columbus wrote, and he added: 'Only the song of the nightingale was missing.' The sky was deep blue and almost unbearable. With the evening, a wonderful meteor, like a streak of fire, sank to the horizon. The crews took fright, but once again the Admiral found an explanation: it was a piece of a star that had broken away. Nothing could be more natural.

From September 17th signs that land was very close multiplied. Enormous masses of seaweed slowed the progress of the vessel. This was the weed from the Sargasso Sea. The flotilla seemed to be moving over a flooded grassland. The sailors threw out ropes and drew in these conglomerated plants. There was no doubt about it: it was 'river weed' and not marine flora. A living crab hid among them, and this was another good sign, for crustaceans do not venture into the high seas. A flight of birds once again cleaved the sky, whose homeland must certainly be near. The very sea-water—it was surely mixed with river
water—bore witness by its singularly fresh flavour to the fact that land was not far off.

The night of the 17th to 18th passed in a sort of confused excitement. The least phenomenon was interpreted by the crews as a sign of land. Columbus did nothing to dispel the illusion, imprudently, he allowed this atmosphere of enthusiasm to mature and grow. On the morning of the 18th the weed-encumbered sea was as smooth and featureless as a board. The next day it rained. The helmsmen calculated the distance covered since the Canaries, but they could not agree. The Niña showed 540 leagues, the Pinta 420 and the Santa Maria 400.

September 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25. . . . It was nineteen days since the caravels had left Gomera. The crews began to lose patience. They were weary of sky and sea, and Columbus strove to keep them in hand. A bird that got caught in the sails (the Admiral asserted that it was a sea-mew), the flight of a pelican, the fins of a whale emerging between two waves—no more was needed for Columbus to assure his men that land would soon be in sight. At twilight on September 25, the Pinta and the Niña drew near to the Santa Maria, as they did each evening and morning. They came ‘for orders.’ Columbus and Martin Alonso exchanged their day’s observations. According to their calculations and the indications of the maps, they ought that day to encounter Antilia, the island of the Seven Cities. Nevertheless, the sea was featureless and the horizon unbroken. While Columbus and Juan de la Cosa exchanged notes, Martin Alonso, high up on his caravel, scanned the horizon. The sun descended into the sea. It was that fantastic hour at which mirages hold sway. Suddenly there came a cannon-shot, and a cry ‘Land!’ Columbus fell on his knees. The whole crew did the same. The men of the Pinta, who were the first to perceive the land, sang the Gloria in excelsis Deo and the two other caravels took up the canticle. Martin Alonso reckoned the distance still to be covered to the point he had seen at 25 leagues. None could sleep during that night of expectation. Turning slightly southwards, the vessels steered carefully. Dawn came, but on the horizon there was nothing; the land glimpsed by the elder Pinzon had been a bank of clouds. They had dispersed. The splendid monotony of sea and sky continued.

The disappointment of the sailors was terrible. Was the fleet condemned to rove miserably till the end of the century? Actually, it had covered half the voyage without knowing it.

On October 1st, Columbus verified that the caravels had
covered 700 leagues. To his men he gave out about 100 leagues less. The trick was a crude one, for experienced sailors reckoned the distance by guesswork. Seven hundred leagues! Normally, and if his calculations were right, he should be at Cipango. On October 6th, Martín Alonso suggested to Columbus that they should steer southwest, the direction clearly indicated by the flight of the birds. But the Admiral stuck to his fixed idea: west it must be. The next day the crew of the Niña fired a cannon in their turn, but again it was an optical illusion. Martín Alonso then begged the Admiral to change course. The situation was grave. The men were discouraged. Land was certainly close. One had only to watch the flight of the birds and to guide oneself by them; that was what the Portuguese did. Columbus let himself be convinced, and he gave the order to steer west-southwest.

LAND!

October 10th. Thirty-four days since leaving the Canaries. The weather was fine. The sea was as calm as a lake. ‘One breathes the scented air with delight,’ Columbus noted in his log. If nature was peaceful, the men were less so. Columbus had been able until then to impose authority by his impassioned speaking, noble bearing and rank. But gradually his prestige fell. Ignorant as they were, the sailors understood that their commander knew no more than themselves. His errors of navigation were flagrant. Moreover, the Genoese was harsh with his crew, and his anger was terrible and often unjustified. At the highest level he lacked that social sense, that team spirit which is traditional at sea. The Basques of the Santa Maria did not hesitate to grumble openly and in the evening gathered about the galley stove and argued resolutely. An end must be made to this ridiculous expedition. Why not toss this gim-crack admiral into the sea? they asked—then they could turn for home. There was one objection to this plan: the proximity of the other two caravels. The Pinzon brothers had their crews well under control; they were good to their men, who had full confidence in them. But these happy comrades, always ready for a laugh with the sailors, would stand no nonsense in the matter of discipline; they put down the least attempt at rebellion on the Santa Maria with extreme rigour.

The protests from the galley reached the castillo. Columbus
fired a cannon-shot. The Pinta, leading, stopped. The Santa Maria joined her. The Niña came into line. From the top of the stern castle Columbus cried: 'Captains, my crew are complaining. What, in your opinion, should I do?' Vicente Yáñez Pinzón answered: 'Go on for another 2,000 leagues and then, if you find nothing, return.' A burst of laughter greeted Vicente's sally. But Martin Alonso was not in a mood for trifling. At the top of his voice he cried: 'Hang half a dozen of these malcontents and throw them into the sea!' Then he added: 'I have sworn, by the royal crown, that neither I nor any of my kin will return before discovering land. Let those who wish to return, return! For my part, I will go on. I must discover land or die seeking it!' This resounding voice drowned the murmur of the waves. It stifled the murmur of the rebels. Everything returned to normal.

Columbus was the spirit of the expedition, but Martin Alonso was its arm. Without a doubt, Columbus would not have been able to bring it to success without him. His own incontestible gifts as a fine talker and brilliant captain lost their power as the crossing stretched out, for they had not stood up to the trial of daily contact with the men, to a hand-to-hand struggle with elusive Nature, to the slow penetration of an horizon which constantly eluded them. To Juan de la Cosa's Basques and the Pinzón's Andalusians, Columbus was a foreigner, but in Martin Alonso they respected a pilot without equal, a son of Palos and a humane leader. It was Martin Alonso who made Columbus possible.

The Admiral would certainly have laughed if anyone had told him any such thing. The Pinzón brothers? Useful partners, good technicians, excellent boatswains, nothing more. The genius, the strong mind, was himself. And in a way he was right. As the day of October 10th ended, he was so profoundly imbued with messianism, that he was still as Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt. Did not that crowd, too, though delivered from slavery almost in spite of itself, murmur against him who saved them? 'Ungrateful people!' the Admiral sighed on the evening of the revolt.

Martin Alonso's firm attitude and his show of solidarity with Columbus had their effect. The crew of the Santa Maria no longer faltered, and the intrigues around the galley stove came to an end. Moreover, the weather did not favour anger. During the day the sailors bathed in water that was almost warm; around them salmon and dolphins gambolled. At night they gathered on the forecastle; the perfumed humidity of the tropics
made them languid, so did the twanging of their guitars. They saw themselves drifting on the Guadalquivir on an August night; the sky of Seville was not less starry than this unknown heaven. The crystal-clear sob of the strings, and the harsh call of the cante jondo were pleasing to the Admiral. A great hope vibrated in that sad song. In fact evidence of land close by was multiplying: a floating reed, real seamews settling momentarily at the top of the mainmast, a stick covered with snails, a branch with red berries. This time, Cipango could not be far away.

On the evening of October 11th, Columbus climbed up to his castillo. He was waiting for the men to finish the vesperal office. Then, after the Salve Regina, he harangued them in his fine melodious voice. For, when he wished to do so, or when it was necessary, he could persuade and charm. He told his men that they were 750 leagues west of Ferro and that in a few hours land would be in sight. He knew how to find poetic and moving words to describe in advance their arrival in the land of the Great Khan and to thank his crew for their patience. To the first who sighted land he promised, besides a life annuity from the Queen of ten thousand gold maravedis, a silk doublet as a personal present. Such was Columbus's histrionic gift that all the men acclaimed him, forgetting that two days earlier they had wanted to throw him overboard.

It was the night of October 11th to 12th. Since sunset the Admiral had not ceased to scan the darkness with his eyes, and at ten o'clock he made out a feeble gleam, 'like that of a small candle, which alternately rose and fell.' It was so pale and so far off! Was it not the reflection of a star? Columbus summoned his intimates: Pedro de Terrenos, his chief steward, Sanchez de Segovia, the royal comptroller. Both observed the phenomenon. It must be some native's torch. The Admiral ordered the sails to be spread. The speed of the caravels reached at least four leagues an hour. For the moment no one, besides Columbus and his confidants, had yet been told the news.

At midnight the slightly cloudy sky cleared. Almost everyone was asleep. It was two in the morning. With all sail spread, the vessels had never moved so fast. Suddenly came a cry, twice repeated: 'Land! Land!' Then a cannon-shot. A sailor stood up in the bows of the Pinta. In the now clear night his frantic gestures could be distinguished. The Pinta, leading the flotilla as always, stopped. The flagship joined her. Columbus, leaning over the rail of his castillo, cried to Martin Alonso: 'Have you
found land?"—No, not I," replied the elder Pinzon, "but one of my sailors, Juan Rodriguez Bermejo, native of Triana."

In fact, in the moonlight the dark outline of a coast appeared. This was land indeed. The captains took in sail and hove to, that is, put the ships across wind. With a great creaking of rigging and seaweed, the caravels came to a standstill. They must wait for daylight.

Bermejo hoped for the promised reward: Isabella's ten thousand gold maravedis and the Admiral's silk doublet. Martin Alonso, his master, surprised at Columbus's silence in this respect, thought he must refresh the Admiral's memory. But the Admiral feigned astonishment. Who but himself had been the first to see that tiny light, wavering on the beach, at ten in the evening of October 11th—he, Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean? Bermejo's cry, four hours later, was only confirmation. Give him the ten thousand maravedis! As to the doublet, he might think about it later.

The brothers Pinzon were appalled. In this unparalleled moment—there had been nothing like it in the history of the world—how could Columbus think of depriving poor Bermejo of the royal gift (for him a fortune) when he, Columbus, was about to collect a tenth of the fabulous riches now within reach! What probability of truth was there in the Admiral's claim to have seen a light on the horizon so long before the coast appeared? At the moment when Columbus became the equal of the earth's greatest monarchs, he did not hesitate to engage in a sordid argument with a simple sailor, and dimmed the purity of a moment which one could have wished was free of all paltry feelings. For a few golden coins Columbus impaired his prestige. He sullied his own character. While he gave the greatest care to arranging his own postures, this consummate actor could not resist the lure of lucre.

Unaware perhaps of his injustice to Bermejo, not knowing that he had just lost the affection of Pinzon, alone on the Santa Maria's castillo, the great man waited for daybreak. Soon the first rays of the sun would blaze upon the famous golden roofs; they would redden the marble quays, setting fire to the Great Khan's lacquered ships, with hippogriffs at their bows. And long processions of elephants, draped in red silk and bearing turrets of carved silver on their backs, would pass endlessly by.

Did Columbus really think that such a scene would emerge from the darkness? In truth, he was divided—as he always was—between his measureless appetite for the marvellous and his
cold realism. He did not yet know if he was about to touch an island or a continent, but he was persuaded that at sunrise he would set foot on a land subservient to the authority of the Great Khan, whether that might be an island of Cathay (China) or an advanced point of Cipango (Japan).

Facing the darkness that was already troubled by the first pale glimmer of dawn, Columbus prepared his part. He had run his hand under his doublet, less to quieten the beating of his heart than to feel the letter addressed to the Great Khan by the Catholic monarchs. He repeated the first words: 'To the Most Serene Prince, our very dear friend. . . .' This imaginative man, always ahead of events, pondered his discourse. For he would not only hand the Asiatic emperor his ruler's missive; he would comment on it. He would establish an influence over him. He would tell him. . .

Cipango? The Great Khan? Columbus was twice mistaken.

It was neither Japan, nor China, but the Bahamas, in the West Indies, about 2,000 miles from the future New York. A few degrees further north and he would have reached Florida—that luxuriant, lake-studded garden in an eternal summer. Had this happened, Spain might perhaps have supplanted England and its imperial destiny have been established at Miami. There would not then have been two Americas—one Anglo-Saxon and the other Hispano-Portuguese—but only one: Latin America. A chimera? Chi lo sa? In any case, if Columbus had rigorously followed the 28th parallel as he had resolved to do, the bridgehead of the Conquest would have been somewhere in Florida. But Martín Alonso had made him turn south.

Columbus was not in Asia. But what did that matter? It was a long time since the Chinese dynasty of the Mings had seized power, held until then by the Mongol dynasty of the Yuans, founded by Kublai. The Empire of the Great Khan had ceased to exist 124 years before.

Cipango? The Great Khan? Neither one nor the other.
DAY came suddenly, as it always does in tropical skies, like a
curtain rising in a theatre. But where were the marble pave-
ments and the lacquered junk? The sun's first rays revealed a
simple and verdant island. Beyond the clumps of trees a lake
glittered. Not a building, not a roof, not a single ship betrayed
the presence of man. A deserted island, without a doubt. Was
this Cipango?

But the morning of October 12th was so luminous, the scent
of cinnamon and frangipanes so intoxicating, that the Spaniards
were not in the least disappointed. For thirty-three days they
had seen only sea and sky, and at last they were going to touch
earth. Was this not the crown of all their desires? Columbus
had kept his promise. The officers embraced the one who was
now indeed the Admiral of the Ocean. The sailors cast them-
selves at his feet and implored pardon. It was a fine moment.

Without suspecting his ill luck, for he had just missed the
American continent, the commander prepared to land. He
dressed himself in the garnet-red of an admiral, put out the long
boat and took his place in it, accompanied by an escort that
was armed to the teeth. The boat was low in the water with
the weight of sailors turned into soldiers with helmets and
roundels. Some were enclosed in cuirasses with blunderbuss and
bandolier, for they had to be prepared for anything. Columbus
clutched the banner of Castile. The emblem of Christ nailed to
the Cross floated for the first time in the blue tropical sky. The
boats of the Pinzon brothers followed close behind the
Admiral's. The two captains held aloft the standard of the
expedition: the green cross entwined with the royal initials.

As the boats were about to touch the shore, some men broke
out of the thickets. They were naked. Some of them dragged
hollowed tree-trunks over the sand, which they launched on the
sea and paddled towards the Spaniards. So the island was
inhabited. For the moment Columbus scarcely cared: the most urgent matter was to enter into possession of the land he had discovered. The Admiral ran his boat ashore and took a few slow steps across the strand. Behind him walked Rodrigo de Escobedo and Sanchez de Segovia, notary and royal comptroller, witnesses and licensed scribes. Columbus drew his sword, cut a few weeds and whipped off the bark of neighbouring trees, a symbolic gesture to mark his right of ownership. The officials

then drew up the deed by which Columbus took possession, in the name of the Catholic monarchs, of this island which he named San Salvador. The natives called it Guanahani. Later this was to be Watling's Island, part of the Bahama or Lucayes archipelago in the British West Indies.

Thus was America discovered on a bright morning of October 12th, 1492—a relative discovery, since Columbus thought he was in Asia, though he was only in the approaches to the real America.
Columbus never lost his head. At the height of triumph, as in the darkest of his reverses, he preserved an astonishing realism. Never did the intoxication of pride affect his practical sense. First of all and in every circumstance he had to have a document, duly signed and initialled. From his father, the Genoese merchant, or perhaps from some Jewish ancestor, he had inherited this fear of the one who pays and the necessity of a written contract, without which no valid agreement was possible. Thus, as soon as he set foot on new land, his first act was to draw up a legal deed. Only afterwards did he kiss the earth, thank God and order the Te Deum to be sung. Business before sentiment.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW WORLD

The natives kept at a respectful distance from the Spaniards. But curiosity possessed them. Step by step they drew near to these god-like creatures. Then the boldest of them touched the extraordinary objects that were the strangers' beards, for the Spaniards had not shaved since their halt in the Canaries, and Columbus's own beard was almost white; they touched the stuffs that shone brighter than the plumage of parrots and the hard surface of the armour. One native seized the blade of a sword in his hand, and cried aloud at seeing the blood flow. None had ever seen this shining substance that could inflict such wounds.

These natives, on the whole, were good-looking and well-built. Their short, stiff hair was bunched together on top of the head and then left to hang down at the back like a mane. The colour of their skins, neither light nor dark, was that of Canary islanders. They were friendly—almost affable. They seemed peaceable.

Columbus did not tarry at San Salvador. There was nothing to be gained from this island of parrots any more than from its simple natives. To the Admiral's questions—signs taking the place of words—the natives of Guanahani could only reply with childish laughter. How could Columbus know if there was gold to be found or where Cipango lay? By taking to sea once more.

On October 14th the caravels raised anchor. Columbus had taken seven natives aboard—either willingly or by force. The next evening the flotilla came upon an island which the Admiral named Santa Maria de la Concepcion. The day afterwards he
discovered another island, Fernandina. To the fourth island, more exuberant than the rest—the parrots' array puts the sun itself in the shade, Columbus noted in his log-book—he gave the name Isabella. Even more perfumes and even more flowers: nature was virgin and the creatures as innocent as in the earliest ages. This resurrection of the Earthly Paradise enchanted Columbus, without making him forget his object, which was to make contact with the Great Khan and to find gold. He was convinced that he was nearing his objective, and the information given him by the natives strengthened this conviction. He spoke to them of a rich and powerful king whose empire was not far away. Sometimes his soldiers came as far as the islands in great canoes; they captured the best of the population and carried them into slavery. They were called Caribs. In which direction did they go? The natives stretched out their arms westwards. This could only be Cipango or even Quinsay, the Chinese metropolis. Such signs confirmed Columbus's certainty that he was indeed in the eastern part of the Indies, a few days from the residence of the Emperor of Tartary. And smiling, the Admiral murmured to himself the strange name that the savages gave to Cipango: Cuba.

On October 20th the fleet reached Cuba. 'I have never seen a more beautiful land,' Columbus wrote. The palm leaves were so large that they served to roof the houses. On the beach there were millions of pearly shells. The water was limpid, the symphony of bird-song was deafening and continuous. On the other hand, the human beings were no different from those of the islands previously visited. The Indians—what else could one call them, since they inhabited the extreme east of the Asiatic continent?—were of a gentle disposition; they could be trained like young animals. Recalling his apostolic mission, Columbus made them repeat the Salve and Ave Maria. 'It will be easy to make good Christians of them,' he noted in his log-book.

Until November 2nd the caravels ran along the eastern end of the Cuban coast, but saw nothing unusual. A delicious air, 'neither warm nor cool'; a superabundant flora; a curious fauna; but men were few. Such as there were lived penuriously, in huts of palm leaves, on the products of their fishing. They were poor, or rather, that they had no idea of riches. They were timid, for they often spoke of a formidable sovereign with whom their king was at war. Obscure though they were, Columbus grasped at these allusions eagerly. He decided to anchor at the mouth of a river—the Rio Maximo—and to send two ambassadors over-
land to the local ruler, in the hope that they would get information from him about the Great Khan. For this embassy he chose the Jew, Luis de Torres, his principal interpreter and a sailor from Huelva, reputed for being very resourceful. The mission set out on November 2nd. It returned four days later, empty-handed. No one knew where the Great Khan lived. Meanwhile, Columbus had taken his bearings. He had calculated that since leaving Hierro the expedition had covered more than 1,100 leagues. Furthermore, he had assured himself that Cuba was not an island but a continental province of the Great Khan's empire. As for Cipango, they had left it behind them. The natives gave it the name of Babeque or Bohio. He would have to turn back and postpone the exploration of the continent.

On November 12th Columbus gave the order to leave Cuba, which he called Juana, after the Infante of Spain. The Admiral had taken six Cubans aboard, with their women and children, En route for Babeque! On November 21st a serious incident occurred. The Pinta, which since the beginning of the voyage had constantly led the fleet, disappeared over the horizon. Had Martin Alonso lost sight of the Santa Maria's lanterns or had he deliberately separated from the expedition? Columbus himself regarded this disappearance as premeditated flight; Martin Alonso wanted to reach Cipango before him, which was a possible hypothesis since, as a result of the Admiral's attitude towards Barmejo, relations had been strained. Vicente Yáñez, however, remained faithful.

On December 6th the Niña and the flagship reached the island of Bohio, and it was as if the ships had returned to Spain. Before they had even reached the shore, the sailors could descry fields of corn as they stood in the country around Cordóba. There were wide valleys and high mountains, like the scenery of Old Castile. A nightingale—a ruiseñor—sang, awakening a nostalgia in the hearts of the sailors. To this island that was so like Spain Columbus gave the name Hispaniola; later it was called Haiti. While the crews were moved at finding that Hispaniola look so much like Spain, Columbus spoke with the natives. They were peaceful, but they lived in terror of the Caribs, the cruel cannibals already mentioned by the inhabitants of Isabella. Columbus started. Cannibals! Yet they were supposed to be subjects of the Great Khan. Actually these were the formidable tribes of the West Indian and Central American coasts. But the least sign, however small, gave Columbus hope, so he went from island to island, asking for Cipango, like a lost
traveller. He staved off his appetite for conquest by naming islands and ports: Tortuga, Puerto de la Paz, Val do Paraiso, and so on. If a stream pleased him, he called it the Guadalquivir. But these were mere hors-d'oeuvres to one who was starving for glory. He was seeking an empire and gold. Until now he had found neither.

Christmas was drawing near. On the strength of a vague indication, Columbus headed eastwards. He would find the land of gold at Cibao, of which the natives had spoken. Here was a word that greatly resembled Cipango! It was December 24th and would soon be midnight. On the Santa Maria everyone was asleep, save the man at the wheel. But, having doubtless celebrated the Navidad too generously, he too felt slumber stealing over him, so he handed the wheel over to a deck-boy and went to sleep. A slight shock suddenly awoke the Admiral. He could no longer hear the sound of the open sea, but that of breakers on the reefs.

The caravel was stranded on a sandbank. Columbus aroused the crew. A mast was cut to lighten ship, but Juan de la Cosa shook his head: there was nothing to do but abandon ship, for the bows, which were inadequately protected, were leaking at every seam. So the boats were lowered and in a few minutes the crew of the Santa Maria were transferred to the Niña. The flagship was no more than a wooden corpse that a shroud of sand would slowly cover. A sad Christmas night!

THE FIRST RETURN

Once again ill-luck had befallen Columbus. He had found nothing of what he had been seeking—neither gold nor empire—his surest companion and best commander had abandoned him, and now he had lost his ship! Of the three caravels only one remained, but she no longer had the freshness and pace of the departure. As was his wont when things did not go his way, the Admiral was consumed with violent anger. He attacked the elements and his men; he accused Juan de la Cosa of not knowing his job and the crew of having been asleep. Then, having exhausted his temper, he thought of what dispositions he should take. For this indomitable man knew nothing of fruitless despair. In this dramatic situation he found precious support in the person of a cacique, Guacanagari, with whom he had struck up a friendship. With his own people the Indian co-operated in
salvaging what remained of the *Santa María*. The caravel was taken to pieces. From the framework, the two decks and the fore and aft castles, a fort was constructed, which was called *La Navidad*—Christmas! In it Columbus installed those he could not take back to Spain: forty-one men in all, among them Diego de Harana (who was appointed governor) and Escobedo, with provisions for a year and the *Santa María*’s artillery for defence. This was the first European colony in the New World, but when, ten months later, Columbus, faithful to his promise, came to seek his companions, he found not one. A head, a few corpses, and the sorrowful silence of the cacique. But that is another story which will be told later.

For the Indian chief it was not enough to give aid to the Admiral. He gave him gold. Very little—a few humble pieces of jewellery, but just what Columbus needed to avoid facing the Catholic monarchs with empty hands. A little gold proved that gold existed.

At dawn on January 4th, 1493, the *Niña*, heavily laden, drew away from *La Navidad*. Perched on top of a rock, a man followed the fleeing caravel with his eyes, plucking the strings of a harp. He was the Irishman; his English friend was aboard the *Niña*, and it was for him that he played the funeral song of *La Navidad*.

Two days later there was a surprise. The watch signalled a sail. It was the *Pinta*. The *Niña* rejoined her, and the two caravels dropped anchor in a safe harbour. Martín Alonso presented himself to the Admiral. Why had he separated from the fleet? The reason was simple: the *Pinta* had a long lead on the other two vessels and had insensibly drawn away from them until they were lost to sight. Columbus accepted Martín Alonso’s explanation, at least to all appearances. Actually, he did not believe it at all. But that account would be squared later. For the moment Columbus needed the Pinzons, so he was prodigal with endearments. Nevertheless, he had difficulty in concealing his resentment when he learned that Martín Alonso had disembarked at Haiti before him, somewhere in the eastern part of the island. He had brought off some gold. Thus, the elder Pinzon was the true discoverer of Hispaniola.

Once more together, the *Pinta* and the *Niña* reached the eastern end of Haiti. There they remained until January 15th. On January 16th, three hours before dawn, they set out for Spain, in a north-easterly direction.

For twenty-eight days the sea was as calm as on the outward
journey. But on February 12th the wind rose and a gale began. It reached its climax on the night of February 14th to 15th. For the second time the Pinta disappeared. Columbus regarded her as lost, but would the Niña survive her? The Admiral retained his sangfroid. He took the time to put down on parchment the story of his voyage, to wrap it up in oiled cloth and to throw it into the sea. It was addressed to the Catholic monarchs, with a thousand ducats to him who should send it to them!

Columbus was not to perish at sea. On the morning of February 15th the gale died down. An island became visible through the mist. 'Madeira' cried the lookout. It was Santa Maria, one of the Azores.

On February 18th the Niña put into the Azores. She sailed again six days later. Once again a violent gale assailed the unlucky caravel, but this was her last trial. On March 4th the remains of the fleet came within sight of the Cintra rock at the mouth of the Tagus. Portugal! Almost home! On March 8th the Admiral was received by John II. The 'man in the threadbare cloak' took his revenge. Finally, on March 15th, at noon, the caravel crossed the bar of the Saltes and dropped anchor in the Palos roads. Columbus's first voyage had lasted seven months and a day. A few hours later the Pinta reached the port of Palos. Contrary to what Columbus had thought, she had survived the gale; but she arrived too late. Those who watched Martín Alonso disembark from the Pinta, carried by his sailors, were few. The sorrow of seeing himself deprived of his part of the triumph, as well as the physical trials he had experienced, got the better of the old sailor. Before he died in the monastery of La Rabida, he had heard the roar of acclamation that accompanied Columbus on the road to Seville, mingled with the surge of the sea.

The Court was not at Seville, but at Barcelona. Columbus went to Barcelona. About the middle of April a strange procession passed through the Catalan capital. Boys carried long poles on which parrots perched. Others held cushions on their upturned palms, bearing golden masks and jewels. Others displayed fishes, plants—afoes and rhubarb—balls of cotton, all of them rarer in appearance than in value. They might, in fact, be called samples; for had not Columbus once been a commercial traveller? The whole display might have been quite poor, but that at the head of the column there were human specimens: the six Indians captured at Cuba, shivering with the cold in their
wretched clothing. It was not so much their copper-coloured skin that surprised the Spanish Court as their simplicity. What an admirable field for evangelical seed! Millions of men for the cause of Christ! This vision compensated largely for the thinness of the gold plates and the crude jewellery—guanines—that Columbus brought back from his voyage. In fact, the King, the Queen and the Infanta, seated on a brocade dais, had eyes only for the six Indians prostrate at their feet, and the Admiral skilfully emphasised the spiritual conquest. As for the material conquest, he remained vague, confining himself to evoking—with more talent than ever before—the riches of Cipango and Cathay that he had only glimpsed. The heaps of gold were for tomorrow, that was certain, but the harvest of souls had already begun. Columbus was taken in by his own eloquence, and he burst into sobs. Isabella was not long in following suit. Like a well-orchestrated opera, the singers of the royal chapel entoned the Te deum laudamus, and the whole assembly fell on its knees. Once more, Columbus had humbugged his public.

THE SECOND VOYAGE

Columbus saw himself confirmed in his privileges. He was Viceroy and Admiral of the Ocean Sea. He acquired the title of Don for himself and his descendants. He lacked a 'coat of arms,' but one was given him: a shield with the arms of Castile and Leon—a castle and a lion—in two of its quarters, in the third quarter a group of golden islands, and in the fourth five golden anchors on an azure field. He could ride beside the King. He supped familiarly at the table of the Catholic monarchs, and at that of the Grand Cardinal. The most exalted of the Lords disputed the honour of entertaining him. There was everything to turn the head of any but Columbus. His remained cool; for he guessed that the most difficult part remained to be accomplished. This new glory would have to be maintained. His destiny was in the west and it called him.

The Admiral savoured his triumph for a few weeks. He knew honey and flattery and—already!—the bitterness of jealousy. Hatred raised its head. The Admiral saw it in the twitching of a smile, in the shrugging of a shoulder, in a silence. They were to reveal themselves later when Columbus began to totter. During a banquet some courtiers, half seriously, half jokingly, pretended to regard Columbus's exploit as an easy matter. The
Admiral then invited these gentlemen to stand an egg upright on the table. None but himself succeeded, simply by lightly crushing the egg at its end. The guests then cried out 'That's very simple!' 'Very simple, indeed,' the Admiral replied. 'It was only necessary to think of it. Like my voyage to the Indies!'

While Columbus tasted the joys of the victorious return, thinking all the time of his coming departure, the Catholic monarchs worked to get the discovery confirmed, and especially to regularise future discoveries. For Isabella and Ferdinand certainly reckoned there would be others. Until then, Portugal had had the effective monopoly of discovery, but Columbus’s voyage had turned Spain into her dangerous rival. From rivalry to hostility is but a step, but the Spanish Pope, Alexander VI, was wise enough to prevent it from being taken.

Exactly two months after Columbus had cast anchor at Palos, Alexander VI signed a bull granting to Spain all the land situated 100 leagues west of the last of the Azores. Portugal should have the right to the territories discovered to the east of that imaginary boundary. How did the Pope define the respective boundaries of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, present and to come? Simply by drawing a line on the globe from one pole to the other. But it was understood that, in return for this privilege the Catholic monarchs would be required to instruct the conquered peoples in the Christian faith. John II of Portugal having protested against this arbitrary boundary, a Spanish-Portuguese treaty was concluded at Tordesillas, carrying the boundary line from 100 to 370 leagues west of the Azores and Cape Verde. That is why Álvaro Cabral, pushed westwards by the currents when within view of the Cape of Good Hope, was able to take possession, in the name of Portugal, of a land situated less than 370 leagues from Cape Verde, and so within the limits of the Portuguese concession. A lucky drift and the courteous bargaining at Tordesillas was to turn Brazil into a Portuguese possession. A contrary wind and a flourish at the foot of a parchment was to put the largest South American state outside the Spanish orbit. Thus are empires born—by chance.

Convinced now of the reality of the West Indies, the Catholic monarchs decided to pursue their exploration methodically. They set up a political and commercial commission with the function of regulating affairs within the new Spanish territories. Bishop Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, a member of the Council of Castile and soon the ‘patriarch of the Indies,’ presided over this commission. Its powers were wide, including the absolute
right to requisition men and materials. In short, it had the complete command of colonial matters.

Fonseca's career was a brilliant one. Originally Archdeacon of Seville, he became successively Bishop of Badajoz, Palencia and Burgos. Las Casas was to write of him later that he was 'muy capaz para mundanos negocias.' Very gifted, in fact, for temporal affairs, this far-seeing ecclesiastic secured the confidence of the Catholic monarchs. He was less fortunate with Charles V. This young emperor, enlightened by Cortés, deprived Fonseca of the Presidency of the Council of the Indies. The Bishop of Burgos detested Columbus, even as he execrated Cortés and, in a general way, all the Conquistadors except for his own creatures. It was the hatred of a bureaucrat for men of action, the jealousy of a high official, shut up in his office, for the adventurers. Though Minister for the Conquest, he never found conquerors to obey him. However, this skilful manoeuvrer remained in office for twenty-five years. By exploiting discontents, by setting contrary interests in opposition, and by installing his own men in the principal administrative posts, he succeeded in maintaining a semblance of power and deceiving the Crown. Grand master of intrigue, Fonseca never ceased to persecute the Conquistadors in an underhand way; he hunted them down one after the other. Columbus was his most illustrious victim, but no one, during a quarter of a century, dared to make a frontal attack upon the Bishop-President—no one, that is, except Cortés.

Columbus was impatient to depart. On September 25th he set out, this time at the head of a real colonial expedition: fourteen caravels and three carracks, fifteen hundred men and a complete General Staff. The Admiral had called his younger brother Diego to his side. He had surrounded himself with 'technicians': a cartographer, Juan de la Cosa, an astronomer, Father Antonio de Marchena—two old acquaintances—and a doctor, Chanc. He had not forgotten the chaplain, Fray Bernardo Buil, to whom the Pope had given the title Vicar Apostolic of the Indies.' Around the great men the future Conquistadors—his enemies of the morrow—revolved: Alonso de Hojeda, Ponce de Leon, full of courage but as greedy as carnivorous beasts. Gathered in the port of Cadiz, the fleet raised anchor amid salvoes of cannon and acclamations. Columbus remembered the sad departure from Palos a year before. Times had changed.

Columbus's destination was Hispaniola. He followed the same
route as the first time: Hierro and then a westerly direction, but he steered a little further south. Twenty days after leaving the Canaries an archipelago was sighted: the Lesser Antilles. One by one the gilded islands ran past: Desirade, Domenica, Marie Galante, Santa Maria la Redonda, Santa Maria la Antigua, Guadalupe, Once Mil Virgenes and Puerto Rico. Turning northwards, Columbus came to Hispaniola once more and within sight of La Navidad. Not a single light shone from the shore. The Admiral ordered the cannon to be fired, but only the mountains replied. A group of sailors went ashore. At the site of the fort there was nothing but human remains. Columbus made a search for Guacanagari and demanded explanations, which the cacique gave. Left to themselves the Admiral’s companions had not been able to resist the pleasures of the climate any more than the primitive beauty of the women. Was this not the place to revive the delights of the Earthly Paradise, here on the Haitian shores? But in this paradise—Musulman more than Christian—houris were needed. Where could they be found, except among the natives? The Spaniards then decided to raid the Indian population. They began by capturing the women, then by making off with the poor possessions of their hosts, claiming the rights of victors. This could only last for a short time, for rightly angered by their oppressors, the Indians of La Navidad attacked the Spaniards and effected a terrible massacre. Those who escaped their vengeance fled into the interior, but were never found again. Guacanagari’s protection was useless. The first European foundation in the New World had been a failure. Passions had to be controlled before men could be governed.

The story of La Navidad made the Admiral gloomy. He began to realise that conquest and colonisation are two different things, but he had not the time to go deeply into the problem. The continuance of the conquest was his first care. He had promised the Catholic monarchs immense territories, gold in profusion and the road to Asia. Until now the lands were disappointing, gold was lacking and Cipango remained undiscoverable. Cipango! The name burned him like a fire. Each time that he spoke of it to the natives, they led him to understand that it was quite close. Was it not Cibao that he was trying to say? He explored Cibao—a mountain in Haiti—gave the name Vega Real (‘royal plain’) to a valley, succeeded in discovering a little gold, took to sea again and steered for Cuba. On the way he dropped anchor at a new island: Jamaica. He ran roughly along the southern coast of Cuba in a westerly direction in search of
Cipango or Cathay. He encountered a group of islands—the Jardines de la Reina—which he took for the spice archipelago said by Marco Polo to be off the eastern coast of Asia. He was now certain that he was approaching the Golden Peninsula—Malacca—and was surprised that he did not find any of the great towns described by the travellers. He was convinced that Cuba was an advanced point of the Asiatic continent, but in another two days of sailing he reached its western end. He made his way round it in the direction of his starting point, but decided to turn back at the moment when the coast began to bend. In a fit of puerile anger, he ordered his men to swear before a notary that it was possible to return on foot from Cuba to Spain by the land route across Asia.

While Columbus persisted in his chimerical course, his officers tried their hands at governing. Some, like Alonso de Hojeda, Diego and Bartolomé Columbus, who had joined his brother at Hispaniola, distinguished themselves by their talents and humanity. The others, among whom were Pedro de Margarit, thought only of enriching themselves by every possible means. Cliques took shape, for or against the Admiral. Parties became organised, for or against the Indians. The exactions of certain Spaniards were such that a cacique named Caonabo, having assured himself of the support of all the Haitian chiefs, raised an army against the occupiers. Better equipped and better trained in fighting, the Spaniards defeated the Indian troops and captured Caonabo. The Spanish victory was inevitable, but the effect on the population was unfortunate. In fact, the time had passed when the new arrivals could try to win the good will of the natives. The Spaniards were now no longer ceremonious in requisitioning the labour they needed. It was still too soon to speak of colonisation, but soon enough to use the word exploitation. Later, the conditions of work were to be regulated, at least in principle, but for the moment the only law was that of compulsion. The Haitians had to provide a certain quantity of pure gold every three months, and the washing of the metal was very arduous. The Spaniards who had been able to set up farms or agricultural workings were obsessed with the idea of yield. Their domestic animals and their cereals, imported from Spain, had to produce a maximum yield. This was a new idea for the Indians, who lived merely from day to day; but whether they like it or not they contributed by their forced labour to an increase of production which was not for their own benefit.

Columbus's second stay in the West Indies lasted for three
and a half years, but contact was maintained with Spain. The first time, a dozen ships commanded by Antonia de Torres took back the useless or undesirable colonists to their homeland. Torres was the bearer of interesting news: the foundation of Isabella, the first Spanish town, on the Haitian coast, the discovery of gold mines on Cibao, and the submission of the Indians. Columbus made known his great needs in man-power. His special need was for miners for extracting and working the gold. Would it not be possible to consider using slaves? He even suggested trading in them with the homeland. To this question the Catholic monarchs gave a dilatory reply. In Castile it was usual only to regard non-Christian prisoners of war as slaves. Torres reported this message to the Admiral. Yet, several months later Torres embarked for Spain a cargo of five hundred Indians. They had revolted against the Admiral and he had made them prisoners; and since they were heathens they had both of the required qualifications. Legal appearances were saved. Five hundred souls for the Catholic monarchs! Five hundred souls for the Church, too, since they would be converted.

But it was not only good news that Columbus's messengers carried. There were some who echoed the complaints concerning the difficult character of the Admiral and the mistakes he made in command. It was far from Cadiz to Isabella, but nothing stopped the cry of anger nor the whispered calumny. In any case, these rumours did not fail to influence the Catholic monarchs, for they promulgated an edict granting every Spanish subject the right to trade freely with the newly discovered lands and to settle there.

One morning in October, 1495, a caravel anchored in the port of Isabella. It brought Juan de Aguado, royal commissioner, to Hispaniola, charged with inquiring into Columbus's administration. Columbus was not there. He was waging war against the Indians in the neighbourhood, for he was told of the arrival of the visitador. He returned to Isabella, received Juan de Aguado coldly, put off reading his credentials till the next day, but left him a clear field for his enquiry. For five months the commissioner was free to make up his dossier. The principal grievance of the colonists was insufficiency of food. But is this not always the complaint of soldiers in the field? Moreover they were homesick for Spain. 'God take me to Castile!' was their common oath.

While the visitor sought his information, Columbus, cruelly mortified, showed nothing of his feelings. As usual when his
The Undiscoverable Cipango

prestige was at stake, he struck an attitude. He chose humility and dressed himself like a Franciscan. For the five months he remained at Isabella and during the return voyage, he did not abandon the homespun. This was no simple gesture. True, he reckoned on the favourable impression the Franciscan habit would inevitably make on the pious Isabella, and it would be the surest way to obtain pardon. But this selfish calculation was accompanied by sincere repentance. If he had made mistakes, he meant to expiate them from now on. He thought of the five hundred slaves who were rotting in the Andalusian lands of Bishop Fonseca. He thought of the mastiffs he had set at the heels of the Indians in the plain of Vega Real. He beat his breast. But in such penitence there was also arrogance.

An unforeseen event put Aguado under an obligation to Columbus. A terrible hurricane struck the port of Isabella, shattering the visitor's ship. Courteously—but with a touch of malice—the Admiral had a caravel built for Aguado, and eventually they set sail together, like two good friends, for Columbus did not wish to delay his return to Spain any longer. He made his dispositions for departure. He delegated his powers to his brother Bartolomé, to whom he attached his other brother, Diego. He established small forts equipped with garrisons. Everything was done to avoid a repetition of the tragedy of La Navidad.

On March 10th, 1496, the venerable Niña got ready to raise anchor. Columbus was aboard. Thirty Indians—among them Caonaba, who died on the way—accompanied him, as well as 220 sad-looking colonists, the disillusioned Conquistadors. The sails were unfurled. The Niña drew away from the moorings, flanked by Aguado's caravel.

The voyage was long and difficult. The visitor and the visited did not reach Cadiz until June 11th, after a perilous crossing of fifty-two days. It was not an Admiral in his garnet-red cloak who landed from the Niña, but a penitent in brown wool, with the cord of St Francis round his waist. And what had become of his brilliant escort? In truth, they might be described as survivors of a shipwreck. The crowd on the quay contemplated these almost moribund mariners without a word, and found difficulty in recognising their own folk among them. Happily the troop of Indians in their strange apparel mitigated the bad impression of this return.

This time the interview between Columbus and the Catholic monarchs took place at Burgos. More than ever before the
Admiral had need of all his powers to disperse the clouds which his enemies had heaped upon his glory. He was ready to justify himself. But of what was he accused? It is easy to imagine him before the royal throne, with raised head—already almost white—and the wide movements of the two homespun sleeves. He took up the grievances of his detractors one by one. He refuted them. Five hundred slaves? Had not Pope Innocent VIII once accepted the present of a hundred Moors? The Queen herself had made her cousin, the Queen of Naples, a gift of thirty fine female slaves. Moreover, these Indians were prisoners of war; it was therefore lawful that he had made them slaves. Had he been lacking in respect for the gentlemen of the expedition? Had he refused to provide food for the colonists of Hispaniola? Absurdities and falsehoods! His first care had always been to accord the nobility the consideration that was due to them. As to provisions, that was not his affair, but he had never heard it said that men had died of hunger. In any case, he had undertaken to take to Hispaniola the provisions that were needed there; this was one of the main objects of his third voyage.

His third voyage? Isabella and Ferdinand glanced at one another enquiringly. The moment was scarcely favourable for putting an affair of such dimensions on foot. Vaster plans absorbed the Catholic monarchs. Spain was at war with France. It was necessary to wind up this adventure and turn to serious things; to establish the young Spanish power in Europe. The marriage of Joan, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, to the Archduke of Austria, Philip the Fair, son of the Emperor Maximilian, was settled. It was to be celebrated in the autumn. Was this not the germ of a colossal empire which might one day unite, under a Spanish head, besides the heritage of the Catholic monarchs, Germany, Austria, the Low Countries and sumptuous provinces of France and Italy? Columbus welcomed the promise involved in the alliance with the Hapsburgs. It meant, in fact, the possession of the western world. But who would be master of that other part of the world that stretched towards the Orient, as far as the antipodes? It was already quite enough that Portugal had pushed her caravels even further than was provided for by Alexander VI's bull, to the point of extending the rule of the Aviz dynasty as far as the Cape of Storms (later the Cape of Good Hope). The grandiose plan of the Catholic monarchs—the annexation to their profit of the Holy Roman Empire—fell in with the no less grandiose plan which Columbus was in process of carrying out. The Admiral
displayed the balance-sheet of his second voyage; he had reconnoitred 333 leagues of the continent—the southern coast of Cuba—discovered almost seven hundred islands and completed the conquest of Hispaniola. The riches of these territories were immense. Their Majesties had only to glance at the massive gold collar that had been worn by Caonabo, brother of the cacique of Cibaol. They had only to consider for a moment the robust Indians—representatives of innumerable peoples who asked only to be subordinated to the Spanish Crown and to pay it tribute! Gold and men, these were what the Admiral brought to the Catholic monarchs while they awaited the advantageous alliance with the Great Khan! Cipango was worth as much as the House of Austria!

Once again Ferdinand and Isabella were convinced. They published an edict, in continuation of the PragmaticSanction of April, 1495, by which they reserved Columbus’s rights to the discovered territories. They confirmed the appointment of Bartolomé as the Admiral’s adelantado. Finally, they undertook to assist Columbus in his third voyage. The Franciscan had won.

THE THIRD VOYAGE

Two years passed before Columbus embarked for the third time.

It was from Sanlucar de Barrameda, at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, that the Admiral’s six caravels set out. Having arrived at his usual port of call—Hierro in the Canaries—he split up his fleet: half of it made straight for Hispaniola, while the other half, under his own command, steered for the equator. What was he seeking there? Cipango, of course.

Columbus took exactly three months to reach Hispaniola. In the course of a difficult crossing—it was so hot that melted pitch ran down the hulls of the ships—the Admiral discovered the island of Trinidad and dropped anchor in the Gulf of Paria. There a surprise awaited him. The gulf water was fresh. But Columbus did not let himself be caught by the sailors’ questions! Let them drink this water without fear! God had sent it them. The world, in fact, was not altogether round. Rather, it was shaped like a pear, the top of which was the Earthly Paradise and the stalk the Tree of Life. Four rivers had their source in that Paradise: the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Ganges. The water at Paria came down from Paradise and the river was
the Ganges—certain proof of the proximity of Asia. They were only a couple of steps from the Malacca Straits and the mouth of the Ganges. Paradise was within their grasp. The neighbouring landscape gave proof of it: gardens, multicoloured birds and, on the beach, the variegated heaps of shells. The Admiral's new recruits—they were, for the most part, former convicts—silently savoured the paradisial wave. Columbus did not wait a minute before cutting a quill and reporting the event to the Catholic monarchs.

Once again the Admiral was wrong. The river that washed the bows of his caravels was not the Ganges but the Orinoco. It did not descend from Paradise but from the Andes. The luxuriant soil through which it flowed was not Asia, but it was a continent. In fact, without knowing it and for the first time, Columbus had set foot on the continent. He had passed the archipelagos. This wonderful land, 'one of the most beautiful in the world,' was later named Venezuela. The continent was America.
The Admiral had not the time to pursue his observations further. A sense of urgency—a presentiment?—pushed him on to Hispaniola. What had happened to his two brothers? He drew away from the continent, discovered an island (Margarita) in passing, and steered for his colony.

He reached Hispaniola to find rebellion. There were two opposing parties, each dependent upon an Indian clan: that of Roldan—the Admiral had such confidence in him that he exercised the office of judge!—and that of the brothers Columbus. Roldan had revolted against the authority of the adelantado and his brother. The latter meant to bring him back to obedience. The conflict had reached the acute stage where the decision could only be carried by force of arms. By alternate promises and threats the Admiral succeeded in avoiding the worst, and the fratricidal war did not take place. After a fashion he re-established peace among the Spaniards.

During the absence of Christopher, Bartolomé had discovered some gold mines. He had also founded a town, Santo Domingo, on the south of Hispaniola, and he had fortified the island. But he had been less happy in the role of administrator. The need to maintain order and to obtain respect for his authority had led him to ill-advised violence. In the name of the King, hundreds of Indians were reduced to slavery, while in the name of God, natives accused of sacrilege had been burned at the stake. What was Columbus to do?

Actually, the Admiral was scarcely better inspired than his brother. After re-establishing Roldan, the originator of the revolt, in office, he tightened his hold on the Indians. Interpreting royal instructions, he introduced the repartimento system into Hispaniola, that is to say the sharing of the natives among the Spanish colonists who were holders of concessions—the first stage in the direction of the encomiendas system which ten years later was to become general in the territories under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Crown. For the moment there was scarcely any difference between workers subject to requisition and simple slaves, although they might legally be regarded as ‘vassals’ at the express wish of Isabella. In fact, the Queen insisted on recording her wish to see the Indians treated humanely; a touching but platonic wish. As in every colonial enterprise at its beginning, he who controls the central authority is one thing and he who acts as local delegate is another. The road to Isabella was a long one. Is it surprising that on the way the royal pragmatic sanctions should have weakened?
Two years passed fairly well, two years during which Columbus showed himself to be as bad an administrator as he had been a persistent navigator. The Descubridor had not been made for public business, nor for ruling men. The charmer who had won the princes to his cause was not successful with the colonists. The gentlemen of Hispaniola gave him anything but a welcoming look: he was a parvenu and a stranger. The rest of the Spaniards—they were both good and bad, from the fine Andalusian merchant, who had come to make himself rich, to the common criminal, who desired to redeem himself—gave him poor support: he treated them like dogs. A more serious matter was that both sides suspected him of being a Jew, an unpardonable blemish at a time when everyone carefully measured his drops of limpia sangre. Columbus was not unaware of the rumours that circulated about him in this respect, and he unburdened himself about it to the Catholic monarchs. How could they accuse him of being a converso, he who worked for Christian Spain and never missed Mass!

Cares overwhelmed the Admiral. His responsibilities began to weigh upon him. In a letter to the sovereigns, he asked them to send someone to help him—the first sign of weariness in a man who was regarded as tireless. After long reflection, Isabella and Ferdinand complied with his request. Someone would be sent. Did Columbus asked himself if this someone would be his help, or his judge and executioner?

One morning two caravels—the Gorda and the Antigua—arrived at Santo Domingo. One of them brought the visitor, Francisco de Bobadilla, Commander of the Order of Calatrava, gran caballero y amado de todos, according to his friends. His powers, restricted at first to a simple enquiry into the rebellion against the Admiral, had been greatly extended by the Catholic monarchs, following new reports which had reached the Court. Actually, Bobadilla was about to take over the functions of Governor of Hispaniola. Between the Commander and Columbus conflict was inevitable. The latter scarcely took the trouble to substantiate his rights or those of his brother Bartolomé—rights recognised and patented by royal orders. Bobadilla put in his own. Who was right? It is difficult to know, the visitor having received verbal instructions from the Catholic monarchs. Anyway, Bobadilla’s arrival at Hispaniola cause great commotion among the island’s population, for they regarded it as the Admiral’s disgrace. Partly animated by very evident opposition to the Admiral, the visitor ordered the rebels to be freed, pro-
claimed the freedom of trade and very cleverly exempted the natives from tribute. These demagogic measures were enthusiastically received and had the effect of ranging all Columbus's enemies, Spanish and Indian, on Bobadilla's side. Finally, determined to complete his activities with a spectacular gesture, the visitor had the three brothers Columbus apprehended, clapped into irons—the Admiral was chained by his own cook—and cast into prison.

Bobadilla had arrived in Hispaniola in August. Two months later, Christopher Columbus and his brothers, being regarded as rebels, were embarked for Spain in order to be tried there.

Moved by such ill fortune, the captain of the ship, Alonso de Vallejo, wished to free the Admiral from his chains. He refused: he had been chained under orders from the Catholic monarchs, and only the Catholic monarchs could free him from them. Moreover, he had the firm intention to keep these heavy iron chains all his life, even to the grave, as a reminder of the services he had rendered to Spain and of the reward he had received.

The caravel left Hispaniola eight years to the day after Columbus had discovered Guanahani. The dismal voyage home lasted six weeks—forty days and forty nights. The Admiral filled them with his bitter thoughts, but they were not so bitter that a glint of irony could not intrude. Thanks to Bobadilla, he was about to make a striking entry into the Spanish Court. Already he was calculating its favourable results. After the Franciscan habit, the criminal's robe! What a blow for the Queen!

On a melancholy November morning the caravel entered the Bay of Cadiz. An innumerable crowd was gathered on the quay. Had the whole of Spain come to the port? An enormous uproar greeted the chained man.
CHAPTER IV

His Greatest Discovery: Himself

THE great sun of the Golden Age rose upon Spain, and its symbol was the birth at Ghent, in February, 1500, of the future Charles V, that ambitious prince who was to try and build a powerful Iberian world after the image of the Holy Roman Empire, while, on parallel lines, the great clerics and teachers were to construct an everlasting mystical universe.

The miserable creature who, in December, 1500, fell at the feet of Isabella the Catholic in her palace at Granada, also identified himself with the Golden Age. 'Look upon my chains, my white hair and my tears!' Through the windows of the Alhambra, wide open to the Sierra Nevada, came the murmur of the mob, just as at Cadiz three weeks earlier, indignant and angry to see the one who had discovered the road to Cipango chained like a common malefactor. The people were with him. So was the Queen, who had never abandoned him.

The sovereigns made Columbus rise. He was invited to explain himself, and he did so with his usual eloquence. Although wearied by the bad treatment he had suffered, his eyes inflamed with ophthalmia, his wrists and ankles ravaged by the irons, the Admiral still had a fine presence. His voice, broken at first with sobs, grew firmer and became like thunder as he spoke of his enemies. He accused his accusers and twisted the neck of slander. He ended by convincing everyone. He was freed of his irons, and Bobadilla was recalled. Christopher Columbus was reinstated in his dignities and prerogatives. The Admiral had won, but it was his last triumph.

His triumph was more apparent than real. Certainly Bobadilla had manifestly overstepped his mandate, and he was relieved of his duties in Hispaniola. But it was Nicolas d'Ovando who was appointed in his place. Columbus was no longer Governor of Hispaniola. He was even forbidden to return there, in the name of public order. So he had become a sort of honorary viceroy,
but he continued to draw revenues from the discovered lands. In fact, Columbus had been discharged, without hope of being able to resume an active role.

The decision of the Catholic monarchs—firm in principle, restrained in its nuances—throws light on their feelings with regard to the Admiral. They were grateful to him for his first success. They had friendship for him—especially Isabella—and they never ceased to furnish proof of it. But they were farseeing. Columbus’s inaptitude in command of men and his total absence of administrative capacity were a danger to the future of the territories he had discovered. He had to be separated from them. At the moment when a tough and victorious Spain was in process of giving birth to her empire, her two rulers—Yo el Rey, Yo la Reina—could not afford the luxury of favouritism. Moreover, they had done everything for Christopher Columbus except establish him on a throne.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS TAKES TO PROPHECY

Well informed as they were on the psychology of Columbus, the Catholic monarchs were mistaken in believing that he would be content with this anticipated retreat. He began harassing tactics for the fourth time. He met the same coldness and the same reticence as when he was preparing for his first voyage. The apotheosis of Barcelona seemed to have been forgotten. Astonishment was feigned that he could dream of further discoveries. He had had his share of triumph; let him make way for younger men! Now that Bishop Fonseca had decreed the freedom of the route to the Indies, the ocean was to become as frequented as the Guadalquivir. The time of the pioneers was ended, and they should know how to retire. But was he not an Admiral and Viceroy still? Without a fleet and without a kingdom, it is true; but he still had his hands on a tenth of the proceeds. Thus the gentlemen of Castile and Aragon whispered under the porticos of the Alhambra, with honeyed smiles and much kowtowing, though at heart they were immensely satisfied to see the idol tottering.

Columbus, for his own part, did not see things thus. Though he might be very near his fiftieth year, he felt young. Everything had not been discovered; far from it. There was still Cipango to be reconnoitred, and the road to Jerusalem. At this point in his life a period of religious exaltation began. He
abandoned the Court, elected to go into retreat at Granada, where he would be at peace, and threw himself passionately into study. It was no longer the geographers that he preferred, as at Porto Santo; he doubtless thought he had covered all human knowledge in that field. Instead, his meditations and readings were directed towards biblical themes and the Holy Scriptures became his vital sustenance. After having absorbed the Prophets for nearly a year—especially Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—he produced a synthesis of them in a work called The Book of Prophecies. This strange work—heavy reading, but sometimes of superhuman beauty—reveals a new Columbus, and makes it possible for us to decipher certain notes hastily scribbled in his log-book. Throughout this torrential book, which is heavy with reminiscences and quotations (clear evidence of an autodidact at work), one sees the unexpected although suspected figure of a Christopher Columbus who was simultaneously a mystic and a prophet. He regarded himself as a prophet and a father of the Church, and in a sense he was both.

In The Book of Prophecies he first of all stated and defined his religious doctrine. For the period it was daring and bordered on heresy. 'It is my opinion that the Holy Spirit works through Christians, Jews and Musulmans, and in men of every sect. And not only among scholars, but also among the ignorant—a proposition that heralded the Reformation. More daring still, having regard to the edict of proscription which was only eight years old, was his allusion to a universal church which would unite both Jews and Christians. Relying on the Psalms of David, Columbus even went so far as to claim that a converso could remain an infidel. What, in fact, did he want to prove? That conversion to the Christian faith did not perforce imply renunciation of Judaism? Did he intend thus to justify his Hebrew origin? However that may be, the stand he took in defending the Jews and explaining them was striking. What brotherly accents he used in espousing their cause!

This passionate absorption in the prophets raised Columbus to a pitch of exaltation. He was no longer satisfied to comment; he became original and even took to prophecy. Calling upon St Augustine and Alfonso the Wise, astronomer and King of Castile, he foretold the end of the world. Everyone knew that the world must end in the seventh millennium of its existence; it was then 6845 years old and had only 155 years to live, just the time needed for all the prophesies to come about. In a sort of mystical trance, the new prophet recalled the historical creation of the
people of Israel. They were indeed the chosen people. God had chosen them to rule over men and to bring great things to pass. In skilful disorder, Columbus mingled the brilliant imagery of the Old Testament with the solemn themes of the Spanish Crusade. He called upon the Catholic monarchs to complete the Reconquest by capturing the Holy Sepulchre from the Moslems. Time was short. It was for them to close the history of the world with a gesture at once political and religious. But they must act quickly.

The gold of Cipango, the earthly paradise of the Gulf of Paria, the conversion of the Indians, the conquest of Jerusalem, spices and pearls, the teachings of the Bible and the calculations of the astrologers—was this the discourse of an illuminé or a doctoral thesis? An appearance of logic, however, tied these separate ideas together. The man who made prophesies in his retreat at Granada was not so different from the one who had explained his ideas to the Spanish sovereigns fifteen years earlier. The discovery of the road to the Indies and the alliance with the Great Khan were not an end but a means. It was a matter of harvesting legions of conversos in oriental lands. And as for gold—there could never be enough of it—it could serve to finance the colossal expedition which would give Sion back its early grandeur. Even the return of the 'Holy Dwelling' to God—it was all there, although the Admiral took care to make clear that both Christians and Jews would have a place in the Casa Santa. Columbus was obsessed with the idea of the union of the churches. How far ahead he was of his orthodox century!

The Admiral addressed his book to the Catholic monarchs. They never received it. Did Columbus fear at the last moment that he had made his thoughts too obvious? Did he think of Isabella the fanatic and the fires which flamed at Seville? It is true that in his book he borrowed more often the irritated growling of Jehovah than the tender voice of Christ. The Old Testament inspired him more than did the Gospel. It is also true that his personal religion had all the features of Judaism: an ardent restlessness, a messianic sense, a certain taste for catastrophe and, more than all these, that sombre view of the world that the persecuted have. Had not his own life been one long complaint? And as for his Christianity, filled with his own cries and bathed in his own tears, carried along on the apocalyptic waves of a lucid despair, is it that of a cristiano viejo?

The colour of the hair and of the skin, the beauty of the eyes, the shape of the lips and nose, the gift for trade and the love of
gain—these features are not enough to identify a Jew. But to believe oneself chosen, to know how to wait and suffer, to seek martyrdom, to be hard in power and stoical in servitude: these are scarcely mistakeable. These were the essential virtues of Christopher Columbus, the Genoese.

FAREWELL TO CIPANGA

The flotilla which, in May, 1502, raised anchor in the port of Cadiz was a very meagre one. Four caravels of medium tonnage and not more than 150 crew was all that Columbus was allowed.

A royal official was aboard, charged with noting the incidents of the voyage, and especially with watching the Admiral's behaviour. The latter was forbidden to touch Hispaniola or to use natives as slaves. That he was mistrusted is clear: it was more a piece of study that he had been authorised to carry out than a colonial inspection. Once again it had required a grave
event for Spain to force the Catholic monarchs to a decision. Vasco da Gama had turned the Cape of Good Hope. A Portuguese had discovered the sea road to the Indies. As the route followed by Vasco da Gama was east of the line of demarcation fixed by Alexander VI, the Spaniards were excluded from it. Was fortune to turn to the profit of Portugal? Certainly, unless the western route proved shorter. It was necessary to return to Columbus's plan, to give him carte blanche for a last time, the more so as he said he knew the strait, west of the Gulf of Paria, that gave access to the Indian Ocean.

The road to the Indies, Cipango... could it be imagined that the Almirante Mayor had abandoned his fabulous plan? The old lion—he was fifty years old—could not live without the odour of salt and tar. And he wanted revenge.

From Cadiz to Martinique—Martinino—by way of the Canaries, the crossing was calm, almost monotonous. Ten years had sufficed for this daring exploit to have become an undertaking, if not commonplace, at least without mystery. For the five weeks of the voyage the crews were peaceful. Columbus was less so. Certainly, since his retreat at Granada, he was no longer the same man. A great peace was in process of descending upon him. Was he about to acquire at last that philosophy of events which he had always lacked? Not yet! And the anxiety which possessed him was terribly human. While he drew near to the West Indian archipelago, he thought of all his collaborators who, since his third voyage, had followed and passed beyond his own tracks. He knew their names by heart, their itineraries and adventures. Vicente Yañez Pinzon had crossed the Equator, reached the coast of Brazil and dropped anchor in the Gulf of Paria. Alonso de Hojeda had made the same circuit, accompanied by Juan de la Cosa. All three—his partner, his second in command, his pilot—had betrayed him. The two latter had joined ship with a certain Florentine named Amerigo Vespucci. There was also the Portuguese, Cabral, who had discovered the land of Santa Cruz (Brazil) and the Spaniard, Rodrigo de Bastidas, who had pushed as far as the Gulf of Darien. All this in scarcely three years and at the very time when Columbus—their master—was crossing the ocean chained like a criminal or meditating upon the fate of Spain while devouring the Bible. In short, all these adventurers had done nothing but repeat his gesture. But this gesture was without meaning if it was not directed towards some grandiose end. He, Christopher Columbus, had fixed that end a long time before: the West
Indies, their emperor, their gold and their people—more numerous than the fish of the sea. And Cipango, always Cipango. This prize, simultaneously political and mystical, no one had yet captured. It remained to be taken, and Columbus would take it. This resolute man, who challenged the new conquistadors, was nevertheless double their age. He was half blind, crippled with gout, exhausted by nameless experiences. But his spirit was young and his will would only be broken by death. Almost peaceful he was, but not resigned; he would never be that. Such was Columbus during his ultimate struggle with the Dark Sea.

His plan was as follows: to make for Jamaica and from there push on directly to Central America, following the northern coasts until the discovery of the famous strait opening on to China... or Japan. Hardly had the fleet lost sight of Martinique than a violent tempest arose, inflicting serious damage on Columbus’s caravels. What could he do but seek aid in Hispaniola whose outlines were visible through the mist? But Hispaniola was the forbidden land. There lay Santo Domingo, the Haitian paradise the Admiral had discovered, but which was closed to him, though it was his own realm. He sent a boat ashore but his messenger was turned away. Governor Ovando was intractable, and referred Columbus to the royal decrees: Columbus was forbidden to land on Hispaniola under any pretext whatever. He must continue his voyage.

Columbus received the blow without flinching. While the four wretched caravels cruised off the Haitian coast, a powerful fleet of more than thirty vessels sailed away from it, steering for Spain, laden with riches. The Catholic monarchs were to have their share: four thousand pieces of gold. Bobadilla and Roldan, the hateful conquerors of Columbus, were among the passengers. The two fleets met; they were no more than a few cables length from one another, when the tempest redoubled in its fury. Columbus cried to the captains to turn back to Santo Domingo, but the Admiral’s advice was lost in the uproar of the waves. A few hours later, almost the whole squadron—twenty-seven ships—went to the bottom, and Bobadilla and Roldan were among the victims. Was this the vengeance of heaven? Columbus was not far from thinking so. Anyway, his miserable fleet, spared by the tempest, followed its mad course towards a chimerical port.

Columbus’s fourth voyage was to last nearly two and a half years. A voyage?—rather a tragic wandering through a liquid labyrinth. The Ariadne’s Thread which he thought he held was
only the insubstantial thread of his own tenacious dream. Let us look at his wayward track on the map. Columbus left the vicinity of Hispaniola, strewn with the wreckage of the sunken fleet. He then ran along the south-east coast of Jamaica; leaving the Jardines de la Reina on his right, he steered for the Honduras, which he reached at the level of the present town of Trujillo. He landed and enquired of the natives concerning the places where gold could be found. They indicated Veragua, which he believed was Malacca, the Golden Peninsula! He set sail once more. Despite a fiendish tempest, which blew for forty-four days, he succeeded in rounding Cape Gracias a Dios at the present frontier of Honduras and Nicaragua. He ran past the coasts of these two lands, and continued southwards along Costa Rica and Veragua. He reached the isthmus of Panama, which was where he expected to find the mouth of the Ganges. Columbus was certain of this; he had recognised the spot on the maritime charts. For several months he prowled around the neighbourhood of Panama, but found no break in its facade. He then passed on to the Gulf of Darien. But this unlucky man had no idea that he had only to land on the Panamanian coast and to cover 125 miles westward to reach, not the Indian Ocean and the Asiatic Empire, but the Pacific Ocean. Who among his companions would have been able to resist the fatal miasmas of those tropical forests? Others, nevertheless, were soon to draw aside the suffocating curtain of the Isthmus of Darien.

Columbus had lost! This daring exploration, from Honduras to the frontiers of Colombia, had taught him nothing. In the north he had missed Yucatan, the point from which Cortés was to start out for the conquest of Mexico; in the south he had missed Colombia, the edge of an immense continent; while in the west he had missed the Pacific, the widest ocean in the world. It had been the Descubridor's misfortune aways to have touched upon the Discovery and to have half-opened gates through which others passed. And what misled him was Cipango.

Columbus decided to return to Spain, and it was a pitiful return. Only two of his four caravels remained. Their bottoms were eaten away by worms. The men were weary. Only the Admiral's brother and son, Bartolomé and Fernando Columbus, still showed good humour. The Admiral himself was calm: he spoke little but he wrote much. He supervised the manœuvres, for the state of the vessels and crew was such that the least weakening could involve catastrophe. After a first call at Cuba,
where Columbus tried to get the hulls repaired, the gale forced him to beach his fleet on the northern coast of Jamaica. His fleet? Two derelicts, only just good enough to lodge the crews while waiting for help. Two sailors, Mendez and Fieschi, parleyed with the natives, procured two pirogues and carried out the extraordinary feat of covering the distance from Jamaica to Hispaniola in five days; 125 miles with oars on a raging sea. While awaiting the return of these two intrepid oarsmen Columbus drafted for the Catholic monarchs a missive which is called *Lettera Rarissima* and, to a certain extent, is a sequel to *The Book of Prophecies*. In this letter he was not content to give merely a pathetic account of his last voyage; he demanded justice for himself and his own people. He demanded that his enemies should be punished. With a sort of sad covetousness, he evoked the golden roofs of Cathay, the precious stones of Cipango and the copper mines, while affirming that he alone knew the road thither. But the great business, *el otro negocio famosisimo*, was the liberation of Jerusalem, which Columbus had never ceased to aim into the royal ears during the seven years he had spent at Court. So here he was, again carried away by a storm of prophecy. He harked back to the Psalmist, he cried aloud his despair and his faith, he called upon Jehovah.

Christopher Columbus wrote this letter to the Catholic monarchs three years before his death and in conditions such that one cannot suspect its sincerity. He was sick, incapable of moving, tied to a wreck, surrounded by men he doubted, scarcely seeing them, not knowing if Mendez and Fieschi would ever return, watching the irritated whispering of the Spaniards and the menacing plashing of Indian pirogues. The circumstances scarcely favoured delusion, much less so as Columbus had no illusions concerning the fate of his letter. If he died in Jamaica, who would take care of that parchment? It was more a conversation with himself than an appeal to the rulers of Spain—a bewildering conversation, giving strength to the principal features of a personality already known to us, and emphasizing its essential element: contradiction. Weakness and strength, pride and humility, trickery and candour, realism and unconcern; above all, an ardent faith in his own prophetic mission, and for all that, a stoicism and a confidence in God that outbursts of genuine emotion affirm. 'A hope in that which has created all men sustains me.' There is also this exclamation: 'Where there is no love, everything ends'—a singular thought like that which St. John of the Cross was to formulate three-
quarters of a century later: 'There where there is no love, put love and you will extract love.' Columbus already sensed the warning of the Carmelite: 'In the evening of your life, you will be asked about love.'

Mendez and Fieschi took five days to get from Jamaica to Hispaniola. It took them no less than a year to get back. It was not an easy matter to soften Ovando's hostility; moreover, he was much occupied with suppressing a revolt that had occurred in the colony, and he naturally attached only a secondary importance to his predecessor's worries. As to Columbus, while awaiting the return of his ambassadors, he had to face a mutiny among his crew. Both of them ended by mastering their respective situations. Two ships got under weigh for Jamaica. Food was already lacking and the Admiral was at the end of his resources.

The two ships steered for Santo Domingo. Columbus was accorded the unexpected privilege of landing there, and the surprise of seeing himself cordially welcomed by Ovando. Doubtless the Governor of Hispaniola reckoned that the Admiral was a 'finished' man; he was no longer dangerous, and one could afford to be polite to him. Columbus and his companions stayed at Santo Domingo for three months, then they embarked for Spain. A last look—the Discoverer could distinguish shapes and colours only with difficulty—at the horizon of Cipango. A last tempest off the Canaries, and at the beginning of November the people of Seville saw two dismasted caravels reach the port of Sanlucar de Barrameda. No one paid any attention to the old gentleman with white hair and beard who was brought off on a litter. He turned a blind look westward. Over there were the West Indies... and Cipango.

SWAN SONG

Columbus landed at Sanlucar de Barrameda on November 7th, 1504. A few days later—on November 26th—Isabella the Catholic died at Medina del Campo. The Admiral had lost his protectress and his only support. This was all that was lacking in his experience, and God had sent it him, so he drank his cup to the dregs. The death of Isabella would make his own death even more bitter.

Columbus had now but one reason to hurry, to get to Court. But Ferdinand could scarcely bear to receive him, for
what would he have to listen to but the echo of that complaint
the aggressive accent of which he had known too well for twenty
years? Under various pretexts, the King put off from day to
day the audience the Admiral asked, or even demanded. Mean-
while, Columbus sent letter after letter to his son Diego, page
at Court, giving him messages for the sovereign. He must not
fail to kiss the King's hands on his behalf. He must find out if
the dead Queen had not, in her will, made known her wish that
he should return into possession of the Indies. He was no longer
beseeched with Cipango, but only that the King should confirm
the Santa Fe agreement, that is the transmission to his son of
his own offices and titles. He was more interested than ever in
what was going on in the Indies, was surprised that his advice
was not asked on the appointment of three bishops to the con-
quered territories and demanded that accounts should be
rendered to him. He who had shown himself so bad an adminis-
trator, now gave the King very wise counsel. Theory was easier
than practice.

Judging that his son Diego's credit at Court was insufficient,
Columbus sent him reinforcements: his other son Fernando, and
his brother Bartolomé. The three men of the Columbus family
were in position and busied themselves to bring success to the
Admiral's cause, the juridicial basis of which appeared unassail-
able. The Santa Fe agreement had conceded to Columbus the
titles and prerogatives of Admiral of the Ocean Sea and of the
Islands and Continents, transmissible to his heirs. The titles of
Viceroy and Governor-General of the discovered territories were
personal. But a letter of privilege, signed by the Catholic
monarchs some days after the agreement, had extended these
last titles—more important by their material results—to the
Admiral's heirs. It is easy to understand the tenacity of the
Columbus family in defending the thesis of 'legality.' It is easy
to understand also the resistance of the Crown. The strict appli-
cation of the texts would have consecrated, for an unlimited
period, the reign of a dynasty of adventurers—foreigners more-
over—over an empire which already seemed to surpass in extent
and riches the Kingdom of Spain itself.

While the three Columbus besieged King Ferdinand at
Segovia, the Admiral seethed with impatience at Seville.
There was no question that he would regain his health.
If he recovered enough energy to get to Court, he would con-
sider himself satisfied. He had to find means of transport, for
he could not move. The sumptuous litter which, two years
Ferdinand the Catholic
(Portrait in Windsor Castle, reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen)

Isabella the Catholic (Portrait in the Palace in Madrid)
The world without America: a map of 1489 showing Ptolomaus' picture of the world, amplified by Diaz' discovery that the Indies could be reached round the point of Africa

PLATE 5

The first inclusion of America in the world map: Waldseemuller's map of 1507. Vespucci's 'New World' is very large in relation to a hardly noticeable North America
His Greatest Discovery: Himself

earlier, had brought the remains of the Grand Cardinal of Spain from Tendilla to Seville was suggested, but Columbus rejected this macabre offer. He had himself hoisted on to a mule and, six months after his melancholy landing at Sanlúcar de Barrameda, he set out for Segovia. He arrived there, after much difficulty, only to learn that the Court had moved to Salamanca. No matter; he would go to Salamanca.

The reception that Ferdinand gave Columbus was correct and no more. The sovereign confined himself to hearing the Admiral’s requests. He promised to examine them benevolently. These were friendly words but they would not satisfy Columbus. He raised his voice. Ferdinand then suggested naming an official whose special duty at the Chancellery would be to look after the Admiral’s interests. Would he not agree to exchange all his titles—fundamentally questionable—for the governorship of a town in Castile? Columbus was not taken in by such courtly language; he would abandon none of his claims. He demanded, quite simply, that justice be done to him. He withdrew, still very fine and very dignified, despite his feeble gait.

The great man was to be seen again in the royal antechambers, awaiting his turn among the courtiers. It was now at Valladolid that Ferdinand had taken up residence. Columbus followed him there, pursuing him like a living reproach. How many times was the irritated eye of the Prince to fall upon this motionless phantom, standing near a window, wearing over his shoulders the garnet-red cloak of the Admirals of Castile and keeping his hat on his head! To remain covered before the King and to ride at his side were only two of the various privileges which the Descubridor intended never to renounce.

The Princess Juana, daughter of Isabella the Catholic, had succeeded her mother on the throne of Castile and Leon. Accompanied by her husband, Philip the Fair, son of the Emperor Maximilian of Austria, she arrived at Valladolid, coming from Flanders, to take possession of her kingdom. A last hope rose in the breast of Christopher Columbus. He remembered Isabella—one the little Infanta of Madrigal de las Altas Torres—to whom he had promised Cipango’s gold. If only Isabella should live again in her daughter, all would still be saved. All what? His honour, that is to say his interests and those of his descendants.

A few hundred yards, no more, separated the modest dwelling of Columbus from the royal residence; after his death, the Dukes of Veragua made a palace of it. It was too far for the
pilgrim of the Dark Sea. Only the circuit of his room was possible from now on. In a few days it was with difficulty that he could turn in his bed. He charged Bartolomé, his brother, to give Juana a letter written in amazing terms, having regard to the fact that a man at death's door had penned it. 'I can still render you services such as have never been seen...'. With his four limbs stricken and his sight extinguished, of what services was Columbus speaking? This last offering to the Crown of Spain—himself, almost a corpse—fits well into the mystical aspect of his personality. He would have given all!

Columbus's message did not hold the new Queen's attention for a second. She was naturally taciturn, and in this young woman, ever anxiously twisting her hands, Juana the Mad could already be seen. Her husband's infidelities tormented her more than the fate of the fallen Admiral. As to Philip, the Prince Charming, he led the dance, placed his Flemish friends in the good jobs and led his father-in-law a hard life. The last faithful cry of the dying servant was lost among the guttural accents of the favourites of the Austrian archduke.

Christopher Columbus did not understand that he had become an outdated hero, living beyond his time. He was in his own era at the taking of Granada, in the ecstacies of the Reconquest, in the chivalrous myths—in short, in the heroic epoch. But while he was wandering upon the ways of the Ultra Mar, Spain was growing hard. She was realising her unity, which the harsh fist of the Flemish emperor was in a few years to seal. For the moment the master of the day was Philip the Fair, merely the Prince Consort, but promised to a much higher destiny. He had not come to Valladolid as a visitor; he was the forerunner of the Habsburgs. He set foot in Spain, and with him in the Trastamare palace was the presence of the House of Austria. Ferdinand was troubled—a little late!—by this nuisance of a son-in-law. With anguish he watched the brief Spanish career of Philip develop. If only he had foreseen it! But the dice had been cast and the game developed very rapidly. On April 15th Philip the Fair arrived in Valladolid. In June he was acknowledged King of Castile jointly with his wife. In July, the Cortes at Valladolid took oath to Queen Juana, King Philip and Charles, Prince of Asturias. Ferdinand was no longer anything in Castile, but he kept the sovereignty of Aragon.

In September, Philip suddenly died. The new star's path in the Castilian sky might have been dazzling. But he had only five months: just time to prepare the way for his son (now six years
old, grandson of Maximilian, great-grandson of Charles the Bold, and future Charles the Fifth) who ten years later would land at Villaviciosa to inherit all Spain. Ferdinand, whether he wished it or not, and despite fruitless combinations to tear the heritage of Isabella from the House of Austria, had won the Empire. But had he kept Spain?

Thus this month of May, 1506, did not belong to any epoch. It was at the crossing-point of two roads: one which still penetrated the shadows of the Middle Ages and the other which opened upon imperial prospects. In fact, Columbus could not have died at a worse moment. Periods of transition are not favourable to great men. But Spain's indifference to the Admiral was unequalled except by her indifference to the events that were developing there.

While Ferdinand clung to the Spanish heritage, Columbus thought of nothing but his own succession. He dictated his will. He wanted to put his affairs in order, to protect his children against royal disfavour, which was always possible. But he wrote his testament too. On May 19th, before the notary Pedro de Hinojedo, the Descubridor began his last colloquy with men.

Complex as the personality of Christopher Columbus may have been, it is singularly illuminated by his writings. Freed of their turgidity, swept clear of their contradictions, the Admiral's own words explain him better than the testimony of his contemporaries. The notes of his voyages, his Book of Prophecies, his correspondence and his letter from Jamaica to the Catholic monarchs find their complement in the last public deed he inscribed. His testament confirms the essential features of his character. He succeeded in portraying his own personality. But he shows us nothing we have not seen already.

Reverting to the terms of a will that he had drafted eight years earlier, Christopher Columbus named his son Diego as his general legatee by reminding him of his rights and duties. His rights? Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy of the West Indies and the revenues deriving from them. His duties? To build a chapel where three masses were to be said every day: one in honour of the Holy Trinity, one to the glory of Our Lady's Conception, and a third for the peace of the souls of his father, his mother and his wife—Felipa Muniz de Perestrello, the gentle and forgotten Portuguese, mother of Diego. Columbus also charged his son to contribute 'to the honour and prosperity' of the city of Genoa. Finally, he commended to him Beatriz Enriquez, mother of his other son Fernando, adding: 'And let
this be done as a relief to my conscience for it weighs much on
my soul. The reason of it, it is not licit for me to write here.'
Thus, before dying, Columbus returned to his old loves: his
native land, his wife and the companion of his evil days. He had
been unfaithful to all three: Genoa, Felipa, and Beatriz. Three
heavy causes for remorse, but the Admiral said no more of them.
All comment on this subject seemed to have no place in a testa-
ment. But what an admission is contained within this modest
phrase! He now knew well that he had sacrificed everything to
pride.

There were a few more days. That great peace which, during
his retirement to Granada, had brushed him with its wing, now
unfolded him utterly. Following the example of Queen Isabella,
he assumed the habit of the Third Order of St Dominic. His
eyes never left the crucifix. The chest which held his relics—the
irons with which Bobadilla had laden him on his return from
the third voyage—had been drawn close. He had never been
separated from them. Doubtless they reminded him less of
Spanish ingratitude and his own humiliation than of the five-
hundred Indian slaves shackled by his orders. The crucifix and
the chains! Yes, it was certainly God who had led his caravels.
But gold had wasted all.

The Admiral of the Ocean Sea was watched over by his son
Diego and by the two sailors who had saved him at Jamaica:
Mendez and Fieschi—a Portuguese and a Genoese. Could
Columbus have thought of a more symbolical guard of honour—
the presence at his pillow of his first and second homelands, and
the presence too of that humble 'troop' who had had faith in
his star?

On May 21st, Ascension Day, Columbus sighed: 'Lord, into
thy hands I surrender my spirit.' Then he died. He was fifty-five
years old. His death passed unnoticed. The Valladolid chronicle
did not even mention it.

Columbus died in the midst of his magnificent error, but the
error saved him from despair. For this unlucky man was always
unaware of his own ill-fortune. He had failed—by a degree
further north—to reach Florida. He had failed—it was only
necessary to cross the Isthmus of Panama—to discover the
Pacific. Imagine the destiny of Spain had she been mistress,
before even the 15th century was ended, of the North Atlantic,
the South Atlantic and the Pacific! Imagine the glory of the man
had he discovered the two Americas and forced the gateway to
the Pacific! But Columbus had failed to be that man. If he had
not been obsessed with Cipango, if the sea, the men and the period had been constantly in his favour, if the passion for gold. ... But the conditional tense has nothing to do with the facts. It is of little importance, in fact, that of all the arrows shot westwards of the Dark Sea—North, Centre and South—none had really reached its end. These fiery tracks had lit the Atlantic darkness. The main point, as regards the man, was that in the last days of his life, in the dim light of his own sorrows, Columbus had discovered the way to himself.

Which is the picture we should keep? Master Columbus, the young mariner; or the outlaw of La Rabida; or Don Cristobal Colon, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, dressed all in red and wearing about his neck the collar of Isabella the Catholic; or the Franciscan, full of contrition, returning from the second voyage; or the condemned man, laden with chains, returning to Spain for the third time; or the Tertiary of St Dominic, dying, almost alone, a few steps from the princess whose glory he had made? Each of these pictures is genuine. They illustrate the successive sincerities of Columbus. But the last picture must be held, for it completes the personality. The martyr had ceased to fight. The covetous man had no other hunger than that of penitence. His soul—how light was this caravel that he took to port!—drew near to the Promised Land, which was no longer Cipango but the Kingdom of God.

COLUMBUS DIES AND AMERICA IS DISCOVERED

Columbus's persistence was rewarded, at least so far as his heritage was concerned. After endless proceedings, Diego, Christopher's general legatee, saw himself confirmed in his father's privileges, including the title 'Admiral of the Indies.' By an astonishing reversal of fortune, Diego was appointed Governor of Hispaniola, replacing Ovando. What a posthumous revenge for the man who was prohibited from landing there!

Fernando Columbus devoted himself to learning and formed an admirable library at Seville. Both knew the favour of the Emperor Charles the Fifth. But the two sons of Diego Columbus having died without issue, and Fernando having no heirs, the sumptuous heritage of the Admiral was escheated. Nothing remains of Columbus and his two sons but a few bones gathered together beneath a stone in the middle of the central nave of Seville Cathedral. It is appropriate here to emphasise a last
stroke of ill-luck. Transported after his death to the cloister of Santa María de las Cuevas at Seville, Columbus's remains were transferred to Santo Domingo, and from there to Havana, where they were mixed with those of Diego. An earthquake completed the confusion. Nearly four centuries after the death of Christopher Columbus, a coffin from Havana joined that which held the remains of Hernando at Seville. Four heralds in dalmatic, with the royal arms of Spain, mount guard around a slab, under which a small heap of calcareous dust completes its disintegration; the Discoverer and his sons are mingled together.

More serious even than this physical disappearance was the shadow cast upon the work of Columbus in the first part of the 16th century, and even on his name, for which another was substituted, Amerigo Vespucci's. Who was this Vespucci? A strange and inquisitive man. Born at Florence of well-to-do parents, he studied mathematics and physics, and was entrusted by the Medicis with organising Columbus's second expedition. It was thus that he established himself at Seville, where he made the acquaintance of the Admiral, then at the height of his glory. This scholar turned man of affairs was soon bitten by the demon of adventure. He participated in numerous reconnoitring voyages, accompanied Vicente Yáñez Pinzon and Coelho on their explorations of the coasts of Central America and Brazil, and was one of those who planted the Portuguese flag on the land of Santa Cruz (later named Brazil). But he seems, in fact, like a kind of amateur tourist. Though he participated in distant explorations, he took neither initiative, nor responsibility, nor risks. Aboard the Portuguese and Spanish caravels he was simply a passenger of rank, much respected by the crews because of his knowledge. He advised but he did not command. And the certificate of piloto mayor which he was awarded was a tribute more to his theoretical knowledge than to his capacities as a navigator, of which he had only rarely given proof. It is not that he had not sometimes taken the helm. It was just that he had not acquired the knack. Vespucci was not a sailor in the sense that Juan de la Cosa or the Pinzon brothers were sailors. How was it, then, that to him was attributed the paternity of a discovery that seems, in all fairness, to belong wholly to Columbus? A simple sentence explains everything. It was written by Vespucci to Lorenzo de Medici on his return from his first voyage to Brazil: '... I have found, in these southern lands, a continent more peopled with men and animals than our own Europe, than Asia and Africa, with a more temperate climate,
softer than any other region known to us. . . . One can, with good reason name it the New World. . . . A capital sentence, if it is reconciled to Columbus's statement that 'The whole earth is an island' and his conviction that by steering westwards he would reach Asia. Thus it was that Vespucci gave the name *Mundus Novus* to the discovered territory, which was clearly distinct from the known world and separated from it by an ocean. Thus it became known, but Columbus had never suspected its existence.

* * *

To discover is not everything. Discovery must be given a meaning. The incredible hardships, the tears and the blood and sweat of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea would have been to no purpose if a clear mind had not erased the name Gipango and inscribed the words *Mundus Novus* in its place. Columbus had crossed the Dark Sea from one side to another, forced a reputedly uncleasurable barrier and touched upon marvellous shores, without seeing anything but the reflection of his inner dream. This sublime vagabond had given the New World only a blind look. Amerigo Vespucci eyed it clearly and recognised it. Nevertheless, the visionary Genoese and the clear-minded Florentine can take one another by the hand. Columbus remains the Discoverer of America and Vespucci its Explainer.

Master Christopher the Unlucky! Vespucci adds to the tale of bad luck. Without Vespucci we should speak of the Colombias, not of the Americas.

Portuguese three-masted caravel; from Juan de la Cosa's map.
Discovery of the island of Hispaniola; woodcut from the 1494 account.
When the time has come, I will return into your midst, by the eastern sea, together with white and bearded men.

(Proclamation to the Toltoc people of Quetzalcoatl, god and king, in the year 1000 of the Christian era. Aztec legend).
Lettera di Amerigo vespucci
delle isole nuovamente
trouate in quattro
suoi viaggi.

Woodcut from the first edition of Amerigo Vespucci's travel-story.
COLUMBUS set out on his first voyage in 1492. He died at Valladolid in 1506. At the same time as Columbus, other flotillas were sailing the Dark Sea. What was the product of these fifteen years of discovery?

Broadly speaking, Columbus and his companions had reconnoitred the Greater and Lesser Antilles, the Gulf of Mexico, Yucatan, the coasts of Honduras and Nicaragua, the Isthmus of Panama and the Gulf of Darien, as well as the Venezuelan coast and the mouths of the Orinoco. If, as many were beginning to think, these countries were not the western part of the Indies, a name had to be given them. It was a German who found that name.

In the year following that of Columbus's death, Martin Waldseemuller, of German nationality, but Professor of Geography at Saint Dié, published under the pseudonym ‘Hylacomulus’ a work entitled Cosmographie Introductio, in which, after speaking of three parts of the world, he said: 'But these parts of the world are now well known. A fourth part, as we shall soon see, has been discovered by Amerigo Vespucci. Why not therefore call it Amerige or America, that is to say the land of Americus—Americi terram—from the name of its great and learned discoverer, just as Europe and Asia bear the names of women?' Indeed why not? Was not Amerigo Vespucci the one who made the discovery intelligible? To him, therefore, the credit and the glory! But it is easier to name an empire than to conquer it; only a little propaganda is required.

Afterwards, Waldseemuller felt he had been frivolous. More precise information, perhaps even remorse, brought him back to the suggestion. Vespucci's deserts were undeniable. But should his perspicacity make one forget the labours and tribulations of Columbus, without which there might not have been a New World? The German's honesty found no echo. The idea he had
launched made progress: he could no longer stop it. Vespucci's letter to Lorenzo de Medici brought him to the attention of Europe, while that from Columbus to the Catholic monarchs in the same year passed unperceived.

The term America, which was at first applied to the territories south of the Equator, ended by describing the whole of the New World. In 1541, thirty-five years after the death of Columbus, a Dutch geographer, Gerard Mercator, drew a map in which, clearly and for the first time, Mundus Novus was separated from Asia: it bore the name America.

THE CONQUISTADORS' RING OF FIRE

It is time to take a brief look at the world which had just been born, if we wish to judge or to appraise the daring of the first conquerors. The site of the adventure must be located in order to help us estimate the worth of the adventurers. Let us traverse the New World from north to south: the battlefield, empire and cemetery of the Conquistadors.

Formed of two southward pointing triangles, connected by a narrow strip of land, the American continent stretches in latitude from 71° North to 56° South, that is through 127 degrees. On the west the Pacific Ocean separates it from Asia.

In reality, the New World consists of two continents, connected by a string of islands and isthmuses. That it remained so long unknown to Europe, to Africa and Asia can be understood if the enormous distances from each of them are borne in mind. From Dakar to Natal is 1,900 miles; from Lisbon to Buenos Aires is 5,300 miles and from Seville to Lima is 7,200 miles. 9,400 miles separate the coast of Chile from Australian shores and there are about 12,500 miles, that is half the circumference of the earth, between Panama and the eastern coast of Indo-China. These figures, even in an airborne age, eloquently explain why America remained terra incognita until the 15th century.

As to the physical aspect of the New World: to the West a dorsal mountain ridge curves from the Bering Strait to the Strait of Magellan. This continuous chain—the Rocky Mountains of North America and the Cordilleras of the Andes in South America—is like a gigantic cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In the centre are the plains, from Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Mexico in the north, and from the mouth of the Amazon to Tierra del Fuego in the south. Finally, in the east, plateaus
slope towards and plunge into the Atlantic Ocean. In short, from west to east there are three parallel zones: mountains, plains, plateaus.

The extreme length of America in terms of latitude (Europe and Asia are wider than they are long) gives it an astonishing variety of climate and vegetation. In the northern part of South America (Amazonia, Guiana, Colombia and Venezuela) the climate is equatorial, warm and humid; the rains are abundant and constant. A dense forest of giant trees and a strange and striking flora quiver in restless vitality. Few men risk themselves there; it is the dark kingdom of insects, of monkeys with prehensile tails among the lianas, and of tapirs. Only the hum of myriads of mosquitoes and the roar of the jaguar break the silence. On each side of this equatorial strip are two tropical zones: on the north, Central America and Mexico, and on the south, Brazil and the northern tips of Argentina and Chile. In the lowlands, at least, there is the same steady heat, but it rains only in summer. The still impressive forests are lighter; their leafy roofs open up and sunlight splashes through in golden droplets. Compact and dense along the rivers, the forests thin out progressively and disappear. To this succeeds the bush, studded with clumps of trees; it is peopled by innumerable birds and the puma is its king. On either side of the tropical zones begin the zones of temperate continental climate. The winters are icy and the summers torrid. In the north are the forests, and the flora is like that of Europe; then come the immense, scarcely undulating prairies. In the south, the monotonous pampas. Finally, at the ends of the two continents, in Alaska and Northern Canada, and in Tierra del Fuego, are the cold regions, reaching polar conditions along the icy Arctic coasts.

Very cold, burning hot or bathed in humidity, the American climate is softened along the western coasts where it is in contact with the western winds and the ocean currents. Thus the Californian and Chilean coasts, narrowly squeezed between the mountains and the Pacific Ocean, have an admirable climate: water and sunshine in profusion, a mild wind, orange and lemon trees, and the soft rustling of the palms.

The structure of the American continent cannot but favour the formation of a powerful hydrographic system. The immense plains, unbroken by any mountains whatever, are a vast bed for the waters that run down from the high watersheds in the west. In North America there are two great river systems, the St
Lawrence and the Mississippi-Missouri, while in South America there are three principal rivers, the Orinoco, the Río de la Plata and the Amazon, whose basin is ten times greater than the area of France.

It is not without point to emphasise here the grandiose character and colossal dimensions of the American natural scene and its extraordinary variety. The astonished eyes of the Conquistadors fell first upon a landscape; only afterwards did they seek to break through the scene in search of man and metal.

Although from a physical viewpoint one cannot dissociate the Americas of the north, centre and south, all three of them being included in the same architectural system, only the last two will be dealt with here. What might be called 'the America of the Conquistadors' is situated in fact in the central part of the American continent, the frontiers of which are, on the north, Yucatan, and on the south, the Río de la Plata: an area of sunshine, spreading waters and volcanic regions bounded by the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, and cut in two by the Equator.

Thus it is to the south of the United States that the wondrous empire of the Conquerors, a hundred times built, destroyed and rebuilt, begins.

The fantastic loop which the Spanish caravels in less than fifty years, drew upon the map of the American continent began at Palos in Andalusia. Let us follow its shining line. It makes its way westwards across the Atlantic. First the Canaries and then the Sargasso Sea, and then the Caribbean Sea, the 'American Mediterranean.' Here lies the tropical archipelago, with its dramatic storms, its cyclones and its giant and brilliantly coloured flowers. Cuba, Haiti, Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands, Jamaica and the Windwards: a necklet of islands abounding in sugar cane and bananas. Then the line leaves the West Indies and winds around Central America: an isthmus 1,200 miles long from Mexico to Colombia—Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. Its shape is such that one might say it had been twisted by the fist of a titan, with dark forests where the trees are tied together with lianas, and great blue lakes reflecting the cones of volcanoes. And here, as the narrow link between Central and South America, is Panama, with the Gulf of Darien, the obsession of the first navigators, on its eastern shore. A landscape like the end of the world, with Nature wild and rebellious against the efforts of man. Deadly vapours glide over the swamps, and the tropical sun is fierce. Northwards the
conquering curve crosses the Caribbean Sea and passes through the Yucatan peninsula. It is a limestone plateau, arid in the north and overrun by forests in the south, with little running water and an alternation of dry savannah and sweet-smelling forest. Bending westwards the line reaches Mexico, a varied land with three aspects. Its northern aspect is a prolongation of the United States, with high and sterile plateaus framed by mountain chains, and the sharp-cut peaks of the western Sierra Madre. In the centre are volcanoes—Popocatepetl, 17,888 feet high—with marvellously fertile soil bearing everything from pines to bananas. All the earth’s climates are found there together, *tierra caliente*, *tierra templada* and *tierra fria*. Lastly comes the Mexican south, with its tropical beaches and its forests of mahogany and cedar. The isthmus of Tehuantepec unites the Atlantic and Pacific shores. The sierra opens up. The waters foam in the rios. Innumerable valleys descend into the plain and die out on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico.

Winding again around Central America the loop turns southwards. It touches upon the Caribbean Sea, crosses the isthmus of Darien and reaches South America. Now the picture is clear, and the junction of the northern and southern continents is settled. South America presents a gigantic and massive bull’s head, a head with two faces: on the north, looking out upon the Caribbean Sea, the Guianas, Venezuela and a part of Colombia; while facing the Pacific are Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Bolivia. Two faces each with its own character.

First of all the northern face, north of a line approximating to the equator. The Guiana plateau, bristling with dense forests where rosewood and rubber flourish side by side. Venezuela, bounded on the north by the sea, its centre watered by the Orinoco, and its llanos periodically drowned by floods. With plains in the east and mountains in the west, Colombia, like Mexico, includes all types of climate, from the humidity of Amazonia to the intense cold of the high crests of the Cordilleras. On the mountain flanks are mines for precious metals, and hidden piles of emeralds.

South of Colombia, western South America looks out towards the Pacific. It has a giant backbone in the Andes, which form a formidable barrier stretching from north to south, surmounted by peaks and volcanoes—Chimborazo, 20,578 feet, and Aconcagua, 23,098 feet. The Andean Cordillera hugs the Pacific coast closely, the coastal strip is narrow and the slopes of the high plateaus often descend to the very shore. Enclosed like a
wedge between Colombia and Peru, framed on the west by a coastal plain and on the east by the mountains, and constantly threatened by earthquakes, is Ecuador. Next, the triple aspect of Peru: a coastal desert, peopled by innumerable birds; then the highlands of the Andes, with snowy summits, massive mountains cut by majestic valleys and blue lakes as large as seas; and to the north-east, shaped like a crescent, the Oriente, the Upper Amazon country, covered with forests and traversed by foaming rivers, the Amazon, the Marañon, and the Ucayali. Between the crests of the Andean Cordillera and the Pacific, Chile stretches along a narrow coastal strip for 2,500 miles, 220 miles wide at the most, with mountain summits exceeding 19,000 feet. It has an almost tropical climate in the north and a quasi-polar climate in the south at the confines of Tierra del Fuego: a tragic alternation of suffocating deserts, silent heights and frozen lands. The western part of Bolivia and Paraguay, although not on the coast, complete the South American facade, but the bulk of both these two countries lies east of the Andes and is turned towards the Atlantic.

The route of the Conquistadors is coming to its end. Slipping along the Chilean coast, the line of the Conquest reaches Patagonia, abandons the Pacific at the Strait of Magellan and enters the Atlantic once more, ascends northwards and settles at the Rio de la Plata. Here are the mouths of the Parana and Uruguay, the open door to the continent.

Wedged between Brazil and Argentina, Uruguay presents a regular relief: a plain, carpeted with tall grasses, widely open to marine influences. A few rare ridges overlook a landscape of woodland and prairie. Argentina, which backs on to Chile, occupies the whole Atlantic face of southern South America; it stretches through 30 degrees of latitude from the Tropic of Capricorn to the environs of Cape Horn. The heart of Argentina is the pampa, the equivalent of the North American prairie, waving and sighing under the wind like the sea. In the north-west are the high arid plateaus of the Puna d'Atacama, with a few scattered oases. To the north-east, the Chaco, a transition between the extreme dryness of the subandean regions and the pampa. In the south is Patagonia, its sky scoured by storms, its shores lined with abrupt cliffs, and its polar seas in constant agitation. Finally, separated from Argentina by the Magellan Strait, the sinister island of Tierra del Fuego, a chaotic tangle of roaring waters and desolated land. Here the South American continent comes to an end. So severe is Nature there and so forsaken by
man that one might well believe that the world ends there too.

From the Río de la Plata, the ring leaps over Brazil without halting (for Brazil fell to Portugal), comes back to the Caribbean Sea and recrosses the Atlantic in the reverse direction—the Sargasso Sea, the Canaries and the Andalusian ports.

In broad terms this is the landscape upon which the first Conquistadors set eyes. For the sake of convenience, modern names have been given here and the land has been divided up geographically, but in fact the places discovered by the Spanish conquerors bore other names and the frontiers were different. But landmarks are necessary to follow the stages of the discovery. Later we shall penetrate more deeply into the conquered lands in the steps of the Conquistadors.

So here we have, first of all, the backcloth, without people—an overall view of the New World, of which the prodigious diversity of climates and reliefs make clear at once the heroism—the madness—and ecstasy of the Conquistadors.

First the empty landscape and now the men.

**MEN FROM OTHER PARTS**

When the conquerors landed on unknown soil, they first of all encountered silence and emptiness. They were about to write the first page in the history of the New World; or so they thought. But soon strange men came to meet them, men whose skin was of a colour never seen before, neither white nor black, but rather like bronze or sometimes like red sand. The Spaniards named them "Indians," a reasonable appellation, since the new arrivals thought themselves in the western parts of the Indies. As they advanced further into the conquered territories, the astonished Spaniards discovered villages, towns, and then great cities, bearing the marks of an ancient civilisation. The history of America had begun a long time before.

So the New World was inhabited long before Europe had ever imagined the existence of the continent. Aztec, Maya, and Inca conquerors had preceded the envoys of the King of Spain along the same roads. They too had discovered territories, found men and enslaved them. Who were these men and from where did they come?

To give a date to the appearance of man in America is impossible. Five thousand years before Christ? Perhaps. The
interest is much less in the antiquity of what is known as the 'pre-columbian' population than in its origin.

Ought we to believe the Argentine scholar Ameghino Florentino, when he tries to prove that American man was born in America, even setting up a genealogical tree of *homo sapiens* from the tertiary ape of Patagonia, known as 'Homo n堂ulvis'? It is even claimed that Argentina was the cradle of the world and the pampa the platform where human migrations took shape and started their journeys.

Another thesis—that of Arius Montana, author of the *Bible Polyglotte*—maintains that the Jews discovered and colonised the New World. The sons of Jactan, great-grandson of Shem, himself son of Noah, may have been the first to people America. Was the Jew the first Conquistador of the New World? Why not? Proof—and even circumstantial evidence—are certainly missing, but who can hope to pierce the mists of the earliest ages? This first American is something we can only guess at.

Should we abandon the idea that he might have been autochthonous and agree that he might have been an immigrant? This is still a controversial question which no one can settle with certainty. But an Asiatic origin appears at every step that is taken on American soil. Are not these faces with prominent cheekbones and narrow slanting eyes the same as we find in Cambodia and Tibet? Bolivian masks and Chinese masks, Annamese counting strings and Inca quipus, and that musky odour of the women of Ceylon and also of the Indian women which the Conquistadors found so diverting. Similar analogies, equally striking, are found in customs and architecture. The powerful heads that are carved in the rocks of Yucaton are the replicas of those on the temple façades of Angkor. What is the mysterious kinship that unites the Mayas and the Khmers? Incas and Pharaohs, royal bandeaus and pshent, the pyramid of Memphis and the Mexican teocallis, Thebes 'of a hundred gates' and Cuzco—the relationship is evident. Is it not good enough to recall that Ra, the Egyptian God, and Inti, the Inca god, carved on the portals of Luxor and in the Peruvian sanctuaries respectively, are one and the same—the Sun?

If the first Americans came from Asia, we must try to imagine how and by what route, which involves another look at the map. The north-eastern point of Asia and the north-western point of North America seems so close that one can easily imagine a time when they were joined. About 60 miles wide and not very deep, the Bering Strait, which today separates Siberia from
Alaska, must at one time—in the ice ages—have formed the natural bridge which the Asiatic hordes used in their penetration of the American continent. It would scarcely have taken a day’s sailing or, if they crossed on a foot, a few hours’ march. South of the Strait, the Aleutian archipelago likewise forms a bridge between Asia and America. Having crossed by one of these bridges, the migrants very likely turned their steps eastwards, came upon the Great Lakes, followed the great artery of the Mississippi, or that of the St. Lawrence and, according to whether they followed the western coast or marched along the eastern routes, reached the Isthmus of Panama or the West Indies.

Having arrived in Central America, the nomads from the Bering Strait encountered other columns of migrants originating in Australia and crossing by way of the Polynesian islands. This flood of wanderers then spread in successive waves over the immense space of South America, turning back upon itself a hundred times and seeming to move by preference towards the regions of the high plateaus.

A few rare but daring migrants came to America by the sea route. From Australia, Japan and Melanesia, primitive navigators, borne along by favourable currents and guided by seabirds, were able to beach their rafts on the Pacific coast of South America; an astonishing combination of luck and courage, winds and currents. Between Africa and the South American coast maritime connections—if there were any—were ephemeral, provided we ignore the myth of Atlantis and the Island of the Gods which made a bridge between North Africa and America and from which the great legendary invasions might have taken off. When Montezuma told the Aztec people of the distant memories of his ancestors, who came from the east, the north and northeast, he mentioned their arrival ‘from cold and icy regions, over a dreary and cloudy sea.’ On what facts did this tradition rest, and what sea could it have been but the Atlantic Ocean?

To sum up, in the present state of knowledge it is agreed that the American population was formed of four great migratory currents. The first—after the ice age—came from Asia by way of the Bering Strait. The second came from Australia by the sea route. The third, composed principally of Polynesian elements, started out from Oceania across the Pacific islands. Finally, the fourth, of more recent origin, was that of the Eskimos, who spread through the polar regions of America and Eurasia.
In any case, whatever may have been the routes by which American territory was entered, imagination falters before the cheerless march—almost a hunger march—beneath the stars of men dressed in the skins of beasts, over enormous stretches of land, much of it in icy conditions, from the Bering Strait to the Strait of Magellan—almost from one pole to another. Or, even more, the journey made by canoe from one island to another, to be wrecked by storms on unknown shores.

So these men who had come from other parts were Asiatics mixed with Malayo-Polynesians. They knew nothing of the plough or of cereals and had no domestic animals. That is to say, they followed neither an agricultural nor a pastoral life. Hunting and fishing were their only activities: they killed in order to eat, a fact which explains their nomadism. For these starving creatures, gold was the great lakes and their miraculous fishes, and the North American plains teeming with game. The hour of the glittering metal had not yet sounded, for the conquerors of the stone age only coveted raw meat and fresh blood. They were cold. They were hungry. They wanted sunshine and food.

The peopling of America, which probably began about the time of the ice age, continued during the palaeolithic age, then the neolithic, and expanded as the circumstances of the primitive tribes improved. It is possible to conceive this peopling as a very slow but continuous penetration, by sea and by land, along the coasts. It took thousands of years for these human herds, wandering along the rivers and straying in the alternately icy and torrid labyrinths of America, to co-ordinate their movements. Nevertheless, this thin trickle of humanity already constituted the conquest of the soil. Such was the basis, the substratum on which the pre-columbian civilisations were built.

A SPREADING PATCH OF OIL.

Christopher Columbus had discovered a world. Amerigo Vespucci had given it a name. Henceforth, Haiti and Cuba, the great West Indian islands, were to be the platforms from which the Conquistadors took off. For it was no longer a question of linking Spain to the West Indies and the adventure was no longer set in the Dark Sea. It had its point of departure not in Andalusian ports but at Santo Domingo, the future capital of the Dominican Republic in the island of Haiti. The question
now arose of pushing the Discovery further forward, from and beyond the West Indies. In this way Santo Domingo became the bridge-head of the conquest. Progress had indeed been great.

Like a spreading patch of oil, the Spanish penetration of America was about to spread towards the centre, north and south. Happy indeed were these young men who, at the dawn of the 16th century, were about to open up the greatest field of activity of all time! They were numerous, even legion, those who burned to follow in the tracks of their predecessors. For many the opportunity to quench this thirst for adventure never came. The majority only repeated the exploits that others had carried out. But some, the best, daringly prolonged the furrow cut in the ocean by the Santa Maria. These were the Conquistadors.

The best? Certainly not in the sense of goodness! In that respect they showed themselves the worst. Their excellence was in their toughness: whatever their social origin, whether they were hidalgos, former soldiers from the Italian wars, one-time convicts, or poets in search of strong emotions—they had to adapt themselves to the special conditions imposed by nature and men. Muscles of iron, stomachs that knew nothing of nausea and defied famine, backs that were able to bear armour under the tropical sun, a skin resistant to Caribbean arrows and the bite of giant ants; these were the physical qualities required. Such a hardening of the body necessarily involved a hardening of the heart. The souls of the Conquistadors were tempered like their swords. No weakness; no pity. To be hard or die, to resist or succumb, these were the alternatives offered to the slaves of the Conquest.

FROM YUCATAN TO DARIEN

A new period of fifteen years opened between 1506, the year of Columbus’s death, and 1521, the year in which Hernando Cortés took possession of Mexico. Between these two superb personalities, the Descubridor and the Conquistador, armed figures stole in. During these fifteen years the Conquistadors fumbled, for it was a period of trial and improvisation. But what a bloody apprenticeship it was! Among this pitiless troop certain names stand out: old acquaintances like Alonso de Hojeda, Juan de la Cosa, Ponce de Leon, Vicente Yáñez Pinzón; then the younger men, Diego de Nicuesa, Diego Velasquez and Francisco
Pizarro. We shall see them again later, bound up with the
destiny of Cortés, or like Pizarro, founding an Empire. For the
moment they plunged head down at an objective still obscured
by hoary legend.

Here are a few of the stages of the Discovery during the first
quarter of the 16th century.

While Vicente Yáñez Pinzon was making a landing on the
Yucatan peninsula, Alonso de Hojeda and Diego de Nicuesa got
together to reconnoitre and exploit the Caribbean coasts. Hojeda
himself took over the administration of the territory stretching
from the Cape de la Vela to the Gulf of Uraba, at the bottom
of the Gulf of Darien between Colombia and Panama, that is
to say, the face that Colombia turns to the Caribbean Sea; while
Nicuesa disposed—'on paper'—the coast from Uraba to Gracias
a Dios, at the frontier of Nicaragua and Honduras. The eastern
arm of this gigantic V was already named New Andalusia and
the western arm was called Golden Castile.

Provided with royal prerogatives, Hojeda and Nicuesa left
Santo Domingo for their colony. Juan de la Cosa and Francisco
Pizarro accompanied Hojeda. Among his crew, Nicuesa had a
young extremeño of whom he had great hopes: Núnez de
Balboa. Pizarro and Balboa! Soon the pupils would outstrip their
masters. The two governors steered, each for his own part,
towards what they thought to be fortune. They met with mis-
fortune. It was all very fine to have a sovereign's support and
to trace on parchment the boundaries of a concession. The mark
of a scribe's pen and the puño y letra of the King of Spain had
no legal value yet in the Caribbean lands. Hojeda and Nicuesa
suffered that bitter experience.

Hojeda’s expedition landed in the neighbourhood of Cartagena
in Colombia. It was the home of the Caribs, renowned for their
cruelty. They exercised a terror over all the peoples of Central
America and the West Indies. Hojeda’s Spaniards knew no fear.
They plunged into the bush in search of these Caribs, whom
they wished to enslave. But they had no time to penetrate very
far, for a cloud of poisoned arrows fell upon them and
annihilated half. Hojeda escaped death, but Juan de la Cosa
succumbed to his wounds: a new St Sebastian, he was tied to
a tree and shot through with arrows. The veteran of the
Conquistadors, the companion of Christopher Columbus and
pilot of the Santa María, he was no more than a bloated corpse—
one might even say a porcupine, for his body bristled with so
many arrows. Hojeda and his men re-embarked precipitately.
On the way back they encountered Nicuesa's expedition, joined up with it and successfully carried out several raids on coastal villages. Then Hojeda and Nicuesa split up. While the Castilian made for Veragua, the Andalusian settled down for a time on the shore of the Gulf of Uraba, where he founded the colony of San Sebastian. Exhausted by his wounds, Hojeda handed his command over to Pizarro and returned to Santo Domingo, where he died in poverty and oblivion.

When Hojeda failed to return, Pizarro decided to leave San Sebastian. He ran into Fernandez de Enciso's expedition and turned back towards Darien. Pizarro's troop and Enciso's landed west of the Gulf of Darien and there established themselves. The name Santa Maria la Antigua was given to this temporary camp, but what would Nicuesa say, since this was in his fief? Never mind! He had doubtless perished over there in the north.

Nicuesa was not dead. At Panama he had founded Nombre de Dios, the future Colon. After innumerable misadventures—hunger had forced his men to devour the half-rotted corpses of Indians—Nicuesa steered for Darien. He reached Santa Maria La Antigua and landed there, and found compatriots at last. But for him they were worse than the Caribs. Although he had legal jurisdiction over the colonoy, he was driven from it. He and his men were embarked on a worm-eaten ship that was taking water at all seams, and sent off to Spain, if they could get there. These unfortunate men did not even reach Hispaniola; they foundered off the coast. This situation had been managed by one man—Balboa; he had rid himself of Nicuesa, and some weeks earlier he had, in the same way, ousted Enciso. Now he was Governor.

Ponce de Leon, another of Columbus's comrades, turned his eyes towards Borinquen, Porto Rico. He obtained the Governorship of the island and founded there the colony of Caparra. His object? To find gold. There was plenty there, but not enough for his taste. Would one ever find a Conquistador with enough of this yellow metal? Would the royal power ever be moved by the excesses of Ponce de Leon and his harsh treatment of the natives? He received the order to leave Porto Rico and explore a mysterious country north-west of the islands, which was known as the island of Bimini. Ponce de Leon set out. He left Hispaniola to the west, went straight to the archipelago of the Bahamas, passed them by and came upon a flowering coast. This was Florida, and it well deserved its name. For hundreds
of miles it was, one might say, a scented replica of an Andalusian huerta. But in this highly-coloured picture there was a shadow: coral abounded but gold was rare, and the Indians, as ferocious as the Caribs, handled their bows with accuracy. Ponce de Leon prudently withdrew from these enchanted shores, though he was later to return as Governor, at the head of a larger expedition. Then he was stronger than the Indians, but the latter harassed him and his men; an arrow in the heart ended the career of Ponce de Leon, Conquistador of Borinquen and discoverer of Florida.

Diego Velasquez was Governor of Cuba. Some bold gentlemen assisted him in his task: Hernandez de Cordoba, Juan de Grijalva, Panfilo de Narvaez, Pedro de Alvaredo. These names were soon to shine in the Mexican firmament. As secretary, Velasquez had chosen a young student from Salamanca: Hernando Cortes. He fixed his capital at Santiago, on the southeast coast of Cuba, 1,250 miles from Yucatan.

Velasquez' first concern was to bring the territorial discovery of Cuba to an end. He made a circuit of the island and plunged into the interior. His lieutenant, Panfilo de Narvaez, laid the first stones of the port of San Cristobal de la Habana—Havana. Cuba established itself as an excellent starting base and tended to supplant Haiti. One important event was to inflate the importance of Cuba, which was in fact to become the natural relay point between the Old World and the New.

One morning in February an expedition led by Hernandez de Cordoba set out from the Cuban coast westwards. Nine days later it was within sight of a peninsula: Yucatan. Men were running about the beach, not naked and of barbarous appearance like the Caribs, but of noble bearing and wearing cotton garments with grace. From afar off the Spaniards could distinguish monuments, temples and palaces artistically built in stone—a strange kind of stone, of an ochre colouring almost like the skin of these Indians who had not been seen before. And above all, there were cultivated fields. The expedition turned Cape Catoche, tried to land at Champoton, whence it was repulsed by a rain of arrows, and returned to Cuba. These people were doubtless very civilised, but not very sociable, of which fact Cordoba was aware, since he came back with a dozen wounds in his body.

Cordoba reported to the Governor. Intoxicated with pride, Velasquez was convinced of the proximity in the west of that famous empire which had escaped the clutch of the Conquistadors for twenty years. What a fine gift for the young Charles on
his accession! In fact, at the same time as Cordoba had discovered Yucatan, Charles of Ghent—a young and swaggering prince—landed at Villaviciosa to take possession of his Spanish Kingdom. These two roads that opened simultaneously, one to Valladolid, capital of the Catholic Kings, and the other to Mexico, seat of the legendary emperor, were a marvellous augury for the Flemish heir. He had not yet assumed the Crown when he lost sight of the boundary of that empire on which the sun was never to set.

Some months after Cordoba’s return, a larger fleet set out for Yucatan, Velasquez had entrusted its command to his nephew, Juan de Grijalva. Pedro de Alvarado and the pilot Alaminos were in the expedition, as well as Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Cortés’ future historiographer.

After touching the island of Cozumel—the Island of Swallows—Grijalva’s ships ascended to the point of the Yucatan peninsula, turned it and ran along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico: Campeche, Tabasco, Tampico. They hazarded a landing. With their first step on the North American continent, the Spaniards’ surprise increased. The houses were white, with brightly-coloured shutters, as in Andalusia. There were colossal statues, representing princes or gods, strange signs carved in the stone, and well-marked roads. Was this China? The inhabitants became more friendly and tried to engage the visitors in elementary conversation. In their ears, and at their ankles and wrists, they wore golden jewellery. So there was gold in these regions! To the Spaniards’ questions the natives answered with one word, ‘Mexico!’ and pointed in a westerly direction. Was this the name of the country or that of its ruler? For it seemed that a powerful emperor reigned not far away. Grijalva could scarcely restrain his joy. The abundance of gold, the grave majesty of the stone monuments, the nearby king—so many signs of the proximity of the fabulous lands promised by Christopher Columbus. This Moctezuma or Montezuma, whose name recurred frequently on the lips of the inhabitants, though with trembling voices, could only be the Great Khan. They were on his territory; the goal was near. The Spaniards from Cuba were soon to grasp and then destroy the precious chimera they had coveted so long. But a shadow passed over this intoxicating prospect. In the outskirts of Tabasco clots of blood were drying upon the monstrous idols, while heads grimaced from the ends of planted pikes. To what barbaric cult did the subjects of the Great Khan make sacrifice? The Spaniards would have to
return with priests and convert these heathens: the Cross and the Sword, as at Granada. Long live the new Reconquista!

Preceded by Alvarado, Grijalva sailed for Cuba. He reported his mission to Velasquez. The news was exciting; it crossed the sea and reached the Court. Presents of gold attested the reality of the discovery. So colonial affairs were perhaps going to be profitable. Velasquez was given a mandate to prepare a third expedition, and the Governor of Cuba got busy again. Who should command this enterprise, from which Velasquez expected glory and profit? Cordoba? Grijalva? Cortés, as Velasquez’ secretary, was present at these discussions.

BALBOA, CONQUISTADOR OF THE SOUTHERN SEA

Vasco Nuñez de Balboa was born at Jerez de los Caballeros. It was a curious city, perched upon a rock and overlooked by the sombre rampart of the Sierra Morena. Although in Estremadura, it was very close to Andalusia. Midway between Badajoz and Huelva, Balboa’s homeland was at the crossroads of two provinces, as different from one another as are the dun colour of the Sierra de Guadalupe and the flamboyant mother of pearl of the marismas bordering the Guadalquivir. The sea was very close, with Sanlucar de Barrameda, Huelva and Palos, and the route to the islands.

This landscape of contrasts shaped the man, who was Extremeño and Andalusian at once. To Estremadura, Balboa owed his enduring toughness and his passion for work; while to Andalusia he owed his pride. How very early in his life did the child Vasco learn to know the smell of salt and blood! The wind that passed along the Guadiana and beat against the Saracen walls of Jerez de los Caballeros came from the open sea. Balboa was no more than sixteen when Columbus raised anchor at Palos for his first voyage, and Palos was scarcely a day’s journey from Jerez by mule. The young man’s ears buzzed with the sailors’ songs, and the irresistible song of the Dark Sea too. He left for the New World when he was twenty-six.

In the wake of Bastidas and Juan de la Cosa, Balboa embarked for Hispaniola. For the moment exploration interested him less than business. So he became a planter at Santo Domingo, though not for long. He became bankrupt. Pursued by his creditors, he hid in an empty cask, but the barrel was rolled aboard one of
Enciso's ships and the fleet made off southward. Once at sea, Balboa leapt from the cask, presented himself to Enciso, threw himself at his feet and embraced his knees. Would Enciso be good enough to accept him as a common sailor? Enciso was moved; but he had reason to rue it, for the man in the cask later rid himself of Enciso and also of the unfortunate Nicuesa. He then reigned at Santa Maria la Antigua while he awaited a greater kingdom. What kingdom it would be he did not know, but he believed in his star.

It was a cacique—Panciaca—who gave direction to Balboa's career. Surprised to see the Spaniards fighting for gold, the Indian indicated that he knew the country where it was to be found. They had only to march westward for six days and they would come upon the goldfields. An extraordinary rich people lived in those lands where everything was to be found in profusion. Faster and bigger ships than the Spanish caravels ploughed the sea. Balboa cocked an ear. The sea? So there was an ocean on the other side of the New World? The tale was worth verifying. They must go and see. The master of Darien was the more urgent to set out since news from Spain was bad: he was out of favour, because he had pushed Nicuesa and Enciso aside. The former had perished at sea, but the other had survived. Enciso, the lawyer, was doubtless of tougher stuff, and his hatred for Balboa had not failed to loosen his already rather glib tongue when he made his report to Ferdinand.

Balboa's departure for the unknown sea resembled a flight.

The expedition had only modest means at its disposal. A single ship, nine pirogues, scarcely two hundred Spaniards, a few native porters and a pack of hounds—galgos correderes. It was a 'sortie' rather than an expedition. Balboa dropped anchor, without knowing it, at the spot where the isthmus of Panama is narrowest—in the neighbourhood of Acla—and landed there with his men. One party remained on the shore to look after the little fleet; the other plunged into the bush after Balboa.

The bush? It was a sort of hell. Imagine these men from Castile and Estremadura, helmeted and armoured as on a Spanish battlefield, fraying a passage with sabre-blows through the dense Panamanian forest! For the first time men were forcing a way through this jungle of trees so densely packed and lianas so tangled that it was a like a fortress that had to be demolished wall by wall. It was dark there even at full noon. Balboa's companions felt the sticky breath of the virgin tropical forest weigh
heavily upon them, sticking to their skins, lashing their faces. The damp heat streamed over everything.

To cover a hundred miles took this heroic band twenty days. Insect bites—there were spiders as large as tortoises, and serpents which were indistinguishable from the roots—Indian ambushes, and the polluted water of the swamps accounted for half the expedition, but those who survived this atrocious journey were well repaid for their pains.

On the morning of the twentieth day the detachment reached the foot of a hill. A keen breath suddenly succeeded to the suffocating smell of the jungle. Balboa inhaled deeply at this breath of seaweed and salt. He seized his sword and, slowly and alone, climbed the slope of the hill. When he was at the summit, his companions saw him kneel and raise his arms to heaven. Then they joined him. At the foot of the further slope, something immensely blue mirrored the blaze of the tropic sun: it was the sea.

Like Christopher Columbus at San Salvador, Balboa broke into the Te Deum and had the record of the discovery drawn up by notary in the company of Conquistadors in order to legalise its spiritual and material conquest. Then he had the deed countersigned by the Spaniards who were present, amongst whom was Pizarro. The initials of the King of Spain were cut into the bark of some trees as a sign of possession, then there was nothing more to do but descend towards the unknown sea—but not before planting on the mountain a great wooden cross.

Three days later the expedition trod the shore of the new ocean. Alone and the first, as at the summit of the hill, Balboa went to touch the shining water. At low tide, he strode forward towards the sea. His armour, his helmet and his naked sword flashed in the sunlight. He held aloft the banner of Castile and Aragon. He entered the sea until it was half-way up his body and took possession, in the name of Ferdinand and Isabella, sovereigns of Castile, of Leon and Aragon, of this southern ocean with all its ports, islands and coasts. And he took care to specify possession 'royal, corporeal, present and eternal.'

As reward for this mad escapade, Balboa received the title of Adelantado of the Southern Sea. How otherwise could they name this ocean of water so still that it was later named the Pacific?

Now Balboa could savour the intoxicating taste of triumph. It was to be of short duration. Like the mouthful of water that he drank on the shore of the Southern Sea, that seemed so fresh
at first, he had to spit out again his draught of glory, for it proved as bitter as death.

While Balboa was bravely cutting a path across the isthmus of Panama, tongues were busy at Valladolid. Enciso had sworn to hang the insolent Balboa. In order to achieve this end, he laid siege to Bishop Fonseca, whose influence remained great in all things concerning the Indies. Enciso had no trouble in instigating the appointment of a governor to replace Nicuesa in the territories of Golden Castile or Panama. This was Pedro Arias de Avila, familiarly called Pedrarias Davila. Was it not proper to take from Balboa what he had acquired without permission and by force? So Pedrarias Davila, Governor of Panama, and Enciso, bearing the title of Alguazil Mayor, sailed for the Gulf of Darien, the former to take up his post and the other to do justice and take vengeance on the man who had driven him away.

When Pedrarias and Enciso landed at Acla, Balboa had returned from his expedition to the Southern Sea. He apprised his judges of the astonishing news. Before the King's envoys he laid all arrogance aside and declared himself submissive to His Majesty's orders. The embarrassment of Pedrarias and Enciso was extreme. Balboa's humility and his modest bearing disarmed them; having come to punish him, they were obliged to compliment the rebel. A few weeks later Balboa's confirmation in the dignities of Adelantado of the Southern Sea and Governor of Panama arrived from Spain. What was there to do but submit to the situation? Pedrarias pretended to applaud Balboa's success. He did better: he gave him his daughter in marriage by proxy, she being in Spain.

The Adelantado was mad with pride. He crossed the isthmus of Panama once more, with even wider ambitions. Hundreds of Indians accompanied him, carrying on their backs the dismantled parts of four vessels. Having reached the Pacific shore, he had the parts reassembled, launched them upon the sea and steered south. What was his goal? The lands of gold, reported by Panciaca. But he was unable to pass beyond the Bay of San Miguel and the Perlas islands. He turned back, dropped anchor, recrossed the isthmus of Panama and returned to Acla. He had scarcely arrived there when he was called into conference. He went towards Pedrarias, his father-in-law, with hands outstretched, but Pedrarias remained impassive. A man approached Balboa at the head of an armed troop: this was Pizarro, his comrade of the struggle. Pizarro gave a sign. The Adelantado
was seized, laden with chains, and dragged before an improvised tribunal and condemned to death. On what pretext? Treason and seditious intrigue. He had succeeded. He had to die.

The same day, at the setting of the sun, on the square at Acla, the head of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa rolled in the ochre dust of Golden Castile. Arrested by his dearest friend, condemned by his father-in-law, executed by his own soldiers, this was almost a normal end for a Conquistador.

These stars that blazed for a moment and then were suddenly extinguished, these kinglets of a day, encamped upon the edge of a gulf, believing themselves masters of the world, while waiting for another to throw them into the sea, this comradeship through life and death that could be changed into mortal enmity by nothing whatever: such was the story of the Conquest.
Pedro de Alvarado, 'the Sun God', hero of Mexico and Guatemala

Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who first crossed the Isthmus of Panama and discovered the Southern Ocean
Plate 7
Hernando Cortés, Conqueror of Mexico
EACH step forward by the Conquistadors—stumbling and hazardous though it might be—brought them nearer to their objective, an objective of which they knew nothing. Without knowing it, in fact, they were circling closer and closer, they were closing in on that gigantic reality that was still nothing but a great empty space on the maps of the world: America. Like blind men, they moved ahead, always westward. All they knew was that they were moving forward, that the road was rough, but that fortune lay at its end. Would there never be an end to this disconcerting voyage? Was this conquered lagoon the end of a world or only its beginning?

Yet, although there was no plan to this exploration, it organised itself naturally. Chance has its methods. Individual effort, even when it seems to end in failure, is not lost. It gives rise to another, which another prolongs and completes. The movements of the Conquistadors, though they were apparently without order, were part of a kind of logic which went beyond them. It can be said that this still shapeless Spanish empire was the fruit of an anonymous improvisation. Brave leaders and calculating princes fixed its shifting outlines.

Where were the Spaniards when Hernando Cortés, still a simple lieutenant under the orders of Velasquez, was meditating his vast plans?

The West Indies were settled. Haiti and Cuba were occupied and firmly held. The other islands of the archipelago had all been reconnoitred. Darien and the Colombian and Venezuelan coasts were becoming peopled. Panama was the point from which tracks were opening up, southwards towards Peru, northwards towards Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras. The Caribbean Sea had thrown off its exciting mystery. The Gulf of
Mexico was ajar. Indeed, Cordoba’s and Grijalva’s men had skirted Yucatan from east to west without really knowing if it was an island or a continent, while Ponce de Leon had reached Florida. No one yet had guessed at the colossal wall that ran from Hudson’s Bay to Tierra del Fuego, but it was now known that the lands discovered by Columbus were not Asia and that it was necessary to cross them from one side to another—at least, provided no one discovered a strait!—to reach the Southern Sea and, on the far side of another ocean, China and Japan. The myth of Cipango faded away. The golden chimera was no more; in its place was the golden reality.

Nevertheless, although his successors had diverted it both northwards and southwards, the westward direction laid down by Columbus was still that of the Conquistadors. Obedient to the westward attraction, the Conquest’s centre of gravity slid from Cuba and Haiti towards Yucatan and Panama. Later it would be at Lima and Mexico. Meanwhile, Charles I of Spain had become the Emperor Charles the Fifth and the centre of gravity in the homeland moved from Madrid to Vienna. On both sides of the Dark Sea—in the east and in the west—the colossal domains of the Fleming were expanding. Every month that passed added a link to the chain that stretched from foggy Pomerania to the burning shores of the Pacific. The Hapsburg was not twenty when he could reckon upon a kingdom whose frontiers surpassed the imagination.

In the same year as Cortés freed himself from the tutelage of Diego Velasquez, Fernando de Magalhaes—Magellan—a Portuguese gentleman, embarked at Sanlucar de Barrama for the first voyage round the world. He too was seeking the route to the Indies, but by the southward direction. Charles the Fifth was his patron. Bishop Fonseca had given him his benediction. He was a lucky voyager who could presume upon imperial support and the Church’s recommendation. In brief, Magellan simply resumed Columbus’s old dream: to reach eastern Asia by the westward route. At the head of a fleet of five vessels, he steered for the Canaries, turned the Cape Verde Islands and crossed the Atlantic level with Sierra Leone. He touched the Brazilian coast at Pernambuco and dropped anchor at Rio de Janeiro. After a brief halt, Magellan continued his voyage: Rio de la Plata, the Mar Dulce, then Patagonia. After several months in the Bay of San Julian (icy lands had succeeded to the exuberance of the tropics) the expedition steered for the extreme south. This wintering almost jeopardised everything.
Isolated in a cottony landscape, where the giant forms of the Patagonians could occasionally be seen, Magellan's men attempted a mutiny. Action saved them from despair. At the cost of incalculable suffering, and after passing through fearful tempests, the exploradores reached the Cabo de las Virgenes. They turned it, entered an arm of the sea and came out into the Pacific. This was the Strait of Magellan. However exciting it might be, the Portuguese was not content with this victory. He crossed the South Sea, reached the Philippines and settled down there for some time. He made an attempt at diplomacy, offered an alliance to the King of the island of Zebu and found death on its shores while fighting his rival. This was an irretrievable catastrophe. However, Magellan's chief lieutenant, Sebastian El Cano, took to sea again with the only two vessels remaining of the original five. Two years after its departure from Sanluca, the expedition reached the Moluccas. The Indies at last! The meeting of Spain and Asia by the western route had been realised. Almanzor, Sultan of Tidore, welcomed the survivors of the fleet ceremoniously. Then came the return journey: Timor, the Cape of Good Hope, the Cape Verde Islands. A single vessel came back to the port of Sanluca after sailing for three years and making the circuit of the world. Sebastian El Cano could well inscribe on his coat of arms, around a globe, *Primus circumdedisti me*.

For the time being, Magellan ranked as the one who had closed the circle. His contract with the King was not as advantageous as that of Columbus, for the lesson of Santa Fe had not been forgotten. But the Portuguese knew where he was going. He was certain of the existence of a strait crossing the New World and leading into the Southern Sea. He was certain that the circuit of the world could be carried out. He was certain of returning to Spain, with the holds of his vessels filled with gold and spices and with treaties of alliance in his doublet. But he succumbed at the age of fifty years to the assegais of the Philippinos, and another than he was to bring his plans to realisation, inspired by the experiences of Columbus and Balboa. One action gives rise to another. The history of the Conquest is that of a succession of conquests, each of which was made possible only through its predecessor. Magellan was dependent upon Balboa, as Balboa was upon Columbus. And in the end, was it not he, Columbus, who owed nothing to anyone?

Magellan's departure for his voyage round the world, the election of Charles of Spain to the Empire, the flight of Cortés
towards Mexico all took place in the year 1519. It was indeed a year resplendent with promise.

A LAWYER FROM SALAMANCA EXCHANGES THE PEN FOR THE SWORD

Who at Medellin, a small town in Estremadura between Merida and Guadalupe, would have imagined the prodigious career of Hernando Cortés when he was born there? No one thought of the New World yet. The year 1485 was marked by the death of Abdul Hassan, Sultan of Granada, which for the Spaniards meant the intensification and perhaps the victorious conclusion of the Reconquest. The people of Cordoba spoke of a Genoese who had visited the Catholic monarchs, who had undertaken to reach the Indies by the western route but had been shown the door. The thoughts and hopes of the people were all for Granada.

Cortés was of good family. His parents belonged to the lesser nobility of Estremadura. Great store was set by their coat of arms, but less by their fortune, for these gentlemen were poor. Martin Cortés de Monroy, infantry captain, had acquired less gold than wounds in the service of the Crown. Ought we to add that before becoming a loyal subject of Queen Isabella, Martin Cortés had borne arms against her at the time when the sovereign was bringing the provincial aristocracy to heel? A youthful transgression that Isabella had long pardoned.

Hernando lived his early years in a sunburned landscape, treeless and almost unpeopled, between the quivering azure of the sky and the naked earth, watched over—for he was the only son—by a proud mother (she had been born Pizarro Altamirano) and by a father from the lesser nobility, but viejo cristiano and of honourable lineage. Like Don Quixote, he occupied his leisure in reading the books of chivalry and in hunting. His habits were no better than those of the hero of La Mancha. He placed great hope in Hernando. He intended him for a soldier’s career, although he was rather puny. But could there be any other profession for the son of a hidalgo?

At fourteen Hernando Cortés was sent to the University of Salamanca. There he showed himself an unequal and temperamental pupil, gifted in letters, refractory at mathematics: in fact, a dilettante. Did he make the grade as bachelor of law? History does not say, just as it is silent about how he employed his
time between his return to Medellin and his departure for the New World. Nevertheless, which of us cannot guess the charming pleasures to which the Salamancan student devoted himself when he was suddenly freed from the family circle and its constraints? Courting the doncellas, frequenting the taverns with his comrades, playing the guitar under the lattices of an emblazoned palace—what rapture for this young man whom his father could still beat for a peccadillo! For the old captain had a heavy hand when he caressed Hernando’s back with his whip, when he was guilty of some lack of morale, honour or faith. But to such discipline the student submitted like a child. To accept the parental whip was an honour for the son of a gentleman.

When Cortés reached the age of eighteen, the French and the Spanish were fighting in Apulia for the possession of the Kingdom of Naples. Two illustrious adversaries faced one another: Gonzalvo de Cordoba, the ‘Great Captain,’ and Bayard, ‘le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche.’ Rather than a war, it was a succession of duels in which the French and the Spaniards alternately covered themselves with courtly glory. Gonzalvo’s lancers cavalcaded before the walls of Barletta as if at a tourney, with a sort of heric gallantry. Blood ran, but it did so with elegance. Under the plumed helms, the same gentlemanly smile lit those noble faces. Was not Hernando Cortés’ place at these chivalrous jousts? His father thought so. Nevertheless, despite earnest requests, he could not persuade his son to set out for Italy. Not that the young man was reluctant to fight, rather he was absorbed with more urgent cares—love, certainly, but especially with a frantic desire to cross the sea. In the year that he should have devoted to the profession of arms, he was entirely occupied with roaming the ports from Seville to Cadiz.

The monotonous and harsh horizon of Estremadura, the rigid education of his early years, his sojourn at Salamanca, that smell of powder that came from the Italian battlefields, and his truancy along the Andalusian coast had given the young Hernando a taste for freedom, for war and for letters. Moreover, he was ripe for big things. One day, at Medellin, he disclosed his plans to his parents, asked their benediction and fled. The next day he embarked at Sanlucar de Barrameda on a merchant ship bound for Santo Domingo. He was nineteen years old. The adventure had begun.
The first stage was Santo Domingo, capital of Haiti, capital also of the Spanish Empire in gestation. Since its discovery by Columbus, Santo Domingo had taken on the appearance of a city: stone houses had been built, a church had been erected, and the semblance of a port had been organised. These were rudimentary constructions, but they were enough to dazzle, perhaps to delude, the young Cortés, who had thought to find there only jungles and Indians.

Ovando was Governor of Haiti. His jurisdiction extended to Cuba, the neighbouring island, and even further still to the vague confines of a world that had scarcely emerged from legend: the Indies. Little was known about this world: men were ignorant of its dimensions or structure, Cuba passed for the continent and the Venezuelan coast for an island. At the moment when Cortés landed at Santo Domingo, Columbus had just left it after his brief visit to Ovando. While the Genoese completed his fourth and last voyage, Cortés began his own. The youth and the old man passed one another without knowing it. Thus it was throughout the Discovery: there would always be someone to carry on the torch. But the young were ungrateful to the old or failed to value them.

Cortés began his career of Conquistador as a public scrivener. ‘Intellectuals’ were rare in the Spanish ranks, but they were needed to assure the administrative conduct of the affair. Resigned to anything, from the moment he was on the spot, Cortés engrossed paper while waiting to polish his sword. But the opportunity soon came his way to show what he was made of. Diego Columbus, son and heir of the Discoverer, had just succeeded Ovando as Governor and Viceroy of the Indies. He decided to pursue the conquest methodically, and especially to complete the exploration of Cuba. It was time to know if it was an island or a prolongation of the continent. Diego entrusted the command of the expedition to Velasquez. Three hundred men in all, among whom the names of Panfilo de Narvaez and Bartolomé de las Casas, the future ‘Apostle to the Indians’, stood out. Cortés was one of this band.

Diego Velasquez was first and foremost a pleasant gentleman, liking to joke with his men, while maintaining his authority over them. He was liked and feared simultaneously. Panfilo de Narvaez little resembled his captain: he was a great strapping red-haired fellow, combative and always ready to return blow
for blow. He had common sense but no political mind. His conversation was lively and his manners courtly; he was not the stuff of which a leader is made though he loyally carried out the duties of a second in command. As for Bartolomé de las Casas, who had been established in Haiti for several years, where he administered the lands of his father Francisco, a former comrade of Columbus, he participated in the Cuban campaign as an observer. He burned with Christian ardour and dreamed only of the conversion of the Indians. He proclaimed himself their protector at the very conclusion of the Cuban expedition which Velasquez carried out with implacable cruelty.

Cuba was reconnoitred, explored and conquered. Velasquez was its Governor. He had appointed Cortés his secretary and treasurer. The young man received at the same time a repartimiento of slaves and a concession of land. So there he was, at twenty-six, a planter, a royal official, and the Governor’s favourite. Any other than Cortés would have been satisfied with this enviable situation. But he had not come to the New World to graduate in administration, any more than to take up agriculture. His spirit and mind were with the Conquistadors—Cordoba, Grijalva, Narvaez and Alvarado—who, luckier than himself, had visited Yucatan and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. But why had Cortés been absent from these expeditions?

It seems that no thing or person would have prevented him from joining those who had pushed as far as Campeche and Tabasco. They were his comrades and the same age as himself. There could therefore be no question or precedence, nor of seniority. The truth is that Cortés was holding himself in reserve. Just as at Medellin he put off from day to day the date of his departure for Italy, so at Santiago de Cuba he willingly allowed the time to pass. He was awaiting his moment. His companions were at the gates of the forbidden kingdom. They were paving the way for him. They were breaking the back of his job. He would enter the scene at the moment of his choice. What good would there be in exhausting himself with the preliminaries of an enterprise which he would take in hand when the time was ripe?

While keeping an eye on what was happening in the west, Cortés was busy. His plantations prospered and he put money aside. To dispel his boredom, he launched out on an amorous intrigue. The story should be told, for it is not unconnected with the tension that was already evident between Cortés and Velasquez. The play began as a comedy in the classic Spanish
style. An expatriate from Granada, named Juarez, was living in Cuba with his four sisters, who were poor, beautiful and virtuous. Handsome Cortés declared his passion to one of them, Catalina, and she gladly allowed herself to be convinced. But once victory had been achieved, Cortés was slow to consecrate it officially. The brother became indignant and frightened. He sought out the Governor. Was a gentleman's promise of marriage not sacred? Velasquez took the victim's part with such energy that he himself began to pay court to another of the sisters, a situation which only made him feel more deeply the affront to Catalina. But there was more to come. Besides the outraged brother's story, another reached him which was even more serious for Cortés. The Governor's favourite, his own secretary, was conspiring against him. Cortés aimed at nothing less than overthrowing the Governor and usurping his place. Rebel and perjurer, he deserved the gallows. He extricated himself with a spell in prison; he escaped, was retaken, escaped again and—height of audacity—sought refuge in the very house of the injured brother. The adventure ended as in the theatre: Cortés married Catalina, and Velasquez pardoned him. But though the brother's honour was saved, the blow to Velasquez had struck home; he now knew that Cortés was not reliable and that he would betray him again at the first opportunity. Thus, beneath the lively appearance of a comedy of manners that might have been penned by Lope de Rueda, another drama continued, that of an underground war between Velasquez and Cortés, which would only be settled by the death of one of them, a drama of hate and jealousy, the echo of which was to reach the very throne of Charles. The conquest of Mexico would be poisoned by it.

Velasquez and Cortés to all appearances had made their peace. It was then that the Governor, encouraged by the results of Grijalva's and Cordoba's expeditions, with strong royal support decided to arm a large fleet. This time the objective was not limited to simple exploration. Velasquez' ambition was to found, in the mysterious western lands, settlements that would be responsible to his authority. Who would lead this expedition? Candidates were not lacking: they surrounded the Governor as a pack surrounds a stag. To everyone's surprise, perhaps even to his own surprise, Cortés was appointed. It was indeed a surprising decision, having regard to the indiscretions of Cortés. Barring an imperceptible afterthought, it seems that, having silenced his justifiable ill-feeling, Velasquez thought only of the
success of the enterprise. To choose Cortés was a proof of intelligence and a fine forgiveness of injury.

Thus the hour had sounded for the son of Captain Cortés de Monroy. He was at the full strength of his years—thirty-four—he had had the time to learn to know men, to exercise his physical courage in the struggles in Cuba, and to perfect his natural aptitude for the art of governing. He had taught himself in Velasquez' antechamber. Finally, his popularity among the Spanish sailors and soldiers was great. There was not one among them of whom Cortés did not know the name and secrets. For almost everyone of those men had some sin upon his conscience, sometimes a murder. Some had had trouble with the Santa Hermandad, the police of Ferdinand and Isabella, or—more serious still—with the Holy Office. They had had to flee to the islands. They no longer had much to lose, but everything to gain, including honour. Cortés closed his eyes to the past. From his companions he only required their obedience and never-failing bravery.

In order to succeed, what does a Captain-General require? A disciplined troop and a general staff. His mission was religious and military, since it was a question of conquering and converting. As lieutenants, Cortés had chosen Pedro de Alvarado—a magnificent fellow with a golden beard—Cristobal de Olid, Gonzalo de Sandoval, Juan Velasquez de Leon, kinsman of the Governor, Alonso Hernandez de Puertocarrero, Juan de Escalante, Montejo, Diego de Ordaz, Francisco de Morla, all gentlemen and already veterans of the Conquest. Father Bartolomé de Olmedo was entrusted with the spiritual affairs of the expedition. He was simultaneously the military chaplain and the moral adviser. Finally, Bernal Diaz del Castillo was chronicler. In actual fact, they were not all at Santiago de Cuba: a large number were at Trinidad or Havana. But Cortés would assemble his men in good time. Among these brilliant individuals only one had not been asked for: Panfilo de Narvaez, the Governor's favourite.

A DEPARTURE THAT RESEMBLED A FLIGHT

At Santiago de Cuba the excitement was great. Crowded upon the quay, the Indians and Spaniards lost no detail of Cortés' preparations. Cuban women adorned with flowers, monks telling their beads, and rich planters with heavy earrings, were packed
close together in a roar of voices and a blaze of colour. Cortés had had no trouble in recruiting the three hundred men he needed, for he enjoyed great prestige among the population. Moreover, he was alcaide of Santiago. The provisions were more difficult to get together, for he had in fact to provide on a large scale, since God only knew how long the expedition would last. Officially, Cortés had received authority to set up strong-points on the Mexican coast, to establish colonies there and to pick up those companions of Grijalva and Nicuesa—if they were still alive—who had disappeared during earlier voyages. But the Conquistador knew perfectly well that he would go beyond his mission. It was to the heart of the unknown empire that he meant to penetrate, not as Velasquez' vassal, but as master.

Cortés six vessels rode upon the waters of the port. From the mast of the largest a flag of black velvet, embroidered in gold, floated in the wind. A red cross, encircled by blue and white flames, stood out upon it. This was the banner of the new Captain-General, and it bore this device: 'Brothers and comrades, let us follow the Cross and, if we have true faith in this symbol, we will conquer.' In hoc signo vinces! The same words shone on the labarum of Constantine. Thus Cortés reckoned to emphasise the evangelical character of his enterprise. But he had not failed to have the arms of Castile embroidered upon his standard too. Was he not also, by proxy, the representative of the King of Spain? But that he was sent by God, and also by the future Charles the Fifth, was not a pleasing idea to Velasquez, and he began to regret his choice. Cortés' annexation of the Church and the Crown to his own profit, and the ostentation of his preparations, revived unhappy memories in the Governor's mind. Had his secretary not already twice betrayed him? Cortés meanwhile realised his impudence. He hurried his men and quickened the operations of embarkation. The important thing was to depart before Velasquez changed his mind.

Just as Cortés was about to raise anchor, one day in November 1518, he received an order from the Governor enjoining him to delay his departure. What should he do? Lie and use trickery. The Captain-General pretended to submit to the wishes of Velasquez, assured him of his entire devotion and protested his loyalty. Thus he gained a few hours; the same night he slipped his moorings and, in the deep silence of the tropical sea, he fled. For it was indeed a fugitive—soon a rebel—who, at the head of his six ships, looked that evening upon Santiago de Cuba as it was rapidly swallowed by the darkness.
So Cortés was beyond the reach of Velasquez. But his precipitate departure had not left him the time to complete his preparations in personnel and material. He put into Trinidad. There he found Alvarado, Velasquez de Leon, Cristobal de Olid and Hernandez de Puertocarrero. He enrolled them. Then he took to sea again and sailed for Havana. It was in this town, situated at the western point of Cuba, that Cortés put the finishing touches to his enterprise: he completed his recruitment, gave special attention to his artillery and stuffed the holds of his ships with provisions. Meanwhile, Velasquez had sent letter after letter to the officers of Trinidad and Havana, ordering them to arrest Cortés, but they turned a deaf ear. Better still, some of them joined the rebel and embarked under his banner. Cortés, following a wise policy, declined to make an open break with Velasquez. When Father de Olmedo reported to him the Governor's doings, the Captain-General pretended surprise. The whole affair rested on a misunderstanding, but what this misunderstanding was he did not make clear. He wrote Velasquez a moving letter in which he reiterated his loyalty. Thus he hoped to safeguard his rear. Cortés' facility with his pen, and his skill in the turning of a phrase, were of great service to his career.

Early in the month of February 1519 everything was ready. The army comprised 11 ships, 580 soldiers and captains, 100 sailors, and 16 horses, 10 cannons, 4 falconers, 13 arquebuses and 32 cross-bows. During his brief stay at Havana, Cortés had made new recruits. The majority of Grijalva's former companions had enrolled under his standard. Furthermore, Alvarado and Sandoval were with him, as well as Bernal Diaz del Castillo—still an adolescent—and Alaminos. The latter, an experienced pilot, had guided Columbus on his fourth voyage, and knew the Gulf of Mexico. He took over the helm of the flagship. Thus Cortez had carried off the best technicians and fighters the islands possessed. He had provided for everything, even a musician, Ortiz, and women for domestic duties. He had not forgotten the interpreter, Melchor, nor the astrologer, Botello. There was no more to do but get under weigh. This time the squadron that drew away from Havana to the acclamations of a great crowd had all the appearance of a conquering fleet. The real voyage was beginning.

The first stage was to the island of Cozumel, off the Yucatan coast. Its scenery was known to some, but not to Cortés. The Spaniards dropped anchor and went ashore. Alvarado, always ready to do battle, started to plunder the islanders and hold them
up to ransom; but Cortés curbed his lieutenant's enthusiasm; it was not his intention to conquer in this fashion. Through Melchor, he exchanged words with the natives. Conversations opened, and exchanges were effected. Cortés looked closely at the stone temples, the columns of which were sometimes ornamented with crosses. Were these the vestiges of some distant Christian influence? He was tempted to think so, until the occasion when he was present at the celebration of the cult. A priest, dressed in a black cotton robe, his hair braided and hanging down over his shoulders, gesticulated before a silent assembly of the faithful. He pointed out for their adoration the ponderous idols carved in granite and smeared with blood—human blood, the interpreter made clear. These were rites that little resembled the Catholic religion.

Cortés then broke into his first political discourse; if they wished to remain his friends, he said, these stone monsters must be cast down at once. The Indians, dumb with dismay, did not know what to think of such surprising speech. Could there be other gods, better than theirs? They trembled with horror at seeing the white soldiers pull down the sacred statues, wash the blood-smeared walls and altar with water and chase away the shaggy-haired priests with the flats of their swords. Cortés had a statue of the Virgin and the Infant Jesus set up in place of the idols; the touching symbol of maternity was substituted for the dismal faces of the cruel gods. Father de Olmedo celebrated mass at the purified altar, and through the interpreter Melchor he preached to the heathens. Because of his eloquence, perhaps, or the passivity of the Indians, the latter seemed easy to convince. Many accepted baptism. It should be said that those who were unwilling were considered by the Spaniards as unruly and they paid dearly for their obstinacy.

A surprise awaited Cortés during his stay at Cozumel. An Indian came before him, threw himself at his feet and bathed them with tears. This Indian was wholly Castilian; eight years previously he had been one of Nicuesa's expedition and, captured by the natives, had become a cacique's slave, a bitter fate for a deacon of the Roman Church, for Jeronimo de Aguilar had taken minor orders. The Captain-General rejoiced at this encounter: here was the interpreter he needed to make himself understood by the rulers of this land. Melchor—an Indian prisoner taken to Spain and converted to the Christian faith—was good enough for jabbering with the people; but Aguilar would be simultaneously an interpreter and a diplomat. Cortés
did not suspect that he would be better still, in fact an interpreter and an ambassador.

The second stage took them to Tabasco. Cortés sent Aguilar to the local caciques, to give them his message of peace, which was at the same time a declaration of annexation. Cortés’ argument was clear: God had given St Peter the care of all men, whether princes or beggars; Peter’s successor was the Pope and the Pope had given the islands and continents of the ocean to the King of Spain. Was it not just—indeed, legal—that the Indians should submit without resistance to the laws of Cortés, the delegate of Charles of Spain? The people of Tabasco did not understand a word of this specious language. What had they to do with this distant prince and his exacting grand priest? They understood nothing of the Spaniard’s discourse but its implied threat; it was clear that, if they rejected Cortés’ proposition, the yoke would be placed on them by force. The Indians were brave. They accepted the struggle.

The battle was fierce. In a cloud of reddish dust, Indians and Spaniards confronted one another furiously. On one side were javelins, arrows and obsidian swords; on the other, steel sabres, lances and especially cannons. For a long time the struggle was equal. The Indians had numbers on their side and the ferocious combativeness of primitive people. The Spaniards had military science and gunpowder. Nevertheless, it was feared that the Indians might prevail, for Cortés’ men weakened and gave ground. Suddenly, furious neighings drowned the uproar of arms: from the swamps of Tabasco surged the plumed heads of the Spanish horses. From what supernatural world had these fantastic beasts emerged, spitting fire from their nostrils, with sparks flying from their feet? The Indians had never seen such monsters. They fled in disorder, pursued by the ‘great stags,’ deafened by the artillery, and harassed by the Spanish outriders.

Cortés’ cannons and horses had done more than any harangue to demonstrate the power of Spain to the natives. The caciques of Tabasco could do nothing but submit. They assured the Captain-General of their loyalty. To seal the alliance they loaded him with presents: cotton garments, provisions, gold dust, four diadems, jewels in the shapes of lizards and dogs, earrings and a thousand precious things. Further, the caciques offered the victor twenty women, chosen from the most beautiful in the land.

One of the latter stood out clearly from the rest by her dis-
tinction and grace. Her story was a moving one. She came from the great tribe of Aztecs in the north; her father had been a great lord, but he died while still young and his widow, who soon remarried, had sold the girl to slave-traders, who in their turn had passed her over to a cacique of Tabasco. Her princely bearing, her clear complexion and her doelike eyes made an impression on Cortés. Was he going to make the beautiful captive his own? Not yet. For this Conquistador the hour of love had not yet sounded. Other cares pressed upon him, another ambition burned him. He dreamed of a fabulous prize, not of flesh but of metal. Would he yield to impulses of the heart when an irresistible impetus was bearing him towards an unimaginable empire? Nothing would turn the captain from his plan, eager as he was for glory even more than for embraces. For the time being he was content to distribute the Indian women among his officers, after having them baptised by Father de Olmedo. He allotted the cacique’s daughter to Puertocarrero, his friend and confidant. But in his innermost heart he knew well that when the time came he would make her his favourite.

His companions suspected this and already they treated her with great respect. Had she not the air of a lady? So, quite naturally, she was given the title of Doña, and was Doña Marina until the day when the Indians changed her name to Malintzin, a word formed from Marina and the suffix tzin, signifying nobility. Counsellor and interpreter to Cortés, it was to her that the natives addressed themselves in matters great or small. Friend of the humble and spokesman for the redskin princes, she protected the unfortunate and was confessor to the warchiefs. Both were so used to treating with Cortés through Malintzin that they ended by giving her name to the Spanish captain too, so that to the Indians Cortés became Malintzin or Malinche. By her tact, by her political intelligence, by her skilful as well as generous attitude towards natives and Spaniards, and by her beneficent role as mediator, Marina well deserved this double honour. To see herself given by Cortés’ companions—none of whom, not even himself, had the right to be called don—the title of doña, which is hereditarily reserved for Spanish grandes dames, and by a roundabout and unforeseen way to give her own Hispano-Indian name to the son of Captain Martin Cortés de Monroy—this was honour indeed for the one who, not long before, had been the slave of a cacique, though of noble blood.
Although bloody, the fight at Tabasco had only been a skirmish. So Cortés thought, now that he had emerged from it with honour. Nevertheless, it had given him the opportunity to try the opposing defences and to prove his own strength. Thanks be to God, he felt himself strong. The adventure was beginning well.

Setting out from Tabasco, the eleven ships ran along the continent in a northerly direction. They were close enough to the land to distinguish the golden shore backing on to the forest, and above the forest the snowy peaks cutting the intense blue of the sky. The Captain-General's enthusiasm had infected the crews. Everyone—sailors and gentlemen—as they breathed the air of the Gulf of Mexico, also inhaled the mysterious odours of the Promised Land. Inflexible on land, discipline at sea was relaxed. Could it be otherwise in the narrow caravels where officers and men, captive Indians and beasts were jammed together? Doña Marina was in the flagship. Puertocarrero kept close to her. But the languorous eyes of the beautiful Aztec never left the face of Cortés.

On Maundy Thursday of the year 1519—two months after its departure from Havana—the Spanish fleet dropped anchor at San Juan de Ulúa. Hardly were these operations completed than several boats from the shore approached the flagship, which was recognisable by its pennon. When they had come alongside, their occupants—fine-looking Indians adorned with feathers—sought information from Cortés, through Doña Marina, about his intentions. Reassured by the Captain-General's friendly words, the Indians returned to the shore. The next day, Good Friday, the Spaniards landed.

A silent crowd watched the foreigners instal themselves. The firing of the cannons astonished them, but not so much as did the hobbling of the horses, for none had ever seen these prancing monsters before. Cortés' first concern was to have an altar erected, and Father de Olmedo straightway celebrated mass. Was this not the anniversary of the death of Christ? The Indians, amazed but respectful, did not miss a gesture of this strange ceremony.

On Easter Saturday, an envoy of the local governor, Cuitlalpitoc, came for news. What did the white men want? Nothing but to pay a visit to a powerful neighbour, said Cortés. A few days later, the governor himself, Tendile, presented him-
A Young Man tries his Luck

self to the Spaniard. He was the bearer of rich presents and was attended by a numerous party. Above all else, Cortés begged him to attend mass. A furtive smile lit Tendile's face at the moment of Communion; obscure as the procedure of Catholic mass might seem to him, he understood that the white man ate the flesh of their god. Here was a peculiarity he would not fail to report to his master.

After mass, the Indian and Spanish chiefs feasted. Tendile and Cortés spoke of their emperors. One spoke of Charles and the other of Montezuma.

Montezuma! At last the name was spoken that until then had only been whispered. The survivors of Grijalva's expedition and the warriors of Tabasco spoke of him as an almost legendary sovereign. Tendile had just seen him; he was one of the Emperor's familiars. This time it was no longer a matter of allusion but of actuality. A strange dialogue ensued between the Spaniard and the Indian, of short, clipped phrases, translated by Doña Marina, of elementary remarks, separated by long silences. Each tried to imagine the features of the unknown emperor and to assess his power. Cortés white complexion and black beard intrigued Tendile, and several times he ventured to touch his face. Did it remind him of something, of a prophecy about a white and bearded man?

Cortés did nothing to dispel the fear that he inspired in the Indian. On the contrary, he decided to give a striking demonstration of his power. The cannons were loaded, and the horses were saddled, and when evening came the Spanish cavalry raced at full gallop across the beach, brandishing their lances, while the artisans fired the cannons. The neighing of the horses, the roar of the guns echoing in the hills, and the shouts of the horsemen filled the native party with fright. Surely, these men from the east were of divine race. They had command over thunder and animals. Meanwhile, skilful scribes were tracing these extraordinary scenes on sheets of maguey, and thanks to their rapid brushes, Montezuma learned about the invaders' bearded faces, their enormous ships surmounted by towers, the sailors in multi-coloured garments, and the furious charge of the Castilian jinetes as they streamed across the beach at Chalchihuhecan.

Dazzled by so many wonders, but not allowing his astonishment to be too apparent, Tendile took leave of Cortés. Before his departure, the Captain-General gave him for Montezuma a carved chair and a red silk cap, hoping that the former would serve as a throne and the latter as an ornament when he agreed
to give Cortés an audience. He added a few glass beads from the King of Spain; paltry gifts which Tendile received with great dignity. Noticing the gilded helmet of a passing soldier, Tendile expressed the desire to take it to his master, for it was the very likeness of a helmet worn by Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. Cortés cocked his ears at these words. The god of war; this was promising! Meanwhile, under the pretence of comparing Spanish and Mexican gold, the Captain-General begged Tendile to return the helmet filled with gold dust. He would then make a gift of it to his emperor. Tendile departed.

In brief, the first interview between Cortés and the Indian ambassador had informed neither party. Each was bluffing and had tried to impose on the other. To probe the secret intentions of the eventual enemy, to touch swords: this was the game, masked by a show of deadly courtesy. But both remained impenetrable. Indian guile and Spanish sutiliza cancelled one another out. Nevertheless, Tendile had difficulty in concealing his anxiety, as witness his quasi-religious reverence when faced with Cortés. Without doubt his hesitant attitude—he seemed alternately to fear Cortés' visit to Montezuma and to desire it—reflected the uncertainty of the monarch himself. Perhaps also he lacked precise instructions from his master. In any case, Tendile's reticence encountered Cortés' inflexible resolution: whether the Indian emperor desired it or not, he was going to see him in his palace, armed or disarmed, according to whether he was treated as friend or enemy.

Several weeks passed. Tendile returned, together with a plenipotentiary named Quintalbor. An impressive column of nobles and slaves followed him. The nobles glittered with emblems. On their shoulders, which were striped with the marks of whips, the slaves carried bundles and chests. With a smile Tendile handed Cortés the Spanish soldier's helmet; it was overflowing with pieces of gold. Then, after spreading incense at the Conquistador's feet, he had the chests opened. Under the amazed eyes of the Spaniards, the slaves spread Montezuma's presents on some mats; a golden disc as big as a cartwheel and representing the sun, a silver disc representing the moon, animals, lizards, dogs, tigers, lions—carved in solid gold; pendants, a great alligator's head, shields, arrows, fans, all of gold; and five enormous emeralds. An immense burst of enthusiasm filled the Spanish camp, but while his officers and men gaped in admiration, Cortés mentally reckoned how many gold pesos this miraculous mountain represented. The golden disc alone must surely be worth
twenty thousand pesos. There was enough there—and more—to cover the cost of the campaign.

While Cortés was absorbed in a dream full of calculations, Tendile drew near. Without relaxing his fixed smile, he begged Cortés to regard these gifts as a pledge of Montezuma’s friendship. The Emperor asked only to maintain good relations with him. But he dissuaded Cortés from undertaking the journey to the capital; there were too many difficulties on the road. Calmly, Cortés made clear that these were no obstacles for a Spanish horseman, and furthermore that he must complete the mission given him by his own emperor. He would therefore go and greet Montezuma on behalf of Charles of Spain, even though he had to move mountains. Tendile bowed. He had only passed on his master’s message. He bowed lower still when Cortés, in order not to be indebted to the Indian monarch, handed his emissary a cut crystal cup from Florence and three shirts of Holland cloth, miserable gifts which Tendile received as if they were sumptuous presents. After which he departed. Before this, however, Montezuma’s sorcerers had offered the Spaniards a performance of magic.

Cortés was now faced with a serious problem, that of his relations with Diego Velasquez. The latter’s partisans—led by Escudero and Cermenó—did not hesitate to criticise the Captain-General’s conduct openly. It was all very fine to promise them an empire, but as it was, they were camping empty-bellied on a torrid beach, devoured by mosquitoes. How much longer were they going to feed on hope? To appease these malcontents, Cortés sent Montejo to reconnoitre the coast in search of a healthier spot. At the same time, he gave his attention to regularising his own position in respect of the Governor of Cuba, or more exactly, vis-à-vis the Crown. In fact, in so far as he remained subordinate to Velasquez, he must report to him. Having made a rebel of himself by his flight from Cuba, he ought to return to Santiago, humble and repentant. In the most favourable hypothesis and after honourable amends, perhaps he would be authorised by Velasquez to continue the conquest. An unthinkable hypothesis. He intended to account only to one master: the Emperor. Furthermore, humility and repentance were not in his nature. For him it was therefore a question of breaking his allegiance to Velasquez for ever. The difficulty was to find a legal formula. He found it.

On the advice of Montejo, who had returned from his reconnaissance, the Spaniards moved their camp further north, to a
place called Quiahuitzlan. The road passed through the town of Cempoala, inhabited by the Totonacs. There the conquerors saw houses for the first time in many weeks. They ate fruits that were new to them, but found them pleasant. They gathered flowers and stretched themselves out on garden lawns. These reminders of Andalusia disturbed them.

The landscape was pleasant and so were the people. The cacique of Cempoala could not do enough to make himself agreeable to the strangers. Why such a reception? Cortés was not long in finding out. As it happened, Aztec officers had arrived at Cempoala at the same time as the Spaniards. In the name of Montezuma, they had come to collect ritual taxes. The Totonac chief seized the opportunity to complain bitterly to Cortés of the exactions which the Emperor made. Never had there been such a insatiable despot! If only he were content with ordinary tribute! But he also required blood to appease his gods. Periodically, Montezuma's tax-gatherers carried out raids on Cempoala's population, choosing the most beautiful young men to be butchered on the sacrificial stone. Horrified, Cortés suggested capturing the Aztec officers by way of reprisal, which the Totonacs did at once, trembling with joy. But the very night after their arrest, Cortés secretly freed the prisoners, assuring them he had nothing to do with the affair. However, they must return to Montezuma at once and tell him of his coming visit. The Aztecs having vanished, Cortés promised the Totonacs that he would take their part against Montezuma and support their just claims with arms. He had one condition: that they abandon human sacrifices and destroy their idols. The Totonacs cried out loudly. Abandon their gods? Never! At a brief order from Cortés, fifty Spaniards sprang up the temple steps, seized the holy images and broke them. The cries of the Totonac crowd were more piercing still, but they stopped short when Cortés observed that the fall of the idols had not involved any celestial intervention. Were these gods not therefore false? The Totonacs were convinced. They gathered the debris of their fallen gods together and cast them into the fire. This task completed, they made no difficulty about taking an oath of obedience to the King of Spain and recognising as the only god the one whose crucified image Father de Olmedo hastened to erect in place of the heathen statues.

While Cortés was releasing the Totonac tribes from Montezuma's authority and imposing the Christian religion upon them, he was perfecting the plan he had conceived for legalising his
position vis-à-vis the sovereign. With the aid of his friends in Cempoala, he had a town rapidly built in the plain which stretched in front of Quiahuiztlan. He named it Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, 'the Rich Town of the True Cross,' a resounding name that contained the promise of gold and also of the Kingdom of God. Then he appointed Puertocarrero and Montejo alcaldes of the new town. To them he added regidores, alguazils and a municipal council. He forgot nothing, not even the gallows. He called a solemn meeting of the municipal council, had himself summoned there by the assembly, and presented them with the powers he held from Diego Velasquez. After gravely examining these powers, the council declared that they were not valid. Consequently, Cortés' functions were brought to an end, and there was nothing for him to do but tender his resignation. But at the same time as Cortés solemnly renounced his responsibility and the municipal council took cognisance of the fact, the council appointed him Captain-General and Supreme Judge of the new colony—Capitan General y Justicia Mayor—in the name of His Spanish Majesty. The trick had been played. The colonists had founded a town under royal jurisdiction, and had freely given themselves a leader by universal suffrage. What could be more regular? Henceforth, Cortés was no longer a rebel captain, but a citizen of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, 'elected' by his comrades to administrative and military command. The most punctilious of lawyers would find nothing there to take exception to. Cortés had got himself appointed by plebiscite. Have not the conquering generals of every epoch acted thus in order to succeed legitimately to civil power?

Freed from his Cuban obligations, Cortés felt relieved. He now had the power to act. His first concern was to draw up a report for the King—signed by all the soldiers and all the captains with the exception of the partisans of Velasquez—relating the most recent events, especially the foundation of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz and his nomination as Captain-General. His Majesty was begged to ratify this nomination. This report accompanied a considerable treasure—material evidence of the conquest—to which everyone had added his own part of the booty. Puertocarrero and Montejo, the most faithful of all, were appointed to take the missive and the treasure to the sovereign. They embarked at San Juan de Ulua, after Cortés had enjoined them to pass the Cuban coast as widely as possible.

Cortés was in a hurry to start out for Montezuma's residence. But he wanted to be sure of his rear. His election and his
message to the King of Spain conspicuously weakened the danger personified by Velasquez. But they did not eliminate it entirely. The 'Velasquists' were still numerous in the colony of Vera Cruz. Some of them even fostered the plan of capturing several vessels and returning in them to Cuba. It was necessary to nip the revolt in the bud, so Cortes did not hesitate. He had all the ships dismantled and sent to the bottom, with one exception, so that contact with Cuba and Spain was broken. There was no longer any possibility of retreat for anyone. Cortes reserved the sole remaining ship for those who grumbled: the poltroons. The Captain-General's biting words had their effect, for no one wanted to be taken for a coward. The Conquistador did not rest at that, for a rebellion is not liquidated without making examples. It was not for nothing that Cortes had erected a gallows on the main square of the new town: Escudero and Cermeño were hanged there. Regarded as less guilty, a pilot named Umbria was cruelly flogged and had his feet cut off. There was no more opposition.

Cortes readily alternated between violence and affection, and now that he had sunk the fleet and annihilated his adversaries, he could afford the luxury of eloquence. The hour had come to 'inflate' his soldiers on the eve of the campaign. Facing his troop, assembled on the main square of Cempoala, Cortes improvised a passionate harangue. Those who were to remain at Villa Rica—a hundred soldiers and sailors—he enjoined to be patient, to watch the coast and to complete the construction of the church and fortress. To those who were going with him, he emphasised the difficulties they would have to overcome, but at the end of the road they would find fortune and glory. Montezuma's presents were only crumbs from the feast of gold that awaited them. 'To Mexico!' he cried in a vibrant voice. 'To Mexico!' the Conquistadors repeated. Cortes gave the order to depart.

Just as the expedition was about to start, Cortes received a messenger from Juan de Escalante advising him that ships were cruising along the coast and making signals. Entrusting his army to Alvarado and Sandoval, the Captain-General bestrode his horse and went to Villa Rica. Three ships were in fact riding off shore. Four men had landed from them and were looking for Cortes; they had been sent by Alonso de Pineda, captain of the flotilla, to inform Cortes that possession of the whole of this territory had been taken in the name of Francisco de Caray, Governor of Jamaica. Cortes found this embassy amusing, so he
made prisoners of Garay's four emissaries, collected three sailors who had escaped from the ships, and departed with them for Cempoala. Pineda understood that he was up against someone stronger than himself, so he raised anchor for Jamaica. As for Cortés, he had acquired seven more soldiers; with light heart, he rejoined his troop and, leaving Cempoala—this time, for good—set out on the road to Mexico.

Cortés had left Havana on February 15, 1519. He left Cempoala for Mexico on August 16 of the same year—six months exactly. What was the reckoning for this half-year? He had freed himself from the tutelage of Velasquez. In taking the part of the Totonacs against the Aztecs, unknown to Montezuma, he had acquired allies. Four hundred warriors from Cempoala, fifty of whom were nobles, swelled his rear-guard. At the same time he had assumed the guise of defender of the oppressed. By breaking the idols, he had affirmed his mission as propagator of the Faith. Thus he was beginning to take on the character long meditated at Medellin and Cuba. He had now to complete it.

Two features, finally, cast a strong light upon his still enigmatic character. At Villa Rica he got himself elected supreme leader by his soldiers—like Galba, Nero's successor. Then he 'burned his boats.' Had he remembered his classics or had he reinvented these stratagems?

So here he was, setting out for the unknown. Of the empire he coveted he knew almost nothing—either of its dimensions or men. He knew that numerous peoples inhabited it, forming a vast confederation. But what did he know of the cruel emperor who reigned at Mexico, except that his very name made the bravest soldiers tremble and stammer with terror? Was this at last the fabulous Great Khan of whom the whole world spoke but none had ever seen?

Cortés was uncertain of his route. But he was sure that before him no Conquistador had penetrated so far into the western lands.

On this last point Cortés was mistaken. He was not the first Conquistador at all.
CHAPTER VII

The Red Conquistadors

THE pre-Columbian civilisations came into being and developed in the south-west of North America, in Central America and in the north-west part of South America on its Pacific face. In the main, they were to be found in Mexico and Peru: the Aztecs in central Mexico, the Mayas in south Mexico, in the Yucatan peninsula and as far as Guatemala, and the Incas in Peru and Bolivia. But beyond Peru, the further south we go the rarer the traces of civilisation become, and it is no longer possible to speak of peoples, but only of tribes: primitive peoples, roughly gathered into clans, who, when their territory no longer offered them the resources necessary to their existence, moved elsewhere.

Contrary to the general belief concerning the influence of climate on human activity, it was in the arid lands around the Equator, and not in the temperate regions, that the great pre-Columbian civilisations flourished, with the exception of that of the Mayas. But this was characteristic of certain other nations too, the mothers of humanity—Egypt and Persia for example—that laboured on a sterile soil and carved from the hard rock the works of art and science that we still revere. These were unprofitable lands for the labourer, but they were productive for the genius.

So it was in the heart of the American continent, on a Mexico-Lima axis, that the dawn of this civilisation rose, and that of the Conquest too. It was there, in fact, that the Spanish Conquistadors first set foot, though preceded by several centuries, in the same places, by the Indian conquistadors. Men always fight on the same battlefields.

America at the beginning of our era is veiled by a mist, through which straying peoples can be dimly distinguished. Like columns of ants, they come and go, zigzagging. To feed themselves, to defend themselves against enemies, to fish, hunt, make
slings and boomerangs, shields of bark, boats of stretched skin, to weave sisal, fire pottery, and draw some sort of music from the conch or the pan pipes—such were the concerns of the earliest Indians. But about the 6th century of our era the fog dispersed.

THE TOLTEC MASTER-BUILDERS

Led by an astrologer-priest, the Toltec tribe broke out into the valley of Mexico in the 8th century. They came from California, and it was like Moses leading the Hebrews into the Promised Land. The Toltecs founded the city of Tollan and elected a king—undoubtedly the first in America. In Mexican annals they are known as the ‘master-builders,’ and Teotihuacán was their masterpiece, a city that was consecrated to the gods. It was also the political capital of the Toltec empire, but the rulers counted less than the gods, to whom majestic monuments were dedicated. The Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon—two hundred feet high—dominated a forest of columns and temples, proclaiming the glory of the sun-god and the moon-goddess. Three hundred years later a mysterious personage appeared, named Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent, hero and sage at the same time. He preached to the multitudes, was a healer, and taught ethics and science. He was extolled and men prostrated themselves at his passing. Then, in course of time, men wearied of the too austere messiah, so he withdrew into the desert and foretold the end of the world. Some time after his death he became the ‘God of Knowledge’; he became the object of worship and at Teotihuacán the Toltecs built him a temple decorated with immense plumed serpents with polished obsidian eyes. It would be interesting to know the language this Indian spoke, this sage and worker of miracles, who was finally deified and knew both the adoration and persecution of man, as well as posthumous glory. Yet nothing remains of his gospel or teaching but images of stone.

While the Toltecs were climbing the steps of the sacred pyramids and somewhere in Yucatan a group of scholars was inventing a calendar, Charlemagne was crowned Emperor on the other side of the Atlantic.

Almost at the same time a great danger threatened the Toltec empire. Decimated by epidemics, softened by too easy living, and divided by religious and political quarrels, it was ripe for
invasion, which came from the north. The powerful army of the Chichimecs poured over the valley of Mexico. The Toltecs were forced to flee, abandoning Tollan and Teotihuacan, the American Byzantium. It was then that the first Conquistador intervened.

A Toltec dynasty had reigned at Tollan, but a power more absolute than the king’s was that exercised by the high priest, the religious leader and earthly representative of Quetzalcoatl—the man become god. As was customary in the ritual ceremonial, he himself bore the name of the God. In the midst of the general disorder Quetzalcoatl alone remained calm. He gathered the Toltec people together and led them to the borders of Yucatan. On his way, he encountered the Tzentals, fought them, mastered them, and then, to make certain of victory, married his officers and soldiers to Tzental women. Thus the Tzentals were absorbed by the Toltecs. Quetzalcoatl, having become the master of a great tribe, then decided to found great cities. The Toltecs were builders, and several cities soon rose from the earth. As at Tollan, the temples were even more numerous than the palaces. In fact, Quetzalcoatl did not forget that he was also the religious leader and representative of the only true god, whose name he bore. On the conquered country he imposed the doctrine and liturgy of the god with the feathered head. He created a church and instituted a clergy, for already the military-political conquest and the spiritual conquest were closely matched. The conqueror brought his altars along with his arms, for now he was to gather souls.

Thus, starting out from the valley of Mexico, the Toltecs now occupied a region contained between the Tehuantepec isthmus and the city of Tabasco at the base of the Yucatan peninsula. But this empire did not satisfy the ambitions of Quetzalcoatl, and the Toltec conquistador turned his eyes northwards. He knew that Yucatan was in the hands of the powerful Maya people. There were no better soldiers than the Mayas. However, travellers and merchants had brought Quetzalcoatl some singular and, on the whole, encouraging news. The great Maya families—the Itzas, Quichés, Tutulxih—were no longer on good terms. Some were even emigrating towards Guatemala and Honduras. But Quetzalcoatl was not surprised: the opportunity was unexpected, and he seized it. He organised his army. He armed a war fleet which cruised along the coast. Then at the right moment he marched upon Champoton, the first Itza town.

Surprised by the mass arrival of the Toltec army, the Itzas
offered only feeble resistance. Quetzalcoatl burned the town and continued his way. Advancing along the Gulf of Mexico, he captured in turn Campeche, Tihoo, and Chichén Itzá. Running parallel to the Toltec army, the fleet mastered the shores of the Yucatan peninsula, and the island of Cozumel alone escaped invasion. While Quetzalcoatl was organising the conquered territory, the Tutulxiuh regrouped in the centre of Yucatan. They even built a town, Uxmal, on the borders of the new Toltec state, which retaliated by founding a holy city, Mayapan, near where Merida stands today. Quetzalcoatl was about to install his gods in suitable dwellings, for he was the Messiah of the new religion, the spiritual descendant and disciple of the Plumed Serpent—Quetzal, precious plume; Coatl, serpent. Temples were raised that foreshadowed the Aztec teocallis,* access being by steps cut in the stone. Blood was soon streaming over the altars, sealing the alliance of the Tollan god and the Itza deities. Quetzalcoatl, a politically prudent man, had chosen peace. Henceforth, the new federated empire had three capitals: Mayapan, Uxmal and Chichén Itzá. Three kings exercised power, each in his own realm, but they consulted one another in the political, administrative and religious matters that interested the peninsula as a whole. The unity of Yucatan was realised.

Quetzalcoatl looked with satisfaction upon his work. He had given peace to this vast land, which until then had been torn by hatred. Gathered together under the three-headed sceptre of the triarchy, welded by marriages and associated by the same rites, the Toltec, Tzental, Itza, Quichés and Tutulxiuh tribes now formed a single community; the Yucatec people. Then Quetzalcoatl took a last glance at the fine thing he had built up: temples for the gods, palaces for the princes, seminaries for the clerks, barracks for the soldiers, hospitals for the sick, laws for all. The Plumed Serpent had laboured well! He could retire and he did. Followed by a few faithful disciples, he crossed the frontiers of the empire he had created. In the reverse direction he resumed the route that was marked by his victories. He progressed southwards and took possession of Guatemala. Here his track is lost, but no one imagined that he could be dead, for had he

* Teocallis — the Mexican temples — were solid masses of earth, cased in brick or stone, in general aspect like the Egyptian pyramids. In area they often exceeded 100 feet square and were of even greater height. They were ascended on the outside by a series of galleries, or even direct up one side, to the sanctuaries of the Gods and to the sacrificial stone on the flat summit.
not promised to return one day by the eastern sea, together with white and bearded men, in the fulfilment of time?

While a Toltec hero was shaping an empire, Europe was giving painful birth to the year 1000. She was besieged by barbarians. The Carolingians collapsed. The cruel Magyars, the Normans and the Saracens paused for breath before flinging themselves again upon their bleeding prey. Olaf, the Viking, was devastating the plains of France. Al-Mansur, the Moor, was pillaging and destroying Santiago de Compostela. Pressed on all sides, morally sick with the virus engendered by despair and hunger, ceaselessly at war, and bleeding from a thousand wounds, Europe showed all the signs of approaching death. Nevertheless, she lived.

THE AZTEC DICTATORSHIP: FROM THE PLUMED SERPENT TO THE TEOCALLIS

What was happening, meanwhile, in the valley of Mexico? Still arriving from the north, columns of immigrants had submerged the Chichimec people. A new dynasty reigned at Tollan, that of the Culhuas. Later they were to found their own capital: Culhuacan or Coyoacan, south of Mexico. Overlooking the lagoons, the temple of the Hill of the Star remained for several centuries the most important religious institution in the valley. The rite of ‘the new fire’ was celebrated there until the arrival of the Spanish conquerors.

On the other side of the lagoon of Mexico, on its eastern shore, facing Culhuacan, a rival town grew up: Texcoco. It became the seat of a wide empire whose frontiers reached to the coast at Vera Cruz.

The history of the valley of Mexico—from the year 1000 till the Aztec monarchy—was that of a bloody quarrel between tribes. It was also that of intrepid and unscrupulous chiefs who knew how to assemble troops, equip them, inspire them and lead them into battle—and to victory.

Shut up within the narrow confines of the town of Azcoapotzalco, the Tepanec people were hungry. Tezocomoc, a chief, appeared. He pointed out the route to be followed, and it led to Culhuacan. The capital of the Culhuas was sacked by the Tepanecs. They continued their raid and the power of Texcoco was then broken. Tezocomoc had conquered the whole northern part of the valley. His son, Maxtla, succeeded him, but
the son was not his father's equal. Although he tried by alternate intrigue and oppression to assure his power over the Culhuas and Texcocans, they concluded a secret alliance to which other oppressed communities were admitted, especially the Tenochcas or Aztecs. Maxtla succumbed to the weight of his adversaries and he was put to death. His capital was burned. As to the Tepanecs who had escaped the massacre, they were forcibly incorporated into the allied tribes.

Who were these Aztecs whose heroism had turned the scale in favour of the coalition of Culhuas and Texcocans? They had once lived in the distant land of Aztlan, north of Mexico. They were of the Naoa race. They worshipped one god, Huitzilopochtli—the sorcerer-humming-bird, a sort of pythoness, with the gift of tongues, who ordered them to set out on the conquest of the world. They did so. While they began their march, St Bernard was preaching the Second Crusade in France. For a long time the Aztecs wandered in the valley of Mexico. Established on Mt. Chapultepec they could believe themselves masters of the majestic valley and its five lakes, as wide as the sea and bluer. They gave it the name Anahuac, 'neighbour of the water.' But they fell to the power of the Culhuas and their king Coxcox. It needed their brilliant military success at the side of the Culhuas to turn them from vassals into allies.

But the Aztec's exodus had not ended. Their god Huitzilopochtli required them to continue on their way and, taking the form of a humming-bird, he showed them the road. One summer morning—a century after their alliance with the Culhuas—they reached the banks of the Lake of Texcoco. In the middle of the lake was an island of rocks between which some prickly pears flourished. Before the wondering eyes of the wandering people a royal eagle, perched upon one of them, was devouring a snake. This was the sign, awaited for five hundred years, by which the Aztec god signified that they could halt, set up their tents and build a town. They set to work at once, not fearing to undertake the enormous task of building a city in the middle of the water. Before the 14th century was ended, the Aztec architects and masons had completed their task. In the centre of the Texcoco lagoon, connected to the shore by three causeways, a city had risen. This was Tenochtitlán or Mexico—Mexiti's palace, Mexiti being the second name of Huitzilopochtli. Tenochtitlán was the capital of Mexico, the Venice of the New World, created under the symbol of the Aztec eagle with powerful claws, like the Roman eagles.
While the Aztecs were establishing themselves at Tenochtitlán, the Texcoco kingdom, freed from the Tepanec menace, experienced an era of economic prosperity and political wisdom under the sceptre of Netzahualcoyotl. Sovereign—philosopher, friend of the arts and belles-lettres, the king of Texcoco instituted councils and promulgated a civil code. He organised labour and gave a strong impulse to agriculture. Himself a poet, he sang of the beauties of life: 'Gather the fairest flowers from your garden to crown your brow. Seize present joys, before they perish.' He was also a moralist: 'All earthly things have an end. In the course of their vanity and their splendour they lose their strength and sink into the dust.' But more surprising and braver still was his act of faith: 'Those idols of stone and wood can neither hear nor feel; much less could they have created the heavens, the earth and man, master of all things. The heavens and the earth must be the work of an unknown and all-powerful god and in him alone I must seek consolation and aid.' To this unknown god, whom Netzahualcoyotl called 'the Most High,' he dedicated a pyramidal temple. No blood sacrifice soiled its altars, before which there was only one offering: the scented smoke of ambered resin burning in the censers.

This enlightened king—law-maker, mystic, builder and poet—died after a reign of forty years, just as the Hundred Years War was ending in Europe.

The accession of his son, Netzahualpilli, although he inherited his father's qualities, opened an era of disorder and difficulty. At first allied to the Aztecs, he progressively became their vassal. His premature death and the bloody quarrels between the candidates to the succession ended in the ruin of Netzahualcoyotl's work. The kingdom of Texcoco fell under Aztec dependance. But the philosopher-prince had foreseen this decadence when he said 'When you no longer hold the sceptre in your hands, your servants will wander desolated in your palace court, your sons and the sons of your nobles will drink the cup of sadness to its dregs. And all the splendour of your victories will live only in their memory.'

The valley of Mexico gradually became a vast confederation. Dynasties were founded by violence or as a result of alliances. But supremacy belonged to the Aztlan people, and became assured during the reign of Itzcoatl. Based upon three principal towns—Tenochtitlán, Texcoco and Tlacopan—the Aztec empire had absorbed all the tribes of the valley. It reached from the
Pacific to the Atlantic, and southward stretched as far as Nicaragua.

During the hundred years before Cortés landed at San Juan de Ulua the Aztecs consolidated their acquisitions and perfected a political system that was communal and dictatorial at the same time. It was a century of organisation, but also of fire and blood. In fact, Itzcocatl's successor, Montezuma I Ilhuicamina, 'the Heavenly Archer,' was not content to extend the supremacy of Tenochtitlán north and south, but propagated and glorified the rite of human sacrifice. His son, Axayacatl, accentuated the bloody character of the worship of Huitzilopochtli. It was in his reign and that of his successors that a gigantic temple was raised to the war god. On the day of its inauguration twenty thousand captives were immolated. Twenty thousand human hearts were burned on 'the stone of sacrifice.' Then the king of Tenochtitlán had himself proclaimed emperor. All the tribes of Mexico had accepted the Aztec yoke, their laws and their gods. Pacification had been accomplished and unity realised.

Some years after Columbus had set foot in the West Indies, Montezuma II Xocoyotzin ascended the throne of Mexico. He was to be the last native sovereign of an empire which had been brought into being with great difficulty. Henceforth, no one dared any longer to dispute Aztec rule. From his palace on the lake, Montezuma contemplated the work of his predecessors. It seemed to him so perfect that he thought less of enlarging than of maintaining it.

How did this enormous machine function? At the head of the state was a triarchy: the kings of Tenochtitlán, Texcoco and Tlacopan. The first of these bore the title of Emperor and took precedence over the other princes. Each king governed a tribe, divided into clans. The land belonged to the caciques. Nevertheless, every member of the clan who cultivated a field had full rights in it. A part of the land reverted by law to the state. These were crown properties, which the government distributed to those who did not possess land, on condition that they improved it; they enjoyed its possession for life. There were no slaves in Aztec society, apart from prisoners. Nor can one say that there were 'classes.' Even a man of poor family could make a career as far as his abilities permitted, either as a farmer, an artisan or a warrior. An hereditary monarchy by constitution, the Aztec state was socially a democracy, although choice by merit replaced the elective system. In fact, a simple peasant frequently became the chief of a clan. Worth was all that
counted. A noble would say to his son: 'Devote yourself to agriculture or to making feather mosaics or to some other honourable profession. Your ancestors have done the same. How, otherwise, could they have provided for their needs? Never has it been said that nobility is enough to support the noble man.' The professions were numerous. Apart from work on the land, the Aztecs devoted themselves to metal industry, commerce and handicrafts. In the Valley of Mexico the people lived happily provided they blindly accepted the inexorable laws of war and religion.

For the Aztec state could never have achieved its unity had it not equipped itself with a rigid ecclesiastical and military framework. Who would have dared, in the name of the liberty of thought, to escape the harsh requirements of a code that was unwritten but all the more imperative? The obligation for the Aztec citizen to participate in the periodic military expeditions, and that—more frightful still—of appeasing the wrath of the gods by human sacrifice, were not disputed. For a man's life counted for little. Whether killed in war or immolated on the altar, he served only as a necessary instrument of the community. He knew this in advance. To him nothing seemed more natural.

The Aztec religion was a strange one. It was rich in marvellous symbolism, but practical nevertheless; it allied the highest moral values to repugnant customs. It had tutelary divinities with charming names: Our Lady of the Turquoise Robe, Feather-Flower (goddess of flowers), Obsidian Butterfly, God of the House of the Dawn. It had great gods also: the Sorcerer-Humming-Bird (Huitzilopochtli) and the Plumed Serpent (Quetzalcoatl), the masters of war and science, and Tlaloc, the rain-god and ruler of harvests. There were religious festivals, some rustic and some sacred, but all inspired by the seasons. Ritual was simultaneously simple and barbarous, varying from greasy-pole competitions to the flaying of living maidens. Nevertheless, beyond the Aztec pantheon that was peopled with sinister figures was a morality and a doctrine curiously like Christianity. 'Clothe the naked and feed the hungry, for you must remember they are flesh of your flesh.' So preached the vicars of the high Priest. Likewise, they proclaimed the existence of Purgatory, Heaven and Hell, but love was missing from this implacable religion. The acts of the liturgy followed one another automatically, like the ticking of a clock. Blood never ceased to run upon the teocallis.
The Red Conquistadors

The 16th century had just begun. Montezuma reigned at Tenochtitlán, the wonderful island that rose out of the waters like a miracle of crystal. The city was still beautiful. But a shadow passed over the steel-blue lagoon. Recent years had been bad. There had been several earthquakes. Whole herds had died mysteriously. Many harvests had been lost. What did all this presage? Nothing good, if it were related to the news that was spreading in the streets of Tenochtitlán. It seemed that white men, coming in ships as big as towns, were cruising along the coasts. Montezuma shrugged his shoulders; such distant threats would not prevent him from celebrating the New Fire. In fact, an Aztec cycle—fifty-two-years—had just come to an end. At that time the fires were extinguished on the altars. Another cycle was about to begin, and a new flame had to replace the dead one.

This ceremony of the New Fire—ten years before de Cordoba’s voyage to Yucatan—was to be the last great religious festival of Aztec theocracy.

Five days earlier, the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán had let their fires go out. They fasted and made lamentation. These were the five days of mourning at the end of the cycle. On the evening of the fifth day an immense crowd—the chiefs of the clans in rich cloaks, musicians beating drums, officials with feathers in their hair—moved towards the Hill of the Star. At its head was a procession of priests, dressed in long black robes, their ears still dripping with blood from their mortifications. Throughout the night they stood, gathered at the top of the sacred hill, scrutinising the heavens. How slowly did the constellation that marked the end of the world and its new beginning rise into the skies! But at last the stars completed their course. This was the awaited sign. Then the priests plunged a reddened spear into the open breast of an already immolated captive. Another cycle began. The people of Tenochtitlán raised a wild shout, which drowned the fanfare of conchs, the ringing of bells made of shell, and the piercing notes of the flutes of bone. Every man lit his torch at the new fire and carried it around the town before going home, and the inky Mexican night was studded with a thousand shining points like dancing fire-flies. On the days that followed there was singing and feasting, and the people got drunk with pulque. The Jaguar-Knights and the Eagle-Knights faced one another in mortal combat. Hearts were torn from further captives. The devotees tore their own flesh with obsidian knives.
Montezuma was satisfied. The festival had been fine. Perhaps all these sacrifices would efface the evil portents: two temples suddenly destroyed, the passage of a comet in full daylight, the appearance of a column of fire, the heartBroken crying of a woman, a tempest on the Lake of Texcoco. Perhaps, too, this blood, spilt by the bowlful, would drive the white and bearded men—long announced by the prophets and already on the march—from their shores.

For Montezuma knew that the white men were on the march. The previous year a slave had come to Tenochtitlán from the coast. He had seen three floating towers approach the shore at Chalchihuuecan—or rather, three mountains moving upon the sea. Neither the blood of the slaughtered quails, nor the learning of the augurs could give a meaning to this astonishing phenomenon. Montezuma sent his steward to the spot. Having reached the edge of the gulf, the Emperor's envoy was struck with terror. These enormous monsters, moored to the shore, had vomited beings of an unknown species. With faces white as chalk, with black or red beards descending to their chests, they wore clothes of every colour and aimed smoke-filled lances at the heavens. By the time the steward returned to Tenochtitlán, the fantastic visitors had departed. The three towers had vanished in the eastern seas.

Montezuma did not doubt that the mysterious men would return. So he received without surprise but with a certain mystical terror, the news that the white captain had landed at San Juan de Ulúa. This time it was all up with his throne and empire, for Quetzalcoatl had returned to his people. The Aztec had no need to consult the mirror on the head of the magic bird to explain the march of an army towards the palace of his ancestors. Quetzalcoatl must be marching at its head. He was tall, of light colouring and pensive mien. He wore long hair and a patriarchal beard. His tall forehead was crowned by a tiger-skin mitre adorned with feathers. At his belt hung plumage studded with golden stars. In his left hand he held a shield on which was painted the rose of the winds. His right hand tightly grasped a sceptre like a staff. He marched like a somnambulist, just as, five hundreds years before he had marched towards the sea—that 'sad and cloudy' sea which today had cast him back on the grey beach from where his raft, woven of serpents, had set out. The red conquistador was coming back, to punish the evil-doers and reconquer his throne.

What ought Montezuma to do? Assure himself, first of all—
for the Emperor was as artful as he was fearful—that the stranger chief was really Quetzalcóatl. So he planned a stratagem. He decided to send messengers laden with presents to the Totonac country, but he selected presents of the kind that would remind Quetzalcóatl of his divine origin: a tiger-skin mitre, a collection of feathers, some serpent-shaped pieces of jewellery, and earrings set with turquoises. The god would be moved at recognising the jewels with which he was dressed and his very own emblems! By this astute manoeuvre, Montezuma reckoned to make certain that the white man was really the Plumed Serpent, and he hoped at the same time that such gifts would appease the angry god. The messengers were instructed above all to watch the stranger's face when he received the gifts! The least quiver would show that he remembered, and that he was indeed the one announced by the prophets.

Montezuma's envoys began their march towards the coast. Having reach the edge of the Spanish camp, they joined Tendile and acquired exact information from him regarding the mysterious arrivals. Then the first interview took place between Cortés and the Indian emissaries. In truth, no sign of emotion—except that of greed—appeared on the face of the Captain-General. He was undoubtedly master enough of himself not to allow his divine origin to be seen by his people. Faithful to their master's instructions, the Aztec messengers, as well as Tendile, kept continuous watch on Cortés' face. He did not react to the symbols of the Plumed Serpent, but perhaps his words would betray him. Cortés' words were first translated by Aguilar into the language of Tabasco, and Doña Marina passed them on to Tendile and his companions in the Aztec tongue. Of the original meaning very little remained, but enough nevertheless to catch allusions to a powerful emperor and to religion of love and kindness. Was this not what Quetzalcóatl preached?

Many among Montezuma's envoys were convinced that Cortés was the Plumed Serpent and were ready to prostrate themselves at his feet. Tendile stopped them. Nothing proved that the stranger was in fact Quetzalcóatl; he himself remained sceptical. To Cortés' request to meet Montezuma, Tendile haughtily replied: 'You have scarcely arrived but you already wish to speak to him!' Would Cortés have received this cutting reply had Tendile regarded him as a god? In truth, the Indian was divided in his mind: he doubted that the Spanish captain was the incarnation of the expected Messiah, but was troubled,
nevertheless, by certain signs, such as the golden helmet which was like Quetzalcoatl’s.

Montezuma listened with anguish to Tendile’s report, the latter having raced at top speed to Tenochtitlán. He studied the drawings of the scribes. He did not share Tendile’s scepticism. On the contrary, everything tended to affirm the perfect resemblance of the white chief to Quetzalcoatl. The Emperor gathered together his Privy Council, summoned his powerful neighbours and allies—the kings of Texcoco and Tlacopan—and acquainted them with the situation. What course should they adopt? Their advice varied: some recommended total submission, while the rest wanted to oppose the marching invader. Montezuma chose a middle course. He decided to send a further embassy to the strangers. At its head, in addition to Tendile, he appointed one of his courtiers named Quintalbor, chosen from the noblest in the land, and also because he resembled Cortés as he was represented in Aztec paintings. The idea was the Emperor’s own. Obsessed by the divine origin of Cortés, he intended that the ambassadors should treat him as a god, for it was customary for the priests to give themselves the outward appearance and clothes of the idols they served. This is what Quintalbor did: the double of Cortés, and dressed like him, he paid homage to the divinity of Quetzalcoatl. Quintalbor, moreover, was learned in sorcery, and Montezuma thought that his talents and demonstrations of magic would persuade Cortés that he too possessed supernatural power. In short, the emperor’s instructions to his ambassadors were as follows: to obtain information regarding the intentions of the white lord, to load him with presents and attentions, to try the effect on him of magic powers, and to strive to get him to give up the idea of penetrating further into the interior.

The second embassy was followed by a second return, and the results were negative. The white lord had not concealed his intention—more determined than ever—to pay Montezuma a visit. He had accepted the gifts, showed himself enchanted with them and, in return, had sent the Indian monarch a worm-eaten armchair and a ridiculous headdress. He had appreciated the performance of magic, without seeing in it anything but conjuring tricks. Finally, he had given his troops the order to prepare for departure. Montezuma was utterly crushed by this news: he walked to and fro through the palace rooms like one distracted, wringing his hands and bemoaning the fate of himself and his children. What would become of them when Quetzal-
coatl's soldiers had killed him? They must be quickly hidden, before the white warriors seized them! He no longer slept; he had ceased to eat. Neither his wives, dancers, nor musicians could distract him from his deep sorrows. With the suffering docility of one condemned to death, he expected that they were coming to tear from him his throne, his empire and his life.

Montezuma's attitude when faced with the Spanish threat—his terror and his acceptance of it—filled his entourage with confusion. For he was really a brave man and in numerous battles had given evidence of his physical courage and contempt for death. But here he was, in a state of stupefaction on the receipt of only vague information. He was like a bull with the blood-stained espada deep in its neck, that stands for a moment immobile before lying down to receive the coup de grace from the puntillero.

Certainly, the despot of Tenochtitlán had more than one reason for an uneasy conscience. For two centuries he and his predecessors had done nothing but enlarge their empire. The Aztec armies had overflowed the Valley of Mexico, invaded the southern lands and pushed as far as the eastern sea. There was not a tribe that was not tied to the Aztec chariot, like a bleeding body dragged to execution. Not a tribe but had provided Montezuma with gold for his chest, women for his pleasure, men for war, and living hearts for sacrifice. Not a road, from the ruins of Tollan to Cempoala, but had seen the imperial soldiers pass with their obsidian lances held high, and—perhaps more to be feared—the tax collector, holding a crooked staff in one hand and sniffing a bouquet of roses held in the other.

At the inauguration of the temple built to Huitzilopochtli, twenty thousand prisoners were immolated. For four consecutive days the blood flowed in dark streams down the steps to the feet of the allied chiefs, frozen with terror under the fierce eye of the feathered Caesar. Since Montezuma had succeeded Ahuitzotl, the position of the vassal peoples had grown even worse, to say nothing of what had happened to enemies. Hundreds of thousands of slaves had suffered, bled and died for the king of the lagoon. He was indeed heir to the red conquistadors—red by reason of their daubed faces, and red with the blood they poured upon the stones of the teocallis—who had come from Aztlan, naked and famished, and now were arrogantly strutting over stolen lands.

Montezuma had assured the ferocious continuance of the power that his fathers had forged. He made it even more severe,
and was at the same time overtaken by religious mania. He built more temples and gorged Huitzilopochtli with the blood of captives, and never lent an ear to the roar of hate that broke upon the shores of the Lake of Texcoco. He knew that it was easy to stifle, for he had only to raise the terrifying figure of Huitzilopochtli, whose representative he was. Ally, collaborator, executive and representative of the war god, Montezuma feared nothing and no one. He was sure of his strength and his right. What then was the reason for his bad conscience, if his deeds were justified and sanctioned by his god? Why did he fear Cortés, when he had fought enemies just as formidable? Yet there is no doubt that Montezuma was full of fear.

In truth, his attitude is inexplicable if it is separated from the magic and unreal world of the Aztec people. Montezuma's fear was metaphysical. It had its source in the sacred symbols which gave Aztec society its rhythm of life and death. At the dawn of time, the first god and the first goddess were one. Four sons were born of this monstrous marriage: Xipe, Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli. Their lives conditioned those of men. They could die, but blood revived them. Thus the holocaust was the basis of Aztec religion, and blood was needed that the gods might live. But war broke out between the four brothers. At Tollan, Quetzalcoatl had founded a kingdom of peace. Jealous of his power, Tezcatlipoca, who was lame and deformed and bore on his forehead a smoking mirror, chased him from Tollan, pushed him towards the sea and usurped his place, though not for long. Leading the Aztec hordes came Huitzilopochtli, the war god, Son of the Sun, the Sorcerer-Humming-Bird, discoverer of Mexico. It was he who led the Aztecs along the roads to victory, who made the greatness of Tenochtitlán and facilitated the promotion of this miserable people to the rank of a tutelary power. But the Sun God was vulnerable. He could die. The deaths of men were necessary to maintain his life; blood was the price of his preservation and glory. In exchange for human blood, Huitzilopochtli protected Aztec arms and assured Aztec lives. The blood of sacrifice, constantly repeated and flowing in streams, gave the god eternal youth; it mingled so closely with his own that in truth there was but one blood, simultaneously human and divine.

The solemn step which was drawing near was that of Quetzalcoatl, the avenging Messiah. His return signified the defeat and death of his brother-enemy Huitzilopochtli. Two contrary principles cannot coexist. Before modelling a new
human type in his own image, the first concern of the Plumed Serpent was to break the old idols and cast the war god into darkness. He would restore the ruins of his jade palace at Tollan and of his temple at Tenochtitlán and restore supremacy to the Toltec people. What was to become, then, of Montezuma, the servant of Huitzilopochtli? His temporal power was only based on the spiritual. He was simultaneously the chief soldier and the chief priest—the tlacatecutli—and never did anything without reference to the will of the War God. He was lost. It is not enough to say that Montezuma no longer believed in God. For him God was dead. And the Empire was dead too.

Evening fell—perhaps the last—on Tenochtitlán. The lagoon was like a pool of blood. Montezuma already imagined the solitude, the deserted palace, the servants in flight and his vassals turning their lances against him. There was nothing else to do but fall on his knees and wait until the broken columns of the Aztec pantheon crushed him—unless he order his people to give themselves up to death in accordance with established rites. The idea of a great mass suicide fascinated him. What obsequies for a dead divinity!

Cortés on the march to Mexico: pictured by an Indian chronicler.
CHAPTER VIII

Two Worlds Meet

FOUR hundred Spaniards, 400 auxiliaries from Cempoala, 1,000 tamemes or porters, 15 horses, 10 heavy cannon, four pieces of lighter artillery and a few Indians: this was the small army which, in the month of August 1519, marched across the oppressive jungle of the Totonac land towards the mountain of Cofre de Perote. There were not even a thousand fighters, and half of these were not reliable, for how would the Cempoala recruits react to fire? Yet Cortés had never been so optimistic. He had put all the odds on his side, and God would do the rest.

THE BATTLE OF TLAXCALA

Cortés had the choice of two routes for reaching the Mexican plateau. The northern route led through Jalapa; the southern through Orizaba. He chose the northern and shorter route. The Captain-General's instructions were to proceed quickly and directly to the goal.

At the head of the army the Alférez, bearing aloft the standard of the expedition, galloped upon a dappled horse. Behind him came Cortés, surrounded by Doña Marina—who was now his mistress—Alvarado, Olid and Father de Olmedo. After them came the Spanish infantry, the artillery, the baggage train and the group of pikemen and arquebusiers. The Totonac mercenaries and Cempoala nobles brought up the rear. The feathers of the native dignitaries and the Spanish pennons waved in the wind. The beat of drums and the sound of the trumpets regulated the pace of the warriors. Crests and breastplates glittered in the sunlight.

As far as Jalapa there was jungle, dense and damp. The Spaniards panted under their thick wadded jackets, which they wore in addition to their armour. Soon they were shivering with
cold. They had to climb the first cordillera, march along the sinister flank of a volcano—the Cofre de Perote—and cross defiles of huge extent. This immense land was almost empty; only a few miserable huts gave evidence of the presence of man. Sometimes natives appeared in front of the army and offered fowls, but the majority fled at its approach. The horses especially made a great noise with their trappings, terrifying these poor creatures. The echo of military noises broke lugubriously against the hard screen of mountains.

The only pains the troop had to suffer were those of alternating heat and cold, both excessive, according to whether they marched in the plain or followed the mountain escarpments. One evening the army arrived within view of a large populated area. The houses were well constructed and were white, as in Andalusia. The inhabitants did not flee but, on the contrary, approached the strangers and fixed them with insistent stares. Thirteen pyramids dominated the town, and bones were piled at the foot of one of them. What with the warlike look of the population, the oblique looks of the priests who attended the pyramids and the military style of the houses, the Spaniards realised that they had reached the frontier of the forbidden kingdom and were about to tread upon Montezuma's soil. They would have to act with caution.

The expedition was actually not so far ahead as it thought. The town in which Cortés had chosen to camp was called Xocotlán. It was several days' march from Tlaxcala. The Captain-General, relying on information gathered at Cempoala, placed great hopes in Tlaxcala, for it was the age-long enemy of Tenochtitlán, and the centre of resistance against Montezuma. The Indian Emperor had never been able to subdue completely this focus of rebellion. So Cortés reckoned to fan the flame and to make further powerful allies of the Tlaxcalans. To use the internal dissensions of a confederacy in order to master it is the classical procedure which almost always assures success.

Cortés was daring, but also prudent. Before setting out for Tlaxcala he decided to send there as ambassadors four of the Cempoala nobles who were with him. It was a good idea, for the Totonacs were allies of the Tlaxcalans. After waiting for several days without seeing his plenipotentiaries return, Cortés ordered the departure from Xocotlán. He was scarcely a few leagues from the town when the Spanish army found its road barred by a wall of stone, stretching across the valley from one mountain to the other and pierced in the middle by one narrow
opening. It had been built by the Tlaxcalans to mark the boundaries of their province and protected them from the Totonacs, friends today but enemies perhaps tomorrow. What a warning it was for the Spaniards! Once this formidable rampart was passed, who could guarantee that they would pass that way again? A wall that closed behind them and the dark shape of teocallis outlined against the hostile sky, were enough to freeze the hearts of the most daring among them. But Cortés knew no fear. He ordered the standard to be unfurled: ‘Brothers and comrades, let us follow the Cross...’ And spurring his mount, he was the first to pass through.

A little further on the expedition met the four ambassadors returning from Tlaxcala. From their discomfited looks, Cortés realised that the news was bad. Contrary to the Captain-General’s calculations, the Tlaxcalans refused an alliance. Their will for independence prevailed over their traditional hatred for the Aztecs. They were preparing for battle under the command of Xicotenga, a great war leader.

A first engagement took place in the environs of Atalaya. 3,000 Tlaxcalans tried to halt the Spanish advance, but Cortés dispersed them with a few cannon-shots. The next day’s alarm was more serious. The Tlaxcalans had regrouped and were reinforced: 6,000 howling Indians rolled down upon the Spanish vanguard. Their principal weapon was a sort of wooden club with an obsidian spike at its extremity, sharp as a razor blade. It was a terrible weapon in a hand-to-hand struggle, but it lost its efficacy before the two Spanish arms: artillery and cavalry. This fact did not escape the Tlaxcalans, who very ingeniously drew Cortés’ troop into a ravine where neither horses nor artillery could be used. Simultaneously they joined up with Xicotenga’s effectives, so that the Spaniards were now faced with an army of 40,000 Tlaxcalans, led by Xicotenga. Cortés’ companions had to be brave not to flee before this multi-coloured flood, hurricane of noise, the feathers and flags, the shrill scream of war horns and the funereal tam-tam of the teponaztles, that threatened to carry them away. More than one among them remembered the tales of his childhood: the onrush of the Almoravides in the plain of Zalacca, their faces veiled in black, their lances in their hands, the same frenzy and the same rolling of drums. Stoic under the rain of javelins and stones, whirling their swords to turn aside the blows of the Indian clubs, the Spaniards adopted the Tlaxcalan manœuvre in reverse by drawing them towards the plain. Then in the open-country Cortés
soldiers resumed the advantage. Driven back by bullets, overthrown by cavalry charges, the enemy ranks broke up. Cortés had won for the second time. His losses were small: one horse and a few men wounded. Thus the legend of his invulnerability spread among the Indians, whether friends or enemies. Hence the name teules, a synonym for demi-gods, that they gave the Spaniards from this time on.

While he was fighting like a lion, Cortés multiplied his peace-offers to Xicotenga. But the latter, despite his reverses and his increasingly firm conviction that his adversaries belonged to a race of supermen, could not resolve to yield. He decided to launch an extended attack upon Cortés' army. Five corps of men were put into line, composed of the whole able-bodied population of Tlaxcala and neighbouring villages. Besides the usual armament—bows and arrows, slings, copper-pointed lances and obsidian-bladed clubs—the Indians carried bamboo shields and leather helmets. Furthermore, with the object of striking terror into the enemy, Xicontenga ordered his soldiers to paint their faces and to set plumes upon their helmets in the shape of serpent and jaguar heads. The Spaniards did not watch the preparations for this terrible offensive without anxiety. They passed the night before battle in prayer, and it broke out in the early morning with a thunder of cries and clashing arms. Cortés reckoned the number of Indian warriors at 100,000. A screaming tide swept to the assault of the Spanish positions, which were then not far from the town of Tzompantzinco.

This was indeed the battle 'peligrosa e dudosa'—dangerous and uncertain. Although different, the Spanish and Indian arms balanced one another. On their side the Tlaxcalans had numbers, while the Spaniards had quality. The sky was darkened by the cloud of projectiles. But a single cannon-shot was enough to sow panic among the Indians. However, it seemed that their reserves were inexhaustible. Scarcely had one enemy rank been mown down by Cortés' artillery or overthrown by the horses than a second rank took its place. The Spaniards reeled under the weight of a struggle which they began to think was lost. But they were lucky enough to wound several of the most highly-reputed Indian chiefs fatally, and this demoralised the enemy. Moreover, rivalries broke out between the Tlaxcalan officers and those from neighbouring towns. The death of the leading chieftains and the quarrels in the command destroyed the unity of the Indian army and it reeled back in disorder. It was time, for the Spaniards could do no more.
This time Cortés was in an excellent position to renew his offers of peace to Xicotenga. The chief of the Tlaxcalan state still hesitated. In fact, although the people and civil authorities expected the end of hostilities with Cortés, the military party intended to continue the struggle against the invaders—an ambitious plan, but one that seemed doomed to failure following the events at Tzompantzinco. The military party had lost its best elements and the sacred union was broken. Cortés was encamped at the gates of Tlaxcala. Surrender was necessary. With death in his heart, Xicotenga accepted the alliance which he was unable to refuse. He decided to send his old blind father and some high Tlaxcalan dignitaries to meet the Conquistador, including Maximatzin, who had always favoured Cortés. Introduced to their new ally, the lords of Tlaxcala fell at his feet and burned incense before him. Then the elder Xicotenga—the venerable cacique of Tlaxcala—spoke in the name of the delegation. For the first time Cortés was addressed as Malinche—the name of his companion—which all the people of Anahuac were soon to use. ‘Malinche, Malinche, we have begged you very often to forgive us, now that we are emerging from war. Although we have joined battle with you, it was in order to defend ourselves against the wicked Montezuma and his great power, for we thought that you were on his side. ...’ After making honourable amends, the elder Xicotenga begged Cortés not to defer any longer his visit to Tlaxcala where, he made clear, ‘We will serve you with our persons and our possessions.’ The Captain-General responded appropriately and with courtesy. The cacique’s noble words and the smoke of the incense had dispensed the very memory of recent struggles. There was no longer any question of obsidian weapons except to turn them by common accord against a mutual enemy, Montezuma. Peace was signed and the alliance concluded, and the sovereign of Tenochtitlán would have to pay the price.

The next day, at an early hour, Xicotenga the elder and the other dignitaries returned to Tlaxcala, and behind them came Cortés, followed by his army.

An imposing cohort awaited the Conquistadors at the gates of the capital. First there were the four tlatoanis, each of whom governed one of the four cantons constituting the state of Tlaxcala. Then came their officers, superbly arrayed in feathers and cloaks of bright colours. Finally, the priests, dressed in long tunics and black capes—their hair, which was matted with blood, and their slashed ears aroused disgust in the hearts of the
Spaniards—who burned incense at the passing of the victorious army. The crowd acclaimed the riders and threw flowers at them. The colour of their skins and beards, the steel of their swords, their coats and the shape of their mounts were so many unusual attributes which could only be those of gods.

The Spaniards much admired Tlaxcala, which was a very populous city, 7,000 feet above the sea on four hills united by a girdle of thick walls. The low-built houses, the narrow streets and the solidity of the architecture, the tangled lanes, the buildings that clung to the flanks of the mountains, the arrangement of the hills, and the gardens that ringed the town, made the Spaniards think of Granada without its Alhambra. There was the same wild nakedness of the plain, the same silver flow of the river (here the Atoyac, there the Genil), the same blinding light on an almost oriental landscape. And, like the Sierra Nevada, the Mexican cordillera stood out boldly against the turquoise-coloured sky. Struck by this resemblance, Cortés wrote to the Emperor: ‘This town is so big and so beautiful that all one could say about it would be unbelievable. It is bigger than Granada and better fortified. Its houses, its buildings and the people that inhabit it are more numerous than at Granada at the time when we conquered it...’ This recollection of Granada—symbol of the Reconquista—was stimulating to these conquerors on the march!

The richness of the markets and the rigorous order which reigned at Tlaxcala made a strong impression on the Spaniards. An abundance of shops and a good police were to them the signs of good political health. The Tlaxcalan country stretched all around the city within a circumference of 125 miles. The country was fertile and produced cereals, fruits and forage plants in abundance; especially prolific was the aloe or maguey—a variety of amaryllis—which simultaneously served for the making of cloth and for the preparation of pulque, the drink in common use and a ritual beverage.

A rich city and a fecund soil, yet this peaceful picture had its shadow: the Aztec menace that harassed its frontiers.

A MAD FEAT:
The Conquest of Popocatepetl

Cortés' great skill was to transform an alliance imposed first of all by arms into genuine collaboration. While maintaining his
prestige, he was able to convince the Tlaxcalans of his good intentions. Was it not in their interest to join with him to overthrow Montezuma's power, which they could not do alone? United with the teules, the brave Tlaxcalan soldiers could break the Aztec yoke without difficulty. Such frank speaking made a great impression on the tlatoanis, and in pronouncing the name of Montezuma, Cortés aggravated an open wound. The elder Xicotenga, his arms trembling and his blind eyes turned heavenwards, spoke this pathetic complaint: 'We are poor, Malinche, because these treacherous and evil Mexicans and Montezuma, their lord, have taken all we possessed.'

Cortés' first intention on entering Tlaxcala had been to destroy the idols, but Father de Olmedo had dissuaded him. This clumsy gesture would have had the most unfortunate effect on the Indian population; it would be better to bring them gently to the Christian religion and not give offence to beliefs which until then had buttressed their morale. But he had a church constructed not far from the teocallis, so that barbarians and Christians performed their rituals side by side and the same copal smoke enveloped both the Catholic altar and the pantheistic stone.

While he was increasing his contacts with the Tlaxcalan chiefs, Cortés gathered information about Aztec strength. But it was difficult for him to obtain precise details either about Montezuma's military effectives or his strategical dispositions. Even taking exaggeration and fear into consideration, the Captain-General was unable to appraise the war potential and resources of the Aztec kingdom, but he knew enough to reckon that he would have to face a formidable adversary.

Meanwhile his companions carried out a 'sporting' exploit which astonished the Tlaxcalans and did much to establish the Spaniards' reputation of invincibility: this was the ascent of Popocatepetl.

In the main, Mexico comprises a vast plateau formed by the prolongation of the gigantic Andean cordillera which flanks the western coasts of South America. This enormous mountain backbone crosses the narrow regions of Central America, drops towards the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, rises again and then, having reached Mexico, divides into two branches; the eastern and western Sierra Madre. The two arms of these formidable pincers enclose three plateaus or mesetas: the southern plateau, the central or Anahuac plateau, and the northern plateau. The central plateau, the heart of the Empire, is bordered by a
volcanic rim with very high cones: Orizaba (17,891 ft.), Ixtacihuatl (or 'the White Lady' 17,343 ft.) and the sinister Popocatepetl (or 'the Smoking Mountain' 17,888 ft.).

From time immemorial the Indians had considered Popocatepetl as the God of Fire. They had raised temples to it and had consecrated idols to intercede with it. Doubtless the infernal deities were satisfied, for the growling voice of the volcano had been silent for two hundred years. Now, at the very moment when Cortés won the battle of Tlaxcala, the volcano had spoken. A dense column of smoke, laden with cinders, had risen straight into the sky, while incandescent lava slid down the flanks of the mountain. The earth shook. The connection between the volcano’s anger and the arrival of the Spaniards was clear. The phenomenon had to be interpreted. What did Popocatepetl require: submission to the teules or rebellion? Was its anger directed at the Spaniards or at the Indians?

Determined to get the most out of his psychological weapons, Cortés could not do other than approve Diego de Ordaz’s proposal to attempt a reconnaissance of Popocatepetl. The adventure was hazardous and in order to undertake it that streak of madness and that degree of ignorance that characterised the Conquistadors were required.

So one morning Ordaz set out from Tlaxcala with nine Spaniards and some Indian porters. The first stage brought them to the limit of the fir forests at about 13,000 feet—Tlaxcala stood at about 7,000 feet. They passed the night under the stars on the Tlamanca plateau, which was a sacred site with temples. The howling of the coyotes, the rumble of explosions and the uproar of the debris composed a plutonian symphony. The Indians refused to go further. Intrepid, the Spaniards continued on their way. After crossing two barrancas they reached the foot of the volcano, where the region of cinders and fire began. Slipping or stumbling over slopes of solidified lava, Diego de Ordaz and his companions reached the snowfields at 15,750 feet. The summit was not far away. But after 16,400 feet the Spaniards suffered severely: their sandal-shod feet (they had kept their alpargatas for this mountain trip) alternately endured the agonies of ice and fire. They were overtaken by an invincible lethargy, and they lacked air. At regular intervals the volcano spat out scoria and glowing cinders. Between the monster’s fits the Spaniards, tottering with fatigue, and dazed by the sulphurous vapours, went forward a few steps, then let themselves fall upon the shuddering rock. Finally, after superhuman efforts they
hauling themselves to the summit of Popocatepetl, to the very foot of the crater.

Sheltering behind a rock, Cortés' men surveyed the Mexican landscape. Tlaxcala, with fields of maize and aloes, was no bigger than a handful of millet seed, but a grey line could be distinguished that left Tlaxcala, passed through Cholula, then between Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl and ended at the Lake of Texcoco. It was the road to Tenochtitlán—Montezuma's city, that glittered in the middle of the lake. The causeways that connected the imperial island to the land seemed as tenuous as a spider's thread. To the east lay the mountain of Cofre de Perote—an old acquaintance—and then that king of Mexican peaks, Orizaba. Thus, from the top of Popocatepetl Cortés' companions could gauge what they had already conquered and what they had still to conquer.

The earth trembled, and a whirl of vapour and flame enveloped the Spaniards. They had defied and conquered the God of Fire. They took a last look at Tenochtitlán, and then, after collecting some blocks of ice, Ordaz and his companions descended.

It was a difficult descent but a triumphant return. This time the Indians no longer doubted Spanish strength. The god of the mountain had capitulated to the teules, which meant that the people must obey Malinche, the incarnation of Quetzalcoatl. Cortés again took up his pen and reported the mad escapade to the Emperor Charles: 'They arrived near the peak. At that moment there was an eruption with a great deal of smoke, which burst forth with such impetuosity and such noise that the whole mountain seemed about to collapse.' Charles greatly appreciated Diego de Ordaz's daring and awarded him a title with the device 'a burning mountain on a field gules.'

Two years later Cortés had to send a second expedition to Popocatepetl, not merely to demonstrate Spanish courage but having a utilitarian purpose—to obtain sulphur for making gunpowder. The expedition was led by Francisco de Montaña and its task was facilitated by the volcano's quiescence. The Spaniards followed their predecessors' route and, reaching the cone more easily, were able to set up a hoist at the very edge of the crater and extract a large quantity of sulphur.

But the credit for the idea and the courage of having carried it out belongs above all to Diego de Ordaz and his companions. They were the first conquerors of Popocatepetl and three centuries were to pass before, in 1827, the exploit was carried out for a third time.
The ascent of Popocatepetl in full activity by ten Spaniards in sandals, with their capes rolled around their backs and with nothing for ice-axes but the points of their swords, was an heroic interlude in the drama of the Conquest.

**A BLOODY HALT AT THE HOLY CITY OF CHOLULA**

The Spaniards remained at Tlaxcala for seventeen days. The soldiers rested, but Cortés displayed intense political activity. He strengthened his alliance with the Tlaxcalans, gathered information about Tenochtitlán and prepared his coming leap towards the Aztec capital.

During his stay at Tlaxcala Cortés twice received an embassy from Montezuma. The Indian Emperor was kept informed by his spies of everything concerning the Spaniards, and he knew everything about the furious battles before Tlaxcala and of the peace that followed. Diego de Ordaz's exploit confirmed his belief that the white warriors were of divine origin. Nothing could resist them, neither the forces of men nor those of nature. What else was there to do but appease them with gifts and try to keep them away from Tenochtitlán?

The situation of the Aztec ambassadors was strange. They crossed the Tlaxcalan lines furnished with safe-conducts and were under the protection of the Spanish general. Their diplomatic status and Cortés' caution allowed them to move quite freely in the city and even to participate in the interviews between the Spanish captain and the local chieftains. It was known on both sides that one day war would break out between Tenochtitlán and Tlaxcala; meanwhile both sides put forward their points of view courteously.

On their first mission to Cortés the Aztec ambassadors passed on Montezuma's offer to submit to the King of Spain and to pay rich tribute to him regularly, on condition that he returned to his own country. They added that Tenochtitlán did not possess sufficient resources to receive the Spanish captain worthily. Sumptuous presents accompanied the proposal. Cortés accepted the gifts but reiterated his firm intention of paying Montezuma a visit. With their second embassy the tone had changed. Montezuma was astonished that a great lord like Cortés should delay so long among the miserable Tlaxcalans, who were no good even as slaves. He cordially invited Cortés
to his capital. These contradictory messages betrayed Montezuma's confusion. If it was impossible to turn the white leader from the road to Mexico, perhaps he must be lured forward to test his invulnerability.

Cortés reassembled his army and gave the signal to depart. To get to Tenochtitlán the road passed through Cholula. This was the holy city of the Aztecs. Dominating the 360 teocalis was a gigantic pyramid dedicated to Quetzalcoatl. Columns of pilgrims came every year to be present at the ritual ceremonies, when six thousand victims were sacrificed to the gods. The Tlaxcalans were enemies of the Cholulans, who were allies of Montezuma and therefore energetically discouraged Cortés from passing through the city. Seeing that the prospect of danger was more a stimulant to the Captain-General than an obstacle, the Tlaxcalans offered him 6,000 soldiers to reinforce his army. Cortés accepted only 2,000. But at the exit from the city the Indian contingent grew by several hundreds of volunteers. In fact, 5,000 Tlaxcalans followed Cortés' banner.

The grey plain was planted with aloes that stood up like raised fists. Then the Spaniards approached Cholula, and from a distance thought they were seeing Toledo, for in the towers and fortified walls there was somewhat reminiscent of Old Castile. While the Tlaxcalans camped outside the town the Spaniards were received by the Cholulan worthies with dignity. Incense smoked in the censers. Their words were courteous and their gestures deferential. Young girls threw bouquets of flowers to the soldiers. Children obstructed their passage, singing. Crowded on the terraces or pressed against the walls of houses, the Cholulans watched the Spanish horsemen pass, then the infantry, the camons drawn by the Cempoalans and the waggons loaded with enemy prizes; their attitude was that of any crowd watching a military procession. No hostile cry was raised, not even at the Indian mercenaries. Apparently the welcome was correct, even cordial, and the population showed a friendly face—but it was too friendly. This organised enthusiasm augured nothing good for Cortés. Cholula reeked of falsehood. He had only to intercept the sly sneer of the Cholulans when they passed a Spanish soldier to know that. A solemn oppressiveness, as on the eve of a catastrophe, hung over the sacred city.

A certain number of suspicious acts had roused the Captain-General's distrust: the discovery of sharpened stakes at the bottom of skilfully disguised ditches, the evacuation of Cholulan women and children to the mountains, the sudden lack of food-
stuffs. Gradually the Spaniards became isolated: they found themselves cut off in the great temple of Cholula that had been assigned to them as their residence. Finally, the arrival of a third embassy from Montezuma, forbidding Cortés to approach Tenochtitlán, succeeded in perturbing him. What was brewing?

Thanks to her great knowledge of the Indian mind (which was her own) and thanks also to the contacts she had made in the land, Doña Marina had the last word in the story. Something was certainly brewing. 20,000 soldiers from Cholula and

Tenochtitlán were hiding in the houses, only awaiting a sign—that of their departure—to fall upon the Spaniards, capture them and take them bound to Montezuma’s palace, after sacrificing twenty of them at once to the Cholulan gods. Such was Huiztilopochtli’s will, transmitted by Montezuma.

So the plot was well organised, and by him who had sent supplicant ambassadors to Cortés. Such honeyed words and such rich presents to cloak his treachery! The Spaniard’s reaction was terrible. After enjoining silence on his informers and guaranteeing their safety, he officially announced his departure and asked for victuals and 2,000 porters. The muster was to take place in the courtyard of the great temple. Meanwhile he grouped his cannons in well-sited firing positions. What was he plotting? To draw the greatest possible number of Cholulans inside the temple and, as soon as they found it impossible to get out, to cut them to pieces with his artillery. He answered trick with trick and caught his enemies in their own trap.

When day broke, the whole population of Cholula—nobles and plebians—pressed forward to the doors of the temple. On
their side, the Indian warriors held themselves ready to attack the Spaniards as arranged. Then Cortés took a few steps in front of the crowd, crossed his arms and cried in a resounding voice: 'My Lords of Cholula, we have come to you as friends and here you are preparing arms and ropes for our perdition. . . . The laws of our Emperor instruct that such treachery shall be punished. Your punishment shall be death.'

Cortés' words, translated by Doña Marina, threw the Cholulans into consternation. They attempted in vain to justify themselves, attributing the responsibility for the affair to Montezuma. The Captain-General would listen to none of it. He ordered a musket to be fired—the prearranged signal to his artillery—and at once the cannons began to thunder. Smoke and flame filled the temple courtyard. Despite their courage the Cholulans were quickly put out of action. Mown down by bullets, terrified by the bombardment, those who had not perished attempted to flee. But at the city gates they were engaged by the Tlaxcalans, who took their revenge for their abhorred tutelage.

The first part of the battle lasted two hours, during which three thousand Cholulans lost their lives. It was prolonged a further three hours in the suburbs. Cortés had great difficulty in getting the Tlaxcalans to stop the fight: they massacred, pillaged and burned with savage zeal. Houses blazed and teocalis collapsed. The screams of women and children who were burned alive, the regular roar of the cannon and the war cries of the Tlaxcalans sounded the knell of the sacred city. The fire raged for two days. Cholula had paid. Then Cortés stretched a victor's arm over a now silent city. Henceforth it was under his protection.

The Spaniards long remembered the matanza—the slaughter—at Cholula. The temple courtyard became a slaughter-house, with the unbearable stench of decay and of burned flesh. It was, perhaps, the most frightful episode of the campaign. But Cortés' position was now consolidated. Fourteen days passed between the fall of the town and the departure of the Spaniards. During this short delay, Cortés had time to bring off a double political coup: to reconcile the Tlaxcalans and Cholulans, and to secure, if not the alliance, at least the neutrality of the latter. He did not diverge from his inflexible line of conduct: to maintain local dissensions when they were profitable to him, to strive to reduce them when he saw it was advantageous to do so, to acquire as many allies as possible, in brief by arms or by words to conquer
the country as he occupied it. In fact, his vital objective was to prevent the formation of a front behind him: there must be no enemy at his back!

Cortés was scarcely surprised to see the arrival of a new embassy from Montezuma. He knew this personage now. Of course, the imperial messengers brought the Captain-General the monarch's condolences for the tiresome events at Cholula. Montezuma was grieved at the Cholulans' conduct and deplored the fact that Cortés had not punished them more severely. He insistently begged Cortés to visit him at Tenochtitlán. In reality, the Indian emperor had taken the failure of his plan badly. For two days he prayed, imploring advice from Huitzilopochtli. Temporarily appeased by the slaughter of a few victims, he had pronounced judgement: Malinche must be allowed to enter Tenochtitlán! Once in the city, it would be easy to exterminate him and his people. It was an implacable verdict, though Montezuma was not sure that he had interpreted it properly.

Cortés pretended to take the fine words of the Aztec envoys seriously. Not for a second did he let them see that he knew of Montezuma's part in the Cholulan plot. It was important, indeed, that the Spanish army should enter the Mexican capital in a friendly fashion, at least officially. Overcoming his disgust at such duplicity, Cortés courteously sent the Indian ambassadors back to their master with the advice that he would be at Tenochtitlán in a few days.

**MONTEZUMA AND CORTÉS MEET**

This was the last stage before the imperial city, that was no more than 60 miles away. First of all, the road passed through a deep defile between Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, and then traversed sumptuous forests of mulberries and cedars. The Spaniards advanced cautiously with their arms at the ready and their eyes watchful. Gradually the plain succeeded the sierra, cultivated fields the bush, and grass the rocks. Soon the conquerors were in the valley of the Anahuac and the landscape was soft and voluptuous. In the distance the Lake of Texcoco could be seen, shining like armour. The colours were gentle, a symphony of greens and blues. Was it possible that so bloody an emperor could reign over a land that seemed made for happiness? From all the towns close to the capital—Chalco, Tlalma-alco, Amecameca—delegations came to complain bitterly to the
Spaniards of Montezuma's yoke. Did they dare to murmur so close to the imperial palace? This was something that would ease Cortés' task.

Montezuma multiplied his marks of deference. His brother Cuítlahuac, King of Ixtapalapa, came to welcome Cortés as he emerged from the sierra, and soon after passing Chalco, Cacamatzin, King of Texcoco, presented himself to the Spanish general. The two princes apologised that Montezuma was not able to come to meet him and they put themselves at Cortés' disposal to give him any assistance. At the same time, they discouraged Cortés from continuing his journey to Tenochtitlán, a final but vain attempt to stop the invaders' progress. Cortés simply smiled: the legendary city was now no further than a crossbow-shot away. With his heart leaping for joy, the Conquistador set foot on the Ixtapalapa causeway, followed by his Spaniards, like the Romans on the Via Triumphalis. It was November 8th, 1519.

From the opposite direction a magnificent procession advanced slowly towards the Spanish army. Seeing that nothing could stop Malinche, having exhausted every means in Heaven and Earth, Montezuma, in order to prevent the catastrophe, decided to meet his adversary.

At the head of the column came the Aztec emperor in his litter, under a canopy of green feathers. Gold and emeralds shone on his garments. Slaves swept the earth before him. Around the Indian monarch marched the princes of his line and the priests of Huitzilopochtli. Servants carried gilded mats, garlands of flowers and flasks of perfume. Except for the princes, all eyes were turned earthwards so as not to meet the Emperor's glance. The illustrious chiefs, who had come from Tlacopan, Texcoco and Coyoacan at Montezuma's summons, brought up the rear: these were the 'Eagles' and 'Tigers,' and their gem-spangled feathers glittered in the morning sun. Such a gathering of nobles and warriors had never before been seen at Tenochtitlán, but every face—punishment and war had left their holy stigmata imprinted upon them—was marked with touching sadness. Where now were the victory processions? Today the fine flower of Aztec knighthood had a rendezvous with slavery.

Having reached the middle of the Ixtapalapan causeway, the Aztec column stopped. Now the other column approached: at its head was Malinche, mounted on his great 'stag.' Four captains surrounded him, likewise born upon 'stags.' A soldier held a standard aloft. Behind came a crowd of armed men, with fair
skins and bristling beards. These were indeed the 'lords of powder and smoke.' They brandished heavy lances that flashed like silver. Finally, with a noise like thunder the 'bronze weapons' rolled along the causeway, followed by thousands of Indians, among whom Montezuma recognised his enemies.

Cortés' chestnut horse and Montezuma's litter stopped face to face. The Aztec descended from his chair. He placed his golden sandals on the cotton tapestry that had just been unrolled, and advanced towards the Spaniards, supported by his kinsmen, Cuitlahuac and Cacamatzin, kings respectively of Ixtapalapa and Texcoco. Two other kings accompanied him, those of Tlacopan and Coyoacan. Cortés leapt from his horse and moved towards Montezuma, and the two men bowed deeply. Then they looked at one another.

The two armies were motionless, face to face, and a sudden silence succeeded the tumult of a moment before. The wind stirred the crests of the Spanish helmets and the plumes of the Indian dignitaries; the two war chiefs faced one another, while behind them their petrified general staffs formed a group of statues. It was indeed an 'historic' moment as two worlds met.

Montezuma was tall and well proportioned, and his measured movements were as solemn as those of a priest. His hair was long and he had a sparse beard. His colour was pale ochre. Cortés, helmeted and armoured, had the manners of a gentleman who had frequented Courts as often as military camps. His movements were lively and his face, dusty and sunburnt under his helm, showed resolution. His look was hard. A thick beard hid the strong bones of his jaws. He was covered with steel like a medieval knight. Montezuma was adorned with jewels and feathers. Here, in fact, was the royal eagle.

Two men. Two worlds. Cortés was a hero of the Renaissance. He was imbued with the excellence of the civilisation of his day, convinced of the grandeur of Spain, certain of his hold on truth. He knew that he had a role to play, to inform the Indians on Christian morality and to impose on them the laws of the West. His message had the severity of a dogma and involved absolute submission. A single god—Christ; a single emperor—Charles of Spain; a single fatherland—Spain. Cortés' mentality was that of a Crusader: Dieu le veult! The sidelong glance he cast upon Aztec gold and on the sturdy build of the Indians was not that of a slave-dealer or a covetous man; his covetousness was political and, in a certain sense, mystical. Gold and slaves, certainly! But for Catholic Spain.
Montezuma was a hero too. Simultaneously he embodied the fate of a people, the will of their gods and the symbols of a religion. But the people were passive, the gods were silent and religion vacillated. Montezuma could not, like Cortés, detach himself from his task. He himself was the people, the god and religion, and he succumbed to this triple load. Would he rise again? Not before he received from Heaven the sign he awaited. But it was slow in appearing. The silence of the idols—he did not cease to implore them or to bathe their clay feet with blood—turned Montezuma into this hesitating monarch who for three months had not known what orders to give. He delayed the battle. For in the end, if Malinche and Quetzalcoatl were one and the same, was he to take up arms against the god? Montezuma’s tragedy was a tragedy of faith. He no longer believed in God. Thus he no longer believed in himself. Despair and indecision followed. Cortés believed in God. The cross embroidered on his standard had the shape of a sword. He knew that he would conquer.

Thus the two men meditated, face to face. But the anguish and irresolution of the Emperor were not visible on his stony face.

Around Montezuma’s neck Cortés hung a necklet of pearls perfumed with musk. In exchange, the Aztec gave him a golden garland of shell-fish and shrimps. With arms outstretched, the Spaniard prepared to embrace Montezuma, but the princes prevented this act of lèse-majesté. Who was this Cortés to give himself the right to touch the Emperor? A few courteous words were exchanged and translated by Doña Marina, then the Indian monarch returned to Tenochtitlán. The column reformed. The nobles, officers and servants glided slowly over the slabs of the causeway. Their unhappy eyes were turned earthwards.

**MEXICO**

‘Are these not the delights of which we are told in the legend of Amadis? Is not all we see a dream?’ These words of Bernal Díaz del Castillo well express the Spaniards’ astonishment at Tenochtitlán. And the chronicler adds: ‘Before such an admirable spectacle, we no longer knew what to say or whether what was before us was real. . . . And we were not even four hundred soldiers!’ 400 Conquistadors in a city of 300,000 inhabitants!

The Aztec capital was built on an oval island—itself formed
of old islets which had gradually conglomerated—situated in the middle of the Lake of Texcoco. It was connected with the mainland on the north, west and south by three great dikes or causeways which converged towards the centre of the city. The causeways were cut by canals that were spanned by drawbridges. These had only to be raised to sever all communications.

The majority of the house—there were some sixty thousand in all—were built on piles. There were few streets but many canals, and one went from house to house by canoe. Gardens abounded, islets of verdure and flowers at the surface of the lagoon. Each garden, born on a bed of mud, was separated from the others by a sort of wickerwork. The history of the city was written on this muddy water.

First of all there was a lonely lake. Then vegetation began to
grow on a patch of mud. A hut was built and then a house, and finally a city, aquatic and plant-like. With its bridges and canals, it was similar to Venice, but bore no resemblance to any city of the Occident in any other respect. The fine dark red pyramids of the teocallis rose above the green and blue roofs. To the west lay Tacuba, also called Tlacopan; to the north, Tepeyac; to the south, Ixtapalapa; and to the east, Texcoco. The vassal cities stood out whitely against the dark blue of the sky, as well as the graceful curve of the Chapultepec aqueduct, which distributed fresh and drinkable water, while on the southern periphery of the lagoon, around the Lake of Chalco, were further towns, Mixcoac, Coyoa can, Tlacopan and Xochimilco.

The three causeways—those of Ixtapalapa to the south, Tacuba to the west, and Tepeyac to the north—led to the centre of Tenochtitlán. A smaller causeway started from Coyoa can and joined that of Ixtapalapan at its centre, where a fortress stood that was named Xocol.

On the main square of Tenochtitlán rose the city's principal buildings: the temples, palaces and sanctuaries, including Montezuma's palace and that of his father, Axayacatl, which the Emperor gave the Spaniards as their residence. The square was the political and religious centre of the State, where the chiefs assembled. From it, in a northward direction, a road led to Tlatelolco (which at one time was independent and now was a suburb of the capital) to the centre of another great square as large as the first. This was the market, where everything was to be found: gold, feathers, honey and slaves. Tobacco was also sold there, a plant then unknown to the Spaniards, who watched amazed as the Aztecs sucked at long tubes and blew the bluish smoke out through their nostrils.

A double wall separated the market-place and its arcades from a closed area where the temples of Tlatelolco stood. The temple of Huizilopochtli dominated all the rest, for the war god was the real sovereign of the Aztec empire. His massive figure, carved in stone and encrusted with jade and turquoise, weighed down with necklets of serpents and with golden masks, glittered lugubriously in the darkness of the tabernacle.

The sounds and odours of Tenochtitlán surprised the Spaniards. In the Aztec avenues they found no familiar noises and none of the scents of home: not even the creak of cartwheels nor the whimmy of a beast of burden. Everything was carried by men or in boats. There were neither shouts nor violent arguments, but only a monotonous and gentle murmur, like that
of the sea. Sometimes the beat of a wooden drum could be heard, or the shrill complaint of a conch or the regular strike of a tool. But as for the odours!—the sharp whiff of pimento sauces, the heady aroma of lilies, waves of incense, and suddenly the fearful stench of slaughter from Tlaltelolco on the days of sacrifice.

Did this city recall either Venice or Toledo? Neither one nor the other, for there was no point in comparing the stone age with the golden age, though the barbarities were not visible. The light landscape, the delicacy of the architecture and the quiet grace of the people gave the Aztec city a pleasant look. At first contact its beauty was surprising but not disquieting, and so, while waiting for the sinister secret of such grandeur to be revealed, the Spaniards could sample the city's voluptuous peace. From this time forward, they knew it only by the name chosen by Mexitli (Huitzilopochtli) himself, two centuries earlier: Mexico.

* * *

Cortés had left Compoala on August 16 and entered Mexico on November 8th: three months to cover 250 miles, a 'record' time if we recall the difficulties of the undertaking. For having left the coast with 400 Spaniards, not knowing exactly where he was going, Cortés now found himself in Mexico, in the square at the heart of the Aztec empire, in the palace of Montezuma's father. The sovereign had paid him homage and his army had grown by thousands of soldiers.

How had he achieved such a tour de force; how had he been able, above all, to reduce so easily the centres of resistance he encountered on his way? In this connection there is one astonishing fact: the disproportion of the armies that faced one another. In the fighting at Tlaxcala there was only one Spaniard to every hundred Indians. Moved by enthusiasm, the chroniclers have doubtlessly exaggerated the number of the Indian effectives, a number about which there is in any case no agreement. There is the same doubt as regards Cortés' own troops. Although the figure of 400 Spaniards really seems near the truth—all the evidence, including that of Cortés himself, agrees on this figure, account having been taken of the residue of the army that stayed behind at Vera Cruz—that of the Indian allies varies according to the chronicler. When Cortés left Tlaxcala for Cholula, he took with him several thousands of Tlaxcalans. Bernal Díaz de
Castillo gives the figure of 2,000, while Cortés, in his Cartas de relación, speaks of 'five or six thousand.' We must therefore consider the figures mentioned by the historiographers—some of whom like Díaz del Castillo were actually present at these adventures—as exaggerations, made greater or smaller according to whether it was a matter of exaggerating the enemy peril or exalting Spanish bravery.

Having made this reservation, Cortés' military successes are none the less astonishing. The Spaniards were courageous, sometimes to the point of madness; but so were the Indians, who, moreover, had no fear of death, which for them was the supreme reward of the soldier. On the human level—physical endurance, offensive spirit, and the handling of their weapons other than firearms—the Spaniards and the Indians were equal, even though by number the Indians might preponderate. Cortés' superiority was a matter of tactics and material. This excellent strategist recalled the lessons of his father, old Captain de Monroy, who had fought on all the battlefields of Europe. When Cortés forced the Tlaxcalans to fight on terrain he had chosen or when he drew the Cholulans into the great temple under the converging fire of his cannons, he owed his victory to his tactical ability. But we all know that in the end and in all the world's wars, the decision goes to him who has new weapons at his disposal. The effect of surprise and terror is worth more than the number and bravery of the combatants. Cortés' new weapons were cannons and horses, and although they were in small number (15 horses and 10 guns) he provoked panic and death in the enemy ranks. In the same realm of ideas, the muskets and arquebuses—it seems that some chroniclers had counted them as light artillery—completed the work of the cannons. And the dogs, formidable mastiffs trained for war, galloped ferociously beside the horses.

So on his side Cortés had military science, cavalry, artillery, dogs and steel sabres. Against him he had numbers. In acquiring allies he thought first of all to equalise and thereafter to reverse the disproportion of manpower. This is what eventually happened.

There is one final observation regarding this attempt to explain Cortés' victories. Sometimes, during a fight, the Indians softened without apparent reason or seemed to want to avoid contact. It was clear that they wanted to spare the Spaniards. This attitude answered to religious needs; prisoners were wanted so that they could be immolated upon the sacrificial stone. To kill
an enemy on the battlefield was an incomplete deed, for thereby a believing Aztec has done nothing insofar as he has not procured for Huitziolopochtli his quota of warm blood and beating hearts.

How must we think of Cortés, now that he had accomplished his mad cavalcade from Cempoala to Mexico? As Caesar or as Parsifal? It is too soon to say. Certainly, he had handled his affairs without concern for those of others. He had fallen upon Mexico like an eagle on its prey. He had shot up the people of Cholula after luring them into a trap—a trick unworthy of a good adversary. His horses and dogs, his muskets and arquebuses had forced an implacable type of war on the people of Anahuac. One day, during the savage struggles at Tlaxcala, he had sent back fifty of Xicotenga’s men with their hands cut off; they were spies and an example was needed. By doing so, Cortés was defending himself, for the enemy was ferocious and would only yield to force. The enemy? Was it not Cortés who was the aggressor? Although his cause was good, what can be said of the Indians, who were, after all, protecting their own gods and their own houses? The juridical and moral problem raised by the Conquest being inseparable from historical fact, none can deny that the rights of Cortés were those of the strongest. But his duty as a Spaniard had its demands, and the first of these was to go forward. Adelante!

Yet legitimate or not, Cortés’ actions were prudent. He had recourse to violence only when absolutely necessary and when his troop was in danger. Before making war he offered peace—his peace, of course. If he was deceived, he punished. He disliked reprisals but he used them when he had to. He knew how to lull the enemy and how to coax him; he also knew how to impose himself on him. Divide and rule. Deal with the enemy piecemeal. Cortés had made these formulae his own long before they became famous, but the processes themselves are classic. This Conquistador was more than an excellent General; he had the making of a statesman on the Renaissance pattern. At Salamanca his reading had not been limited to Plutarch; he had also read Machiavelli.
CHAPTER IX

The Noche Triste

FIRST concern of Cortés after entering Axayacatl's palace was to fire a salvo of guns: a necessary demonstration. He intended to confirm at once, in the eyes of the Indians of the capital, the reputation of being a white god that he had had since his landing at San Juan de Ulúa. He was the one who commanded the thunder, and none must forget it. He thus hoped to avoid fighting, not from fear but from a desire to spare his effectives, for a good captain is economical with his men's blood. Moreover, what would be the result of a trial of strength, with only 400 Spaniards against Montezuma's whole army? Before this point was reached, he would try diplomacy. He would negotiate, but of course without taking his hand from the hilt of his sword. From this moment the game was to be played out between Montezuma and himself, man to man.

MONTEZUMA'S VACILLATIONS

When Montezuma Xocoyotzin, son of Axayacatl, succeeded his uncle Ahuitzotl on the imperial throne, in the same year as Christopher Columbus set out from Cadiz on his last voyage, times were good and the election was no more than a formality. Only the ceremony remained. In fact for a hundred years the reigning sovereign had designated his successor in his lifetime and the Aztec monarchy had become hereditary.

The evolution of executive power in the Valley of Mexico was linked with that of the régime itself. The passage from an anarchic nomadic state to a municipal régime, then to a governmental and finally to an imperial régime was consecutive to the development of Tenochtitlán. These two related phenomena would not have been possible without élites. The severe trials experienced by the Aztecs when they were first established in
the lagoon necessitated the emergence of élites, formed principally of military men. Selection by battle contributed to promoting an aristocracy of the sword. On parallel lines, the clergy had a growing influence and a veritable ecclesiastical and military aristocracy was thus constituted.

The necessities of municipal life and of the defence of the territory led the Aztec aristocracy to choose a leader. His attributes, at first limited in space and time like those of the Roman consuls, swelled with the spread of the mother-city. Little by little the electors lost their power. The leader was elected from the same clan, and later from the same family, until at last the hereditary principal was accepted by all. The foundation of the Aztec dynasty by Acamapichtli consecrated the hegemony of the Aztlán tribe. Itzcoatl, Montezuma's great-uncle, by uniting Mexico, Texcoco and Tlacopan under his sceptre, laid the foundations of the Empire. There was scarcely a century between the arrival of the Aztec horde in the marshes of Texcoco and the birth of the triple alliance.

Montezuma was the last of this powerful dynasty. His powers were actually those of an absolute monarch. As supreme leader, or tlacatecutli, he exercised civil and military command, but in his function as high priest, or teotecutli, he was the leader of the cult—in fact, he was God's representative on earth. His spiritual realm had the majestic dimensions of the Universe. As to his temporal kingdom, he reigned in the north as far as the Rio Panuco, in the south as far as Guatemala, and on the east as far as the Gulf of Mexico. He had subdued the Totonacs, the Zapotecs, the Otomis and the Tarascans. One state remained resolutely hostile and counter-attacked him vigorously: the republic of Tlaxcala.

A curious man, this Montezuma: a military leader of unquestionable worth, a religious leader deeply attached to his faith, a sovereign by divine right and imbued with the responsibilities of his task. In sacred matters he thought and acted like a fanatical monk. He missed none of the rites of his religion: fasting, penitence and liturgical blood-letting. At the same time he had a taste for grandeur: his palace had a hundred rooms, the walls were of porphyry and jade, the ceilings were of carved wood and the floors of cypress wood. He had two wives and a number of concubines; 500 nobles, bright with jewels and multicoloured feathers, watched over the Emperor day and night. A rigorous ceremonial controlled each detail of the etiquette of this magnificent and barbaric court. Montezuma ate alone and
was served by priests. Gilded screens hid the sight of the eating *tlacatecutli* from the common people. His menus were refined: much game, which abounded around the lagoon, feathered and otherwise, quails, partridge and roebuck. His favourite drink was the chocolate extracted from cocoa beans, which were brought at great expense from the *tierras calientes*. For dessert, *tortillas* of maize. When he had finished his meal, Montezuma puffed at his tobacco through long reeds, then he diverted himself with his clowns, dwarfs and tumblers. Sometimes he gave an audience: the visitor advanced towards his sovereign with lowered eyes and naked feet. He bowed three times and began his discourse with these words: 'Lord, my Lord, my very great Lord!'

There was an arsenal near the imperial palace, filled with various arms: cotton-padded armour, slings and terrible clubs with obsidian blades. Adjoining the arsenal was a clothing store where ceremonial garments, laden with feathers, were carefully piled, then an aviary alive with birds, from the royal eagle to the dazzling humming-bird. Finally, Montezuma's menagerie: day and night, ocelots, jaguars, wolves, pumas and bears made the great square of Mexico echo with their roars. The Emperor loved wild-beasts, and in the great periods of atonement he gave them live prisoners-of-war to devour.

Everyone remembered the day when the kings of Texcoco and Tlacopan in the name of the Empire installed Montezuma on the *icpalli*—the throne—of Ahuitzotl. They placed a crown on his head and hung heavy rings in his ears. Amid clouds of copal and before the prostrated electors the triarchy slowly ascended the steps of the temple of Huitzilopochtli. After sticking aloe spines firmly into his ears, arms and legs, he collected live quails into a basket. He cut their throats and sprinkled the blood on the temple walls and the sacrificial stone. Then, seizing a golden censer, he cast jets of blue smoke to the four cardinal points, a grandiose gesture by which he took possession of the world. Simultaneously, he dedicated himself to the war-god and promised happiness for his peoples. At the height of his glory, he showed himself humble and gentle. His rule, one might think, would be that of a father, if one was to judge by the open arms and the smile that was filled with good will.

Fifteen years and more had passed since Montezuma's enthronement. The promise of happiness had not been kept. It had not taken long for the new emperor to cast aside his mask of benevolence. The arms that had been raised piously heaven-
wards had fallen upon the confederate tribes. Never had the sceptre of the Aztec dynasty been more harsh.

An ascetic prince, an uncompromising defender of the faith like Philip II; an absolute monarch, magnifying the royal person, like Louis XIV; a fierce conqueror, like Attila. But these were only the appearances. What did he lack? Character. He doubted his mission, he doubted his strength, he doubted his god. Caught between the desire to protect his throne and the desire to respect the divine will, he still had nobility when he confronted Cortés. But his spirit was icy. What joy he would have in sacrificing these impudent strangers to Huitzilopochtli! Yet if Cortés was the incarnation of Quetzalcoatl, this would be a criminal undertaking. In this conflict between two divinities, one of whom was silent and the other resolutely human, Montezuma did not know which side to take.

Such was the person whom the Spanish general contemplated subduing. Followed by his faithful friends—Alvarado, Sandoval, Velasquez de Leon, and Ordaz—and a few soldiers, he went to pay a visit to the Emperor. Friendly words were exchanged. Montezuma offered little presents to each Spaniard. On this occasion he cautioned them against what the Tlaxcalans had been able to tell them about his supposed riches. He certainly possessed a little gold, inherited from his ancestors, but much less than was said. His palace was built of stone and lime. He himself was made of flesh and bone like other men. Who could say that he passed himself off as a god? He even went so far as to lift his tunic to show everyone his perishable body. The Aztecs who were present trembled at the sight of their Lord's nakedness laid bare to these strangers for to the Indian nobles it was an incomprehensible gesture, but it was meant by Montezuma to emphasise his humility before Quetzalcoatl. He was nothing but a poor man and the servant of the gods. 'What gods?' Cortés demanded. The Emperor shuddered. He had been expecting that question and only one reply was possible: to take Malinche to the temple of Huitzilopochtli.

Cortés' visit to the war-god could not have turned out worse. After ascending the five stages of the teocallis and the hundred and forty steps that gave access to the upper terrace, the Spaniards reached Huitzilopochtli's sanctuary and that of his companion Tezcatlipoca—the god with the pig's snout and glass eyes—just at the moment when the priests had completed their sinister task. Five Indians, with their bodies open from breast to pubis, lay at the feet of the idols. Like sections of a severed
snake, the hearts still palpitated in the brazier where the copal sizzled. Surprised to see the Emperor and his guests, the priests, with their obsidian knives still in their hands and blood trickling down their black garments, suspended the dismemberment. Mute with horror the Spaniards gazed upon the funereal chapel. The walls were dark with coagulated blood. It was dim, but not so dim that they could not distinguish trumpets, scalpels and withered hearts piled together in macabre disorder. In a corner was the enormous teponaztle, made of stretched snakeskin, whose melancholy note could be heard leagues away. And the stench of putrefying flesh! Cortés could not overcome his disgust. Were these the gods that Montezuma revered?

Then the Spaniard began his first sermon. These cruel idols must be overthrown and the statue of the Virgin substituted. Montezuma took the proposal very badly. The Aztec people owed everything to Huitzilopochtli. He was as solid in the stone as in their minds. Montezuma begged Malinche to abstain in future from outraging the tutelary gods. Cortés did not insist, for the hour had not yet come, and from the Emperor he simply obtained permission to have a chapel built where Father de Olmedo could celebrate the Catholic rites. Slowly, and filled with nausea, the Spaniards descended the steps of the teocalli.

THE OATH TO CHARLES OF SPAIN

It was clear that this state of armed peace could not last long. It was an ambiguous situation which anything could break. For although Cortés was patient and Montezuma indecisive, both felt the need for a solution, which certain events helped to precipitate.

While seeking the best site on which to build their chapel, the Spaniards discovered the entrance to a strong room which held Axayacatl's treasure. The Emperor's presents and the seizures made by Cortés' soldiers seemed almost paltry beside this incredible accumulation of gold and precious stones. For the time being it was decided to keep the matter secret, but after a while the Spaniards began to murmur. What reason was there for such inactivity and discipline, unjustifiable by military requirements? They had come to fight and to make their fortunes—or rather, to fight and to go home after sharing the booty, which already totalled 180,000 pesos. Meanwhile, bad news arrived from Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz. During a sortie by the Spanish garrison
in the direction of Nautila, Cuauhpopoca, the local chieftain, had taken up arms against the expeditionary corps, and although eventually the Spaniards had been victorious, six of them were mortally wounded, including Juan de Escalante, the garrison's commander. To show zeal, Cuauhpopoca thought fit to send Montezuma the head of one of the Spaniards, Juan de Arguello. The Emperor turned away in disgust.

The Nautila affray strongly impressed Cortés' officers: the death of their comrades, by demonstrating the vulnerability of the teules, was a severe blow to Spanish prestige. Moreover, they suspected that Montezuma was no stranger to this act of treachery. If the advantages that had been gained were not to be lost, a heavy blow must be struck at once. What could it be? The capture of Montezuma himself.

After long hesitation, for it would be a risky affair, Cortés yielded to the arguments of those around him. Guards were posted at the crossroads and at the entrances to the streets, and Cortés then marched into the Imperial palace together with his general staff.

The interview lasted two hours. Trembling with fear, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, Montezuma lowered his head before the reproaches of Cortés, translated to him by Doña Marina. He begged the Spaniard to spare him such humiliating treatment. What would his ministers say? What would his subjects think? He begged Malinche to take his son and two daughters as hostages instead. But Cortés' biting words and Velasquez de Leon's resounding voice drowned Montezuma's mumblings. Although he had only to make a sign to his guard and not a Spaniard would leave the palace alive, the tlacatecutli submitted to the will of Cortés, and the horror-stricken people of Mexico were faced with the stupefying sight of Montezuma removed as a prisoner to his father's palace, cringing in his litter with his face bathed in tears. Quetzalcoatl had spoken.

The confinement of the Emperor ended any desire for resistance in the Aztec city. The streets, that hitherto had been so frequented, were now deserted as if a jaguar were at large. Although, theoretically, Montezuma retained his prerogatives, no one was fooled, for who obeys a prisoner? Cortés then felt that he was strong enough to destroy the gods, having overturned their earthly representative. He climbed to the top of the teocalli and, armed with an iron bar, overturned the statues of Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca. Each blow on the stone
echoed in the hearts of the Aztecs. Then the Spaniards white-washed the bloodstained walls and erected an altar to the Virgin on the sacrificial stone itself. A cross was planted atop the chapel and Father de Olmedo celebrated mass.

With their sovereign a captive and their gods overthrown, could the Aztecs know humiliation more complete? But they were to experience a final trial. One day they saw Cuauhpopoca, the chieftain of Nautla, his son and fifteen of his nobles arrive in the main square of Mexico. They were chained, and blood streamed from their wounds. Dragged before Cortés for judgement and put to the torture, they confessed to having acted under orders from Montezuma. The Emperor denied it, but was brought down from his throne and put into irons. At the same time a stake was set up facing the temple of Huitzilopochtli, and Cuauhpopoca and his son were burned there, and their screams mingled with the groans of the tlacatecutli and his intimates.

Resolved to stifle the very possibility of a revolt, Cortés had Cacamatzin and Cuililahuac arrested, as well as the ruler of Coyoacan. In a few weeks he had succeeded in decapitating the Aztec monarchy, and, seeking now to put himself on the right side of the law, he thought to sanction by legal text what he had already done by force. He summoned Montezuma to take an oath to Charles the Fifth (Charles I of Spain had just been elected to the Empire). Then he was ordered to obtain the same oath from his subjects. The sovereign, submissive to Cortés' orders, called his chiefs and nobles together, and on this occasion the princes were momentarily freed from their irons. Alone with his own people, gathered together in the great hall of Axayacatl's palace, Montezuma exhorted them to do what Malinche required. He reminded them of Quetzalcoatl's prophecy. Henceforth, Huitzilopochtli was obliterated before the white and bearded god. The tears ran down the faces of the disarmed warriors; they had to submit. The next day, before the troops and the assembled people, the Mexican chiefs solemnly swore fidelity to the unknown emperor. The report was drawn up by Cortés' clerk, so that none could be ignorant of it.

Cortés' soldiers could no longer reproach him for remaining inactive, but they were not the type of men to content themselves with glory. They were tortured by another hunger: the hunger for gold. So they pressed the General to proceed with the sharing of the treasure. To have delayed longer would have gravely affected Spanish 'morale,' so Cortés yielded to their entreaties. With Montezuma's 'permission,' Axayacatl's treasure
chamber was emptied of its contents. Every man received his share; that for the King of Spain—the fifth or quint—was not forgotten. Montezuma added his own personal treasure and charged Cortés to send it to Charles the Fifth, remarking ironically: ‘Pardon the insignificance of these presents, but I have nothing more. You have already taken everything.’

In fact, the Spaniards had taken all. Their booty was enormous and almost impossible to reckon, but in modern terms it was some 6,300,000 dollars in gold! The personal prize of each soldier, Montezuma’s fortune, Axayacatl’s treasure, and the contributions that the Emperor levied on the provinces for Charles’ treasury, formed an accumulation of riches such as no conqueror had ever amassed. The 162,000 gold pesos were far exceeded. A shining river continued to flow to the feet of Cortés. He watched the stream carefully, setting aside the jewels and precious stones and ordering everything in gold to be melted. Alas for the gold-smiths’ art! He placed a higher value on gold in bars than in jewellery. Moreover, Cortés reserved to himself a fifth of the booty, like the King of Spain. After the quinto real, a quinto for the Conquistador. Every Spaniard found himself in possession of a considerable revenue, but they never ceased to plead poverty. They understood nothing of Cortés’ arithmetic.

A people dazed with despair, soldiers confined to barracks, chiefs executed or in captivity, the national treasury pillaged, the gods silent: indeed, it seemed that nothing more remained of Aztec grandeur. Cortés still spared Montezuma, keeping him in reserve for the improbable event of a popular rising, but in reality it was he who governed in the place of the fallen sovereign. He levied the taxes, named the officials and, above all, had his lieutenants reconnoitre the country that he already considered his own. Small detachments were sent almost everywhere with the task of discovering the gold-bearing regions. Cortés wanted gold. His soldiers whispered that he kept the larger part for himself and only gave them the crumbs. There was some truth in these murmurings. Cortés loved gold.

While the General consolidated his power in Mexico, a double danger hung over his head. Two enemies, an Aztec and a Spaniard, were preparing to pounce upon him. In the north of Mexico, at Tlatelolco, resistance was being organised against the Spaniards in the greatest secrecy. Its leader was Cuauhtemoc, son of Ahuitzotl and Montezuma’s first cousin. Elsewhere, a powerful fleet was steering towards Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz,
with Panfilo de Narvaez in command. It had been sent by Diego Velasquez to arrest Cortés.

Thus, at the very moment when Cortés was receiving the submission of Montezuma’s Mexico to Charles’s Spain, another Mexico and another Spain were rising to contest his rights and, if possible, to break him.

**ALVARADO DISTURBS THE FEAST**

In truth, Cortés’ thoughts were very little concerned with Cuba. Although close in terms of time—he had left Havana only fourteen months before—the island and his own beginnings seemed to him very far away. So many things had separated him from them: the cordilleras, the massacre at Cholula, the valley of shining cities, Doña Marina, ... How banal Cuba seemed beside all that! But if Cortés did not think about Cuba, Cuba was thinking about him. It would not be long before the results of this concern were felt.

For the moment the Captain-General was watching Montezuma. His attitude had changed. Since Cortés had overthrown the statue of Huitzilopochtli and substituted that of the Virgin and the Infant Jesus, Montezuma had cold-shouldered the Spaniards. He doubtless reckoned that Malinche had gone too far. Wishing to clear the matter up, Cortés presented himself to the heathen monarch. What was going on? In a few words Montezuma acquainted him with the present situation. The gods had spoken at last. Huitzilopochtli, the war god, Chaloc, the rain god, Xipe, the god of the Spring, and all the rest had given their verdict: that all the Spaniards should be stretched upon the sacrificial stone! The gods were hungry for Castillian hearts and thirsty for their blood, and the hour of oblation could no longer be delayed. Cortés’ officers, present at the interview, put their hands to their swords. But the General restrained them. He knew his man. Let him finish! In fact, Montezuma’s voice became softer. He would remain deaf to the voices of the gods. Why? Because Cortés was his friend. But the Spaniards must leave the country at once.

Cortés had several strings to his bow: patience was one of the best. He must gain time. He bowed, apparently, to the Emperor’s will. He reminded him simply that he had no longer any ships. The observation was well-founded. So Montezuma made no difficulty about giving the General the time necessary to con-
struct a small fleet. Cortés reckoned to use this delay for other ends. Was he to leave what he already called New Spain because of Indian threats? None of the 400 Spaniards seriously considered this. In this adventure they had staked not only their lives and their honour, but also their spirits; it was not for them to scampers away like rats at the first growl of the exotic tyrant. 400,000 Indians surrounding them? A thousand to one! But the proportions were right, for was not one Castillian worth a thousand Indians?

A few weeks passed. Cortés' carpenters had set to work. But although the official order was to work fast, the secret order was to drag things out. While pretending to take an interest in the shipyard, the Captain-General was busy consolidating his position in the Mexican capital. He multiplied his contacts with the allied chiefs, without ceasing meanwhile to lavish smiles upon Montezuma. He did not hide from himself the delicacy of the situation. They were only a handful of men at grips with a thousand dangers. The numerical inferiority of the Spanish troops would one day end by playing into the hands of the Aztecs if the reinforcements demanded by Cortés did not quickly arrive in Mexico. The silence of Montejo and Puertocarrero was alarming. Had they failed in their mission? Every Spaniard had his eyes turned towards the eastern shores.

One morning in May 1520, Montezuma called for Cortés. Never had his smile been so oblique nor his words so honeyed. He had just received surprising news from Cempoala: eighteen ships had dropped anchor at San Juan de Ulúa. Cortés trembled with joy. Here were the Spanish reinforcements. Everything was saved! Without foregoing his irritating politeness, the Emperor then handed the General a roll of maguey sheets on which his scribes had recorded the incident. Ships, cannons, horses... the drawing was exact. At the head of the disembarking men was one who was distinguished from the rest by his great corpulence, his great height and the plumes that waved on the crest of his helmet. Cortés frowned. He had recognised Panfilo Narváez, Diego Velasquez' lieutenant. The armada had not come from Spain, but from Cuba.

Cortés had deluded himself about Velasquez by thinking that he would abandon his thoughts of revenge. But the successes of his former subordinate, who had now become an 'elected' Captain-General, had only exasperated the resentment of the Governor of Cuba. Now more than ever, he intended to punish
Cortés for his disobedience and recover control of the Mexican expedition.

When the ship that bore Cortés’ ambassadors—Montejo and Puertocarrero—passed near Cuba, Velasquez tried to stop it. But the crew, properly briefed at the departure, was ready to upset Velasquez’ manoeuvre. The main thing was to cross the narrow passage between Florida and the western coast of Cuba without being seen, which was done with great skill.

So Cortés’ embassy reached Seville without hindrance. From there it went to Barcelona, then Corunna and finally Tordesillas, the residence of Queen Juana. Charles of Spain had come there to take leave of his mother before returning to Germany, where he had just been elected to the Empire. On the road Cortés’ emissaries passed through Medellin in order to take the latest news of his son to old Captain Martin Cortés de Monroy. They persuaded him to accompany them to the Court, thinking thereby to give greater weight to their embassy. Although much pre-occupied with Spanish affairs—the Cortes of Castile was showing coolness towards the Flemish prince and Juan de Padilla was preparing resistance—the young Charles showed interest in the two officers’ report. But this was not the first time that he had heard speak of the New World; at the same time as he received the missives from Cortés, others reached him from Velasquez. The Governor of Cuba laid persistent siege to the sovereign. There was even a Velasquez party at Court, strongly supported by powerful persons, including the Bishop of Burgos, Rodriguez de Fonseca, President of the Council of the Indies. After Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortés... Decidedly, this high-ranking prelate had no liking for the Conquistadors. So all the eloquence of the venerable Don Martin was required to force the Emperor’s goodwill. Charles of Spain could not remain insensitive to the hidalgo’s rough words, an old soldier stiffened by the wounds of long ago. He admired bravery. But before deciding in favour either of Cortés or Velasquez, he awaited more conclusive results. In the mind of the adolescent monarch—he was only twenty years old—political wisdom already prevailed over enthusiasm.

Then Velasquez, seeing that his credit at Court was inadequate, resolved to strengthen it by direct action against Cortés. Having no desire to listen to the counsels of moderation voiced by Diego Columbus, Viceroy of the Indies, to whom he was answerable, the Governor of Cuba despatched a large expedition to the Mexican coast, composed of 18 vessels and 900 soldiers,
including 80 cavalry, as many arquebuses, 150 cross-bowmen, two gunners, 20 cannons and 1,000 Cubans. Panfilo de Narvaez commanded these forces, which were much superior to those of Cortés. His mission was precise: to depose Cortés, take him prisoner and bring him back to Velasquez, alive or dead.

Narvaez was established at Cempoala, ready for defence or attack, while in his palace Montezuma considered an alliance with the white captain. They were already in secret contact, and together were weaving a web of steel around Cortés. What was the Conquistador going to do? Without losing time, he assembled part of his forces—70 men—and plunged for Cempoala. He had previously sent Narvaez a conciliatory missive in which he suggested sharing power, faithful to his tactic of not engaging himself in a struggle before exhausting the possibilities of a peaceful arrangement, though this had not prevented him from despatching emissaries to Velasquez de Leon and Rodriguez de Rangel—who were at that time exploring the country—so that they could join him with their troops en route. Before leaving Mexico, Cortés entrusted the command of the place to Alvarado.

Alvarado put his own valuation on the honour that Cortés had done him. But his pride was clouded by anxiety. When he heard the clatter of hoofs on the causeway dying away, a great anguish seized him. He was alone: alone in the defence of the treasure, Mexico and Montezuma. What forces were at his disposal? 80 Spaniards and 400 Tlaxcalans, who were sufficient for policing, provided the city remained calm, but incapable of opposing a rising. Now it was precisely at this moment that the Aztec capital seemed to emerge from its slumber; it stretched itself and growled, like a waking giant. In fact this was the great annual feast of Toxcatl, on the occasion of the beginning of the rainy season in the month of May. It was celebrated in honour of the gods Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca. Cortés had thought it politic to allow the celebration on condition that it was not followed by any human sacrifice. Music and dancing, but no blood, except that of the quails.

Leaning from one of the windows of Axayacatl's palace, Alvarado watched the hourly growing crowd. He was a fine-looking fellow, with shining equipment and a red-gold beard. The Indians called him Tonatiuh—"Sun God." But today the Aztec people had eyes for none but the actors in the festival. In the centre of the square the statue of Huitzilopochtli which Cortés had cast out of the temple, was enthroned, and around
the idol warriors were crowded covered with emblems, priests with blackened faces, young girls with their arms and thighs decorated with red feathers, and children waving palms. To the sound of drums and flutes the dancers beat the dusty earth rhythmically. One by one, the children filed past the priests who gave them the ritual incisions below the navel and on their arms which consecrated them to the gods. The crowd undulated like a brilliant coloured serpent. The nobles' plumes, the opal jewels, the golden bracelets and the emerald-encrusted breastplates flashed in the sunlight, as brilliant as the spread tail of a peacock. And from the ecstatic people there arose a chant in honour of the Lord of Battles. Modulated at first by the priests, it was taken up again by the tribes and grew until it became a raucous incantation accompanied by the booming of the conchs and the thunder of the drums.

Alvarado was anxious. He felt that the fever of this fanatical crowd was rising. Heedful of the barbaric clamour, he noted the successive nuances: entreaty, love and then hate. The religious chant had become a war cry. There was no need to understand the Aztec words to guess that it no longer concerned the beneficent rain, but 'those whose blood should be drunk and whose flesh should be devoured.' Moreover, he had only to watch the grimacing faces that were turned from Huitzilopochtli towards Axayactl's palace. Alvarado was a simple soldier, but he began to feel something that perhaps was fear. There were close on 2,000 in the square. What should he do, or rather, what would Cortés do? Never had Alvarado regretted so much his General’s absence, for he alone was the genius. While he was thinking it over, one of his spies whispered in his ear that, contrary to the undertaking, the priests intended to sacrifice two young people. This put an end to Alvarado's scruples and gave him legitimate cause to intervene. Moreover, he was not displeased to plunge into the mob. He was a man of the people, half-way between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and although he had the temperament and violence of an old trooper, Alvarado also had the simple mind of a crusader. Such contrasts were not infrequent among the Conquistadors. Alvarado, a son of those who had fought against Israel and Islam, hated heresy—and paganism even more. A love of gold he certainly had, but also a desire to defend his Faith. Down with the Infidel!

Suddenly, above the clamour of the crowd, a Spanish trumpet sounded and sobered the Indians. The dancers stopped. The savage litany was cut short. Profiting by surprise, Alvarado gave
a brief order. The Spaniards ranged themselves in fighting formation. Swords leapt from their sheaths, shields were raised, and while groups of soldiers seized the exits, others mingled with the crowd. The massacre began. Surrounded on all sides, the Aztecs were doomed. Soon the main square of Mexico was no more than a battlefield. Lances whirled, daggers struck and blood ran. A murderous madness rose to the heads of the Spaniards. To kill was for them a way of freeing themselves from the anxiety and nervous irritation of the last few days, an atrocious relaxation which turned the soldiers of Christianity for a few hours into wild beasts. After the massacre came the pillage. The dead were trampled underfoot, and the wounded were finished off the better to despoil them. Emblems were broken, bracelets were torn off. Jewels, sticky with warm blood, accumulated under the Spanish doublets. Alvarado gazed with dismay upon this outburst of rage, and wished that he could take back the order he had so imprudently given.

But to the groans that rose from the corpse-strewn square succeeded the roar of a storm. Thousands and thousands of warriors streamed along the two avenues towards Axayacatl’s palace. They came from Tlatelolco. Spattered with blood and laden with their booty, Alvarado’s men fell back in disorder upon the Spanish quarters and there was no longer any question of saving their honour. What was there to do, if not to flee and barricade themselves against this roaring and screaming mass that rolled towards the garrison? Three-pronged javelins and obsidian-pointed arrows darkened the sky, like ‘a yellow cloud’ suspended over the heads of the Spaniards, who numbered only 80.

It was a miracle that Alvarado and his men were able to take refuge in Axayacatl’s palace in time. But how long would the walls resist the furious assaults of the Aztec legions? The siege was directed by the most famous warriors: the Princes, the Eagles and the Tigers. Neither muskets nor cannons could clear a gap in the mass of the assaulting army. The wooden partitions began to give away. Then Alvarado decided to play his last trump card: Montezuma. He was thrust out on to the palace terrace. Alvarado drew his sword and placed the point at the breast of the tlacatecutli. The toneless voice of the Emperor could scarcely be heard as he harangued his people, but the uproar died down and then ceased. This frail figure, crowned with a diadem, was no more than the ghost of a king, but his words were still those of a god. The last rays of the setting sun
reddened the myriad faces of the barbaric mob as they were turned towards their sad master. He had spoken. The order was given to make peace with Tonatiuh, though no one doubted that it was only temporary. Then the arrows fell to the earth and the brandished shields were lowered. The tribes could return home. Hundreds of canoes glided over the Lake of Texcoco, and in the violet dusk of evening nothing could be heard but the sound of oars on the surface of the water.

THE NOCHE TRISTE

Alvarado mopped his brow, but he did not conceal from himself the gravity of the situation. Montezuma had only secured an armistice. The assailants had certainly withdrawn, but this did not mean that they had capitulated. They were regrouping in the darkness, and continuing the fight in their own fashion. With prodigious speed the canals were blocked, the streets barred and the aqueducts cut. The ships that were under construction were set afire. The intention of the Aztecs was clear: to shut the Spaniards up in Mexico, cut every possibility of retreat and besiege them. But before releasing operations, the Indian army waited for information about the result of Cortés' pourparlers with Narvaez.

Three heavy weeks slipped by. Then, one summer morning, the Ixtapalapa causeway resounded once more to the clatter of cavalry. Hundreds of steel helmets shone in the sunlight, and a forest of lances quivered in the dust. Gauntlets were raised as a sign of welcome. From the top of the wall the Spanish garrison sounded the trumpets. Cortés had returned.

The Captain-General’s expedition had succeeded beyond all hopes. Having left Mexico with 70 men, at Cholula he met Velasquez de Leon’s reinforcements (150 soldiers) and Rodriguez de Rangel’s (110). 330 men in all, who would later be increased by the hundred Spaniards in quarters at Villa Rica. Cortés reached the gates of Cempoala. Narvaez had disposed his troops on the heights overlooking the great teocalli. As for himself he was peacefully asleep at the summit of the pyramid. Cortés talked with Gonzalo Sandoval who, since the death of Juan de Escalante, had commanded the Villa Rica garrison and they got together.

The night was dark and it was raining in torrents. In a short space of time Cortés and Sandoval’s Spaniards crossed a river,
took Narvaez' sentries by surprise, overpowered the outposts and penetrated Cempoala. The cannon sounded, but it was too late. Cortés was there. Quick as lightning and sword in hand, he climbed the steps of the teocalli and came face to face with Narvaez. All night the Spaniards of Mexico and those of Cuba fought one another savagely, and for a long time the victory remained in doubt. Cortés lost three men, but Cristobal de Olid captured Narvaez' artillery. In the early morning Cortés carried the day. His men had set fire to the teocalli and had put out one of Narvaez's eyes. Cortés received the submission of Velasquez's lieutenant in the grand manner. To this enemy of yesterday and prisoner of today Cortés opened his arms: a chivalrous gesture immediately followed by taking possession of the fleet and the Cuban army. The 18 ships were disarmed and Narvaez' effectives incorporated under Cortés banner.

Once again, the Captain-General had won. Having arrived at Cempoala with a handful of men, he left it at the head of thirteen hundred Spanish fighters and several thousands of Indians whom he had picked up in passing. He had carried through a tour de force by helping himself to those whose task it had been to annihilate him. Meanwhile, he made propaganda among Narvaez' soldiers. He predicted for them a triumphal entry into Mexico. Was he not Quetzalcoatl to the Indians—the White God? But a messenger who had run at top speed from the Aztec capital tempered this optimism, for the news was bad. Cortés let nothing of his anxiety show. He hurried towards Mexico by forced marches.

Where was the enthusiastic welcome? The streets were deserted and the silence of death enveloped the city. Narvaez' captains sneered. Was this, then, the glorious arrival that Cortés had promised? The General had much difficulty in restraining his anger. He went straight to Alvarado, whom he sharply rebuked. Then in the patio of Axayacatl's palace he saw Montezuma coming to meet him with outstretched hand but he brusquely brushed aside the Emperor's welcoming arm. For that disastrous day of Toxcatl, Cortés held Alvarado and Montezuma responsible, the one by reason of his stupidity and the other by his weakness and duplicity. Swallowing his rage, the General examined the situation, and found it tragic. He now understood why the Ixtapalapa causeway had remained wide open; the Spaniards were to be allowed to enter Mexico, where they would then be shut as if in a trap. The ambush was well laid, but
Cortés did not console himself for having stupidly thrown himself into it. It was a lesson in strategy for strategy.

In the space of a night and with the nimbleness of primitive people, the Aztec patriots cut the bridges, raised barricades and obstructed the canals. Reinforcements flowed in from all parts. They occupied the causeways, thus preventing the Spaniards from getting out, and prepared to besiege the town. A new leader was elected, and it was Cuitlahuac, Montezuma’s brother. The siege began. Cortés ordered Diego de Ordaz to try a reconnaissanced at the head of 400 soldiers. They left in good order, marching in step like a Roman legion, but they had scarcely passed the gates of Mexico than a hurricane fell upon them. Arrows, stones and javelins whirled through the fiery sky. Groups of Indians surged from everywhere. Diego de Ordaz and his men withdrew, sweeping their swords wildly. The next day, Cortés himself repeated his lieutenant’s attempt, but he was forced to turn back hurriedly under an avalanche of enemy projectiles. The situation was grave; in fact, not only were the attacks at a sortie doomed to failure but the Spanish camp was not safe. Water was lacking and provisions were shrinking. The attackers fired flaming arrows which had already set fire to a number of buildings. A veil of smoke and soot covered Axayacatl’s palace.

Cortés had returned to Mexico on June 24. The month ended. Under the furious pressure of the Aztec warriors, fuddled with pulque and inflamed by their priests, the Spanish camp contracted more and more. The Spaniards suffered severe losses. It was no longer a question of leaving the camp, but of clinging on with all their strength. How could they hold back the constantly renewed flood of Indian aggressors? Cortés then decided to make use of Montezuma. It is true that he no longer meant anything in the eyes of the Aztec people, for the election of his brother had finally destroyed the little prestige he had retained. But it was possible that the voice of the fallen emperor might awaken the echo of former terrors in the minds of the tribesmen.

The royal hostage was brought from his apartments. A plumed cloak was thrown over his shoulders; a diadem was placed upon his brow and a sceptre in his hand. Dressed again in his insignia, he appeared before his people on the terrace of his father’s palace. *Ecce homo! Protected by Spanish shields, the puppet spoke. Was this he who had ruled as far as Guatemala, who now delivered this embarrassed discourse in a toneless voice, with trembling limbs? A puppet disguised as a king was
what the great Montezuma had become. Meanwhile the lances were lowered and the people lent their ears. Eight years of reverence are not easily discarded. In a voice that lacked fire, he exhorted the Aztecs to lay down their arms. The Spaniards were the stronger; the Aztecs would have to yield. A long and indignant uproar greeted the ridiculous prince’s declaration; jeers drowned the melancholy thread of his words. A volley of projectiles fell upon the terrace, and the Spaniards raised their shields to protect the Emperor. But they were too late. Montezuma was hit on the forehead by a stone and he fell. He was carried away. He refused all aid and tore away the dressings. Loudly he cried for death, and some hours afterwards died. Did he succumb from his wounds or did the Spaniards finish him off? In any event, whether he perished by a Castilian blade or by a blow from an Aztec sling, Montezuma took his secret with him. Torn between Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl, his indecision had made a martyr of him, and his miserable end, this sort of self-renunciation, was that of a desperate man.

Montezuma’s death aggravated the Spaniards’ situation even further. The tribal council ratified the election of Cuitlahuac. Galvanised by their new king, the Aztecs intensified their siege and gained ground. Attacks and counter-attacks succeeded one another without respite. The Spaniards were dislodged from Axayacatl’s palace and they removed their quarters to neighbouring houses in the square. But not for long, for the fires chased them out again. Withdrawal followed withdrawal until they had their backs to the temple of Huitzilopochtli and there was nothing else to do but take refuge on the pyramid. With shields and swords held high, they climbed the steps of the teocalli, which was still in the hands of the Indians. Each step conquered was a victory, but eventually they reached the third terrace and then the summit platform. Below them the battle raged with the roar of a forge. The whole city was on fire.

Temporarily the Spaniards were safe, but they were condemned to perish, for there was not a grain of maize or a drop of water, while the dead and the wounded baked under the terrible June sun. All around the teocalli the Indian mob, suddenly silent, awaited the moment when its prey, worn out, would let itself be devoured. Cortés had tried everything to pierce the dense human wall of the Aztec tribes. He had even had four mantas built, battle towers mounted on wheels and protected by the cavalry. From inside them the cross-bowmen fired with all their strength, but a few moments sufficed the enemy, perched upon o
the roofs of houses, to smash the Spanish ‘tanks.’ Was the battle lost? Not yet. One last chance remained—to force the siege, to risk the impossible. How could a few hundred exhausted Spaniards possibly pierce that enormous mass of Indians? But their nerves were at an end; rather than die of hunger or surrender, Cortés’ soldiers preferred to stake everything. To stay and be slaughtered by the knives of the priests would be too ignoble an end for the caballeros!

It was July 1, and the blockade had lasted a week. Sick at heart, Cortés gave the order to retreat. The moment seemed propitious. Botello, the soldier-astrologer, had read in the stars that they had to start that very night, for afterwards it would be too late. Rain was falling. The General’s plan was to reach the land by the one route which was not yet completely severed—the western causeway. Having reached Tacuba, the Spanish column would move northwards, circle the Lake of Texcoco and rejoin the road that led to Tlaxcala by way of Otapan. The plan was a daring one, but the alternatives were clear: to flee or to die.

In order to cross the breaches in the Tacuba causeway (the Aztecs had broken it in several places) a portable wooden bridge was built. The men were assembled, and Father de Olmedo celebrated mass. All was ready for departure. Had nothing been forgotten? Yes: the gold. There were 700,000 pesos, but the General hesitated to burden himself with them, for the additional weight might slow the soldiers’ progress. The Spaniards needed the gold, and had no wish to leave it to the infidels. By smoky torch-light the soldiers divided the fabulous treasure: gold in bars, powder and nuggets, and jewels torn from Aztec corpses. They filled their pockets and stuffed their saddle-bows and saddles. And now, adelante! For what seemed the last time, for the hope of return was very small, the command rang out in the Mexican city. The heroes of Tenochtitlán, who had come to the sound of trumpets, scurried away like thieves. The darkness deepened and the rain poured down upon an army in flight.

The column set out upon the causeway. First went the portable bridge. Then came Sandoval, leading the advance-guard. Cortés commanded the centre, while Alvarado and Velasquez de Leon had the rear-guard under their orders, protected by the artillery. In all, eleven hundred Spaniards—the rest were dead or captive—several thousand Indian allies, a few women (including Doña Marina), some thirty cannons and nearly a hundred horses. The order was to keep quiet and to move quickly, for the Aztec
warriors were asleep, while the noise of the thunder and the
downpour drowned the sounds of the marching army.

Suddenly a woman's shrill cry gave the alarm, and the Indian
camp at once awoke. Showers of arrows and stones fell upon
the Spaniards. On each side of the causeway an unbroken line
of boats put up a living barrier to the advance of Cortés' soldiers.
At the top of the teocalli, maddened priests beat the teponatzli,
and its continuous rolling—the very voice of the War God—
sounded the tocsin for the Spanish retreat. The portable bridge
was broken. The horses slipped on the slabs and the men, who
were weighed down with gold, sank in the water and were
drowned. Their bodies were heaped up in the breaches. Each man
sought to save himself as best he could and the living trod upon
the dead in order to pass from one part of the causeway to
another. The vital thing was to reach the land. Under blows
from Aztec clubs the Spanish soldiers tumbled into the lake,
some of them still clasping chests of jewels in their arms, and in
the wan light of early dawn the mud gleamed with Axayacatl's
gold.

From breach to breach the Spaniards eventually reached the
Tacuba shore, where the last to take foothold was Alvarado. He
had lost his shield and his horse had been killed beneath him.
He was gravely wounded. Responsible for the rear-guard and
charged with covering the retreat, he turned round. There was
no other Spaniard on the causeway, and he could now try to
save his own life. Already the Indians were reaching out for him.
Without hesitation, covered with mud and blood, the giant
plunged his lance into the lagoon and, swinging himself up like
a pole-jumper, landed on the bank with a great clatter of armour.

The Aztecs abandoned the pursuit of the Spaniards on the
mainland. They were too busy despoiling the dead that floated
along the causeway, though they preferred the wounded, whom
they loaded with chains and took to Mexico to make a fine
harvest of hearts for Huitzilopochtli.

Cortés and his men took refuge on the hill of Los Remedios,
above Tacuba, and counted themselves. None had ever known a
night more bitter. The General himself retired beneath a cypress
and burst into tears, and all the Spaniards wept with him. . . .

* * * * *

This summer solstice had not been a good one for Cortés. In
two weeks he had known the most intoxicating of victories—that of Cempoala—and the most humiliating of defeats. Qué vergüenza! The Spanish lion had allowed himself to be caught like a sparrow in a net, and had escaped only with difficulty. This time numbers had vanquished science. In the streets of Mexico Cortés had launched the first armoured cars of the New World, but they were shattered in a few minutes by Indian javelins. Montezuma was dead. Cunning as he was, he had served Cortés’ purposes; for to him this puppet was like the equestrian corpse of the Cid Campeador to Alfonso VI of Castile—a standard and a shield. What was left to him now? 440 soldiers, a dozen crossbowmen, seven fusiliers and 20 horses, a few cannons that were beyond use, 100 Tlaxcalans and almost no officers, for the best—with the exception of Alvarado—had perished. As for the treasure, it was scattered in the waters of Tacuba. Did this mean that gold had brought them misfortune? Cortés almost thought so.

However, the defeat of Cortés bore within it the germ of future victory. The shadow that seemed to merge into the darkness of the cypress was labouring to produce a new man. Among his prostrate companions none suspected that at this precise moment Cortés achieved his real victory—a victory over himself. He had dried his tears. He turned his head towards the lagoon, not to say farewell, but to say au revoir in a way that was filled with menace. He no longer heard the sobbing of the Conquistadors in the Mexican night.

Aztec pyramid temple.
440 SOLDIERS: no more than when he entered Mexico. But why despair? Cortés revived his energies, got his people together and ordered them to start for Tlaxcala.

The hate that the people of Tlaxcala bore for the Aztecs was greater than their racial feelings, and it was this that saved the Spaniards. For they could have made short work of this miserable band, which en route had undergone a terrible attack from the pursuing Aztecs at Otampan—a band that dragged its useless guns behind them and were more hungry for sleep than for conquest. However, at the entrance to the town Xicotenga, surrounded by the Elders, welcomed Cortés like a great war chief. They embraced him. Tears flowed. Malinche's prestige was intact, and so was the wild hostility of the Tlaxcalans against the tribe of Aztlan.

Several weeks passed. For the Spaniards it was a period of relaxation. They nursed their wounds and overhauled their forces. For Cortés it was a period of intense reflection. Although gravely wounded himself, in the head and hand, he worked. He made his report to Charles, searched for the causes of his defeat, discovered them and pondered them. His mistake had been to try and capture Mexico from within, when the town was surrounded by water and therefore continually exposed to flank attacks from the tribes of the lake shore. To take and keep Mexico one had to have control of the water. Once master of the lake, Cortés would only have to stretch out his hand to the Aztec city and gather it like a ripe fruit. This beaten general who, instead of abandoning himself to despair, analysed his failure and at once thought out his plan of victory, certainly showed the reactions of a leader. He drew a lesson from misfortune and then in the light of it prepared for the future.

In order to realise his plan, Cortés needed a fleet and an
army. For the moment he had neither, but six months would suffice him to organise both.

He sent a party of Tlaxcalans to the coast under Spanish command, charged with recovering all that was still usable of the remains of the boats that were sunk the year before: timbers, ropes, ironwork and deck-material. All these were transported from San Juan de Ulua to Tlaxcala in the greatest secrecy. Then, obtaining the necessary wood on the spot, the carpenters undertook the construction of 13 brigantines—light, two-masted ships with a single deck. Actually, Cortés' workmen made the ships in sections that would only be fitted together on the site. As soon as the work was finished, the general ordered the sections of the brigantines to be carried from Tlaxala to Texcoco. Thousands of Indian slaves, yoked to rollers like beasts in harness, carried out this incredible tour de force of dragging a whole fleet in separate pieces over a distance of 50 miles. As soon as they had reached the edge of the lagoon, the brigantines were assembled. It only remained to launch them, though this involved digging a canal over a mile long and four yards wide. 40,000 Indians worked there under the Tlaxcalan lash, and in the Spring of 1521 the 13 brigantines, each armed with a cannon in the bows, were anchored in the Lake of Texcoco. 16,000 allied boats formed an escort to Cortés' flotilla.

Alongside the construction of the ships, the Spanish general reconstituted his army. First of all he assembled the debris of his company. Meanwhile—knowing nothing of Mexican events and believing Narvaez to be master of the situation—Velasquez sent another expedition to Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz. Cortés easily took possession of the men and material after they had landed on the coast. Thanks to these unexpected reinforcements, he was able to get together 550 soldiers, including 80 arquebusiers and 40 cavalry. Further, he was amply supplied with munitions and arms: muskets, crossbows and powder. 25,000 Indians, forced or voluntary, enrolled under the Spanish banner.

In a few months Cortés had carried out a complete re-establishment. Now the vanquished leader had at his disposal a naval base and a wholly fresh army; he awaited only the favourable moment for launching his counter-attack.

**THE FALLING EAGLE**

While the vigil of arms went on in the Spanish camp, what was happening in Mexico?
After the departure of Cortés, the first reaction of the Aztecs was that of a liberated people. For some days a gust of madness swept over the lagoon. The Indian mob insulted the Spanish corpses as they lay naked and despoiled. The unfortunate survivors were stretched upon the sacrificial stone; the priests opened their breasts with swift blows of the obsidian knife and presented the people with their dripping hearts like a barbarous host. Huitzilopochtli—was he not the real victor?—had resumed his place in the profaned sanctuary. The grimacing idols were seen again at the altars with their quetzal feathers and turquoise masks. A savage joy shone upon the faces of the Aztecs, and the whole city was one triumphal song. 'The earth trembles. The Mexican native strikes up its song. As soon as they hear it, the Eagles and the Tigers begin to dance.' A lugubrious paean whose echoes added to the agony of the Spanish prisoners.

In the midst of all this Cuitlahuac died of small-pox, brought to Mexico by Narvaez' soldiers. To replace him the tribal council elected Cuauhtemoc, son of Ahuitzotl. It gave formal sanction to a power that Cuauhtemoc had actually held for a long time, for while the weak Montezuma still reigned, Cuauhtemoc was preparing and directing resistance to the Spaniards in the suburbs of Tlatelolco. The Noche Triste was his work. This time the secret hero was to confront the enemy openly.

Predestined to rule by birth, Cuauhtemoc had been educated with a view to accession to the throne. While still a child he was entered at the Calmecac—the seminary for the King's sons—and there had learnt religious knowledge and the art of war, simultaneously with the hardening of his body by fasting and mortification. Penitence and pain had been his first masters. He had covered himself with glory in the fighting at Tlaxcala. Then, having retired to his domain at Tlatelolco, he awaited his hour. Now it had sounded.

Led by the chieftains and priests, he went on foot from his palace to the temple of Huitzilopochtli. He had donned the royal mantle and in his right hand he swung a censer of smoking copal. He prostrated himself before the sanctuary and prayed to the cruel god. He had himself become the god: 'I am now thy mouth and thy face and thine ears and thy teeth and thy nails, wretched and poor as I am.' He turned to his people, and beyond the bowed heads the new emperor gazed toward the invisible frontiers of his empire that had now to be reconquered. Responsible for Aztec grandeur, the son of Ahuitzotl was conscious of the danger that threatened it, and was perhaps the
only one to have presentiments of tragedy. While the animal confidence of the tribes rose to meet the frail figure of the crowned Indian, the thought came to him that perhaps he would be the last of the Aztlán dynasty. He was the very incarnation of the fatherland, but would he be able to save it, or would he drag the Mexican people with him in his fall? His name, Cuauhtémoc, means 'the falling eagle.'

No one had any doubt that Malinche was preparing an offensive in the grand manner. The spies were well informed: the attack on Mexico was imminent. Where and when would it take place? Cortés' intentions were inscrutable. This time surprise would work in his favour. But Cuauhtémoc did not remain inactive; he was preparing for the shock. Foreseeing a siege that he reckoned inevitable, he had the useless ones evacuated: women, children, the old people and the sick. The ditches were enlarged, traps were erected and walls built in haste, and arms and munitions were accumulated in the arsenals. While preparing his defences, Cuauhtémoc strove to win to his cause the greatest possible number of the tribes. He invoked 'the sacred union.' He exalted the community of race. For all the confederated peoples of the Valley of Mexico there could only be one enemy: the White Man. These were intelligent politics, but they reached a contretemps. In fact, for the first time an Aztec king embodied in the same national union all the tribes of the imperium, but the Aztec fist was unclenched too late, for two centuries of servitude are not forgotten in a few days. The very name of 'Aztec' gritted the teeth of Tarascos, Tlaxcalans and Cempoalans, who remembered their own people immolated on Mexican altars or reduced to slavery. Deaf to Cuauhtémoc's supplications, Montezuma's former slaves followed the call of Cortés—'Liberation,' that is to say, 'Vengeance.' Cuauhtémoc and the Aztec people with him were to pay for the mistakes of the Mexican tyrants.

Events took a sudden turn. On December 28, 1520, the Spanish army stood in battle order before Texcoco. War had begun.

**MÉXICO BESIEGED**

Cortés had divided his army into three corps, each at the head of one of the causeways. His plan was to launch the columns towards the Mexican city and protect their flanks with
the brigantines. The Spanish fleet would destroy the Aztec boats as the army progressed, and the assault columns would join up in the centre of the town. This type of offensive was classic in European wars but was being tried out in the New World for the first time.

Before releasing his grand land-and-water manœuvre, Cortés launched a series of small attacks. By harassing the adversary with rapid blows he fatigued him, tried his defences and at the same time tested his own means. Five months passed, and then, one morning in May, 1521— the Monday of Pentecost— Cortés gave the order to attack. The three columns moved off. They advanced slowly along the causeways, and the fleet simultaneously got under weigh. While the brigantines methodically cleared the lagoon with their cannons, the Spanish infantry freed the causeways. The operation began favourably. Taken by the fleet's fire, the Aztec boats found it difficult to approach the causeways. Covered on both sides, Cortés' soldiers gained ground. They did so cautiously, for the General's order was definite: to avoid encirclement at all costs. Anxiety to protect the rear and to advance only with certainty slowed the Spaniards' progress. It was a matter of two steps forward and one step back. Moreover, operations were only possible by day, and when night came the attackers retired into their quarters at Texcoco, the bridgehead of the Spanish invasion. Favoured by darkness, the Aztecs demolished the work accomplished by Cortés' men during the day. They cut the bridges and opened new breaches in the causeways, so that everything had to begin again the next day.

Tired of weaving this Penelope's robe, Cortés invented a new system. He launched his Indian allies in advance with the task of preparing the ground, that is, dismantling the obstacles put up by the Aztecs and using the debris to fill the breaches. The allies occupied the causeways during the intervals between military engagements. They fell back and gave place to the Spaniards as soon as a counter-attack developed. Thus Cortés' soldiers advanced along the ways prepared for them by the Indian mercenaries.

How long was the road from Texcoco to Cuauhtemoc's city! One day, carried along by their own impetus, the Spaniards reached the suburbs of Mexico. Cortés attempted an assault. It was repulsed, and 62 Spaniards were taken prisoner. The army withdrew precipitately, but had time to see the bodies of their companions, with gaping breasts, hurled down the steps of the
great teocalli. In a cloud of ochre dust and under a rain of arrows, the Spanish flowed back towards Texcoco. The funereal roll of the teponaztle and the howling of the conchs told Cortés that the game was not yet won.

The General regrouped his troops. Reinforcements had reached him from the coast, and he had now more than 900 Spaniards, though the Indian contingents varied according to the day and the circumstances, their number being related to the fortunes of the struggle. Desertions were frequent in both camps, but the 25,000 allies that Cortés had bought from Tlaxcala had at least quadrupled since the beginning of the campaign. On both sides the enormous human masses, mobilised and similarly armed, tended to balance one another. Yet it seemed that the decision would never be reached.

Cortés had cause to reflect. Numerically his army was too weak to take the city by assault, and to nibble at the defences, which were tough and full of ambushes, would be like filing at an iron bar. However, an end had to be put to the interminable conflict. Thinking to propose an armistice, his overtures to Cuauhtemoc provoked only an outburst of scornful laughter. One solution remained: blockade. Neither force, nor attrition, nor diplomacy had been able to defeat the Aztecs. Would they resist famine, that pale ally of generals?

With the siege of Mexico the last page of Aztec history was reached. The agony of the Aztlanc tribe lasted for seventy-five days. Cortés destroyed the Chapultepec aqueduct which supplied Mexico with drinking water. All the exits from the city were blocked, and the fleet completely surrounded the Mexican island. An attempt at a sortie was broken by cannon-fire. The General slackened his attacks and contented himself with advancing very slowly along the causeways, without approaching too close to the invested city. The Aztecs no longer had anything to eat or drink; they slaked their thirst on the blood of Tlaxcalan corpses and fed on lizards or on leather from shields. The besieged died by hundreds, but the survivors, munching the salt grass from the lagoon, continued to fight. While there was still a stone or a javelin within the walls it was thrown at the Spaniards.

Cortés multiplied his offers of peace, and Cuauhtemoc obstinately rejected them. Mexico was no more than a vast charnel-house above which the standards of the Eagles and Tigers still floated. With the unbearable stench of decay was
mingled the odour of copal which the famished priests burned at the feet of Huitzilopochtli.

Now the Spanish army invested the city. Having crossed all the causeways, it was methodically occupying every quarter, one after the other. The soldiers had to step over the piles of bodies. Fifty thousand Aztecs had perished, and those who still lived tried to flee. They threw themselves into the water with their women and their children. Mad with joy, the Tlaxcalans pursued this miserable prey and killed 15,000 of them, and as the Aztec prisoners passed they cried: 'Death to this race of savage hearts!' From amongst this pestilence-ridden troop the Spaniards chose the youngest—the 'recoverable' ones—and branded the letter G, for Guerra, on their faces with red-hot irons.

It was August 13, 1521. The city had capitulated; Cuauhtemoc, on an islet with a handful of faithful comrades, abandoned the last struggle. The glow of the setting sun lit the heavy obsidian sword he brandished as the last symbol of Aztec grandeur. Indians and Spaniards fixed their eyes upon the sword that was red with the sunset and with blood. Then it was lowered and fell. The Aztec Empire was dead.

Almost encircled, Cuauhtemoc leapt into a boat and tried to reach the land. Darkness had fallen. The pirouge slid into the shadows among the rushes. Muskets and crossbows were levelled at the fugitive, but just when the Spaniards were about to fire, Cuauhtemoc's voice was heard in the darkness, saying: 'Take me to Malinchel!' He was seized and escorted to the terrace of Axayacatl's reconquered palace. Victor and vanquished gazed at one another, then Cuauhtemoc said: 'I have done my duty for the defence of my city and my subjects. I can do no more. Since force brings me to you a prisoner, do with me what you please.' Then the slender emperor swiftly snatched the dagger from Cortés' belt and, handing it to the victor by the hilt, cried: 'Take this dagger and kill me!'

THE TRIUMPH OF CORTEȘ

The Mexican Empire had become the Empire of the Dead. The earth was in disorder as after an earthquake. Of the 300,000 inhabitants of Mexico only a few thousands had survived, and these were in a terrible state. The Princes, Eagles and Tigers were no more. 'They were emeralds and they were broken!'
Díaz del Castillo cried: 'Never in the world had a people suffered so much!' Mexico was nothing but a sepulchre.

Cortés' first gesture was to offer a banquet to his soldiers. A ship had just arrived from Cuba, laden with casks and pigs. Spanish wine and hams! The feast took place at Coyoacan. Under the influence of wine the Conquistadors lost their heads; they rolled under the tables, ravished the women, Spanish and Indian, and invented grotesque dances. After the Noche Triste this was the night of madness.

The soldiers of Cortés were sated with pork, wine and caresses. Would they be content with love and feasting? But another appetite gripped them: the hunger for gold. They had already turned over the debris of the city, but the harvest had been small: some fans, shields edged with silver, heron's feathers. Where was the gold? The question was put to Cortés. If only he could manage his own people as easily as he managed his Indian allies! These had returned home, very satisfied with paltry presents—priests' copes and chieftains' plumes that the General had distributed among them. And what better trophies than slices of Aztec flesh, salted and dried in the sun! In the villages they made merry with these macabre remnants.

Where was the gold? Cortés passed the question on to Cuauhtemoc. The last Aztec sovereign's life had been spared and the General had taken him under his protection. Superficially, Cuauhtemoc was treated with the honours due to his rank, but he was not fooled by this. He knew well enough that Cortés held him in reserve for some final blackmail. Where was the gold? Cuauhtemoc knew nothing. Cortés persisted. Where was the hiding-place? The Indian remained silent. Then, with two men of his suite, he was tied to a rack. Their feet and hands were rubbed with oil. Brands were brought close and the flesh crackled. When one of the victims began to groan, Cuauhtemoc cast him a withering glance and said: 'Am I on a bed of roses?' Seeing that nothing could be got from the Aztec, Cortés had the torture suspended. Fifty years later the sceptical Montaigne remarked: 'The king, half roasted, was carried away, not so much from pity—for what pity ever touched hearts so barbarous—but because such constancy rendered their cruelty more and more shameful.'

The waters of the lake were plumbed. All the houses were searched. Every Indian was minutely examined. Not a stone remained unturned nor an Indian body unstripped. Grain by grain the metal was recovered, and all these scraps of gold added
up to a great deal. Cortés had it melted down, took the fifth for the King of Spain and a share for himself, and distributed the rest to his soldiers. The Aztec people—its gods, its suppressed kings, its massacred élite and its annihilated army—was now as poor as at the dawn of its history.

The war was ended. Spain's hour had sounded and Cortés had to secure recognition of his conquest from Charles of Spain. Ten months earlier, when he had founded Segura de la Frontera, he had suggested to the Emperor that the conquered territory should be named 'New Spain of the Ocean Sea' and Charles had agreed to this name. But Cortés had to wait more than a year after the fall of Mexico to receive from Valladolid his appointment as Governor and Captain-General of New Spain.

Cortés' triumph was complete. All he had now to do was to make his conquest secure. First of all he had to raze the remains of Mexico to the ground and to construct a new city in the middle of the lagoon. Every trace of Aztec presence there was effaced, and on the site of the great teocalli arose the cathedral of San Francisco. A Franciscan monastery took the place of Montezuma's aviary, and in the city centre was built a Plaza Mayor which was soon noisy with Spanish tertulios. Cortés' palace surpassed Axayacatl's in its splendour. Thirteen churches witnessed to the true God. It took the Indian slaves four years, under the latigo of the conquerors, to destroy the face of the former Tenochtitlán, and it was a bitter paradox that Aztec hands carved the first capital of the Spanish Empire from ancestral stones.

Once built, the new city had to be peopled. Two thousand families arrived from Spain to settle there, and if possible to make their fortunes in the colony that was in process of creation. The economic system was that of repartimientos, already applying in the West Indies. Every immigrant Spaniard received a concession of land and native labour, on condition that he must secure a maximum product from both. Plants and seed were imported from the homeland, and thanks to the water from the Chapultepec aqueduct, which it had been Cortés' first concern to repair, the gardens were restored to life. The first attempts at cultivation produced excellent results: oranges and peaches, as well as sugar cane and cotton, acclimatised themselves very well. Gradually the houses multiplied, and with their patios and colonnades they reminded the exiles of the solares of southern Spain. Crenelated towers, orchards very like the vega of Granada, monasteries that looked like fortresses, and the
odour of jasmine... was this not Andalusia, risen again under the Anahuac sun?

So at last the master of New Spain had found a role to suit him: that of a legendary prince. In the magnificent lord of today the rough soldier of yesterday could no longer be seen, nor the unlucky planter of Cuba, nor the man who fled from the Noche Triste. In the residence that he set up at Coyoacan, which he preferred to his palace at Mexico, Cortés kept Court like a sovereign. He had his counsellors, his gentlemen of the chamber, his civil and military households. He ate from vessels of gold. He never moved except with a circle of armed valets and pages. The Governor's clowns and musicians were ready at any hour of the day or night to distract him at a sign from his hand. His women—their colour was not important to him!—shared his favours. Don Juan? This was in fact the epoch when that type of man, dressed in black velvet, with a rapier at the ready, frequented the palace of the Dukes of Seville, and Cortés was the Don Juan of the New World, and was never separated from his 'little allies,' Indian and Spanish. The earlier ones—María de Estrada the Asturian and Doña Marina the favourite, and all those whom he had drawn to his retinue since Cuba and Tabasco—were honoured, which was only just. They had been under fire like the men, and they had been through the sinister retreat from Mexico. They had bandaged the wounded and buried the dead. Cortés considered them as companions in arms. But the faithful cohort had been swollen with new recruits: daughters of caciques who had been handed over to the victor by far-seeing fathers, and Spanish ladies who had come from Cuba or from Spain. The general had his seraglio.

There was one shadow on this gallant scene: the sudden arrival in Mexico of Catalina Juárez, Cortés' lawful wife. Was it jealousy that drove her to cross the sea, or was it ambition? The General's court was also a salon and Catalina's intention was to become the queen of this salon. She was coldly received by her husband, but she tried her hand for a while—scarcely three months—at the difficult role of General's wife.

A rigorous etiquette regulated this still barbaric yet Castillian court. Cortés had re-established the high local officials in their functions, and Cuauhtemoc himself, although a prisoner, had the title of Governor of Mexico. By this means, and under the guise of generosity, the General transferred to the Indian administration the delicate responsibilities of recruiting labour, levying taxes and maintaining order. Quite a composite crowd gathered
at the Governor's audiences: alcaldes, captains coming to take their orders, and native chiefs, silent and grave. And at the same table, under the trees of Coyoacan, were gathered together the clerics from Valladolid and the caciques from the lagoon. Catalina presided over the banquets and received visits, but Cortés did not hide his irritation, for her presence revived in him the bitter regrets of his forced marriage. Had she forgotten that he had married her in order to escape the alguazils? He vainly tried to bring her to reason, but she pursued him with her recriminations and ceaselessly demanded further honours. One morning Catalina was found dead in her bed, apparently strangled. By whom?

Cortés' amusements and his conjugal vexations did not keep him from his main objective, to complete the conquest, and the moment had come to confirm its evangelical character. At his request, religious missions were sent from Spain to begin the struggle against idolatry. Franciscans and Dominicans were the pioneers of the spiritual conquest. Thenceforth and first of all, at every public catechisation the Indian chiefs and their families were led to baptism. Cortés built great hopes on the value of example at these spectacular conversions. First in importance was Cuauhtemoc. His religious instruction was begun, but what did he retain of all this teaching? Was he truly touched by grace, or did he make his submission to Christ because he harboured some last and secret stratagem? However that may be, he docilely let himself be taken to the baptismry, where he knelt with bared shoulders and joined hands, while behind him stood his sponsors, Hernando Cortés and Pedro de Alvarado. Behind them was Doña Marina, and all around stood Spanish cavaliers and befeathered caciques. While a herald sounded a trumpet, the lustral water ran over the brow of Ahuitzotl's son. He had renounced his Aztec gods, at least in appearance. He was now called Hernando de Alvarado Cuauhtemoc.

THE TWILIGHT OF A HERO

Cortés had triumphed, but evil omens were already visible in his sky. A success as brilliant and total as his could only be followed by vexations. As from the moment of the creation of New Spain, his star began to fall.

Cortés' principal enemy was Spain. Captivated at first by the Conquistador's personality, and by his gifts, Charles of Spain
lent an increasingly complaisant ear to those of his counsellors who disapproved of Cortés' colonial policy. They knew how to stress very skillfully to the young emperor the danger the Governor was to the Emperor's own power. He had more gold and would soon have more soldiers than Charles himself! The powers of Cortés must be limited. Such language was not new, for a quarter of a century earlier the enemies of Columbus had spoken to the Catholic monarchs in the same way. It was still Bishop Fonseca who led the game.

Commissioners were sent to Mexico, and then inquisitors. They settled down near Cortés and watched his actions, but as yet there was no question of supplanting him. He alone had the situation in hand, and to overthrow Cortés would mean losing New Spain. The imperial magistrates temporised.

While Fonseca intrigued at Valladolid, treachery worked its way into the very entourage of Cortés. Intoxicated by his victory over the Aztecs, the General had the imprudence to call Narvaez to his side. It was like introducing the worm into the fruit. Conspiracy began in the Spanish camp. They plotted even in the ante chambers of Cortés' palace. Encouraged by the dissensions of the white leaders, Cuauhtemoc broke his long silence and addressed a pathetic proclamation to the tribes in which he evoked the grandeur of their past. More than that he declared Cortés' powers unlawful and recalled that Mexico belonged to the Mexicans. 'I have never,' he said, 'ceased to watch over the waters of the lagoon.' The order to resist was clear, but it was not followed, for although the tribes well remembered their past glory, the memory of their recent reverses was even clearer. They bowed their heads and wept. Cuauhtemoc relapsed into silence.

Scorning the dangers that surrounded him, Cortés enlarged his conquest. He despatched his lieutenants to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, from the Rio Panuco to Yucatan, to the shores of the Pacific, as far as present-day San Francisco, and into Michoacan. But his ambition was not simply to reconnoitre and embrace the whole of Mexico; he was seeking a strait that would lead to the Southern Sea and thus open up the Spice Road. With this end in view he entrusted Cristobal de Olid with the command of an expedition towards Honduras. Shortly afterwards he learned of the treachery of his old companion in arms, for Olid had gone to Cuba, had come to terms with Diego Velasquez and marched in the direction of Honduras on his own account. Five years earlier Cortés had freed himself of Velasquez
in the same way, but the General became violently angry, organised a column, took command of it himself and left for Honduras. He took Cuauhtemoc with him.

Preceded by his musicians, surrounded by his Court and followed by the vanquished chiefs, Cortés set out for the unknown, crossing forests, marshes and rivers. A passage was cut through the jungle, the rivers were crossed and the sierras climbed. On the way, believing suspect evidence, Cortés—obsessed with the idea of treachery—decided to put Cuauhtemoc to death. The execution took place in the square of a Mayan village. A rope was passed over the branch of a ceiba, the totem tree of the Mayas. Cuauhtemoc was led to the place of execution and, as he passed Cortés, said: 'Oh Malinch! I have known for a long time that you were reserving this death for me and I have known the falseness of your words... Your God will make you pay for it!' Cuauhtemoc's head was passed through the noose; the eagle fell.

After burning Cuauhtemoc's remains and scattering his ashes, Cortés resumed his journey. With immense difficulty he reached Honduras, where he did not meet Cristobal de Olid, for he had been assassinated by his companions; but what was worse, he found there a Spanish expedition sent from Darien by the Governor, Pedrarias Davila. Contact between the two columns was stormy. A fight began, but Cortés calmed the men, quietened their minds and laid the foundations of a colony. Then he returned to Mexico.

Cortés' journey had lasted a year and a half. In his absence conspirators and intrigurers had rejoiced. Had it not been said that the General was dead? Everyone cast covetous eyes at the place he wanted to assume, but Cortés' return cast a great chill over the conspirators and they were obliged to get back into their ranks. Meanwhile, Charles' eyes were fixed upon New Spain, and the visits of inquisitors with steadily increasing powers multiplied. At first Cortés had treated the emissaries of the Council of the Indies with disdain, for he intended to have dealings only with the Emperor, and in this concealed struggle with the Administration the General won the first round. He had had little difficulty in ridding himself of the mediocre Cristobal de Tapia. He even succeeded in destroying the influence of Bishop Fonseca and in bringing about the disgrace of Diego Velasquez, but intervention from the homeland became increasingly insistent. Missi dominici followed one after the other: Luis
Ponce de Leon, Aguilar and Estrada, who went so far as to threaten to banish the conqueror from New Spain.

This was too much, and Cortés decided to go and justify himself with Charles. He embarked for Spain and presented himself to the Emperor at Toledo. One by one he took up the complaints that were made against him—including the abuse of personal power, the exploitation of the Indians and the murder of his own wife—and refuted them with sombre eloquence. Two Caesars faced one another, and Cortés was the Caesar of the Gallic War. He expounded his campaigns. The Emperor listened, and asked questions about the Indians and the nature of the country. Cortés seized a sheet of parchment, rumpled it and threw it upon the Emperor's table. There was the map of New Spain—bristling with peaks, hollowed out into valleys, blistered with mountains—it was an inhuman land, but men had conquered it for the greater glory of His Catholic Majesty.

Charles was convinced and Cortés was loaded with honours. He received the titles of 'Admiral of the Southern Sea' and 'Marquis of the Valley'—the valley of Oaxaca, southeast of Mexico, of which he was given inalienable possession for himself and his descendants. Charles placed the collar of the Order of Santiago round his neck. Finally, he married the niece of the Duke of Bejar, one of the most prominent personages at Court. One might think that Cortés, six years after the capture of Mexico, was at the height of his triumph, but it was not so, for as counterpart to the honours conferred on the General, an Audience was created at Mexico. Thus New Spain became a viceroyalty, and from then on Antonio de Mendoza reigned at Mexico in the name of Charles the Fifth.

Returning to Mexico, Cortés tried for a while his new role as a planter. He took possession of his domain at Oaxaca and busied himself with improving the land. But soon he felt too restricted in his palace at Cuernavaca. Did they think him old? He was not yet fifty and he was rich. At his own expense he raised an expedition and set off northwards. For four years Cortés explored the Pacific coast and discovered Lower California. He founded settlements and planted his pennon on desert shores. He pushed his explorations as far as the thirtieth degree of latitude north. A great part of his fortune was swallowed up in this affair and hundreds of Spaniards died without profit to the Crown. Then Mendoza forbade him to continue an experiment that was costly in gold and human life, and sick
at heart Cortés looked for a last time at the Valley of Mexico and left for Spain.

Did this signify the Conquistador's renunciation? Cortés was not one to accept defeat, and while breath remained in his body he was to use it in demanding justice for himself. New Spain was his and it must be given back to him. For seven years this went on, a tragedy in two acts, the one heroic and the other funereal, completing the portrait of the hero.

The first act took place before Algiers, where Charles was determined to undertake a punitive action against the capital of the Barbary pirates. The imperial galleys had taken to sea, but having reached the African port they were violently assailed and, after a disastrous land battle, the Spanish soldiers precipitately reembarked and were pursued by the Barbary corsairs. The rout was complete. Forty galleys were shattered on the reefs and a hundred boats were sunk, while the rest returned with great difficulty to Cartagena. At Charles' side, deep in the forepart of the flagship, an old man cried out that he would undertake to capture Algiers if they would follow him. This simple white-haired soldier was Hernando Cortés. The expedition to Algiers was his last affair and in it he had involved all that remained of his strength and money. During the battle he had lost three emeralds that had come to him from Montezuma. Rain and darkness shrouded the vanquished fleet, just as at Mexico, during the retreat.

The second act took place in an Andalusian village, about four miles from Seville: Castilleja de la Cuesta. Cortés was preparing to leave for New Spain, where he wished to die. He was sixty-two years old. But his body, exhausted by superhuman labours, betrayed his heart's intention. Death left him no time to prepare, but struck him down unawares. So he expired, not on the shores of the Aztec lagoon, but under the Andalusian sky. Solitude, indifference and poverty were the companions of his agony.

It was while the Emperor was placing the Cross of Santiago on the breast of Cortés that his administration was preparing the Conquistador's succession: honours and caresses to hide a dismissal. Cortés' last years were occupied with soliciting an audience that was indefinitely adjourned. The spectre of the great man haunted the ante-chambers, and he importuned everyone. In this last season of his life Cortés resembled Columbus
very much. Forty years earlier the same tragedy was played out at Valladolid in King Ferdinand's palace. Like Columbus, Cortés demanded power that was refused him; like him, he died almost poor, after enriching the Royal treasury and giving Charles of Spain, according to his own words, 'more provinces than he had inherited towns from his parents and ancestors.' Also like Columbus, he died alone and abandoned by those whose fortunes he had made.

Did Cortés ever have doubts at the end of the Mexican story? Did he remember the blood that was spilt, the Indians devoured by dogs, the gold torn from corpses, the slaves toiling under the lash, and the ashes of Cuauhtemoc scattered in the forest? If we reread his testament, if we consult the testimony of his contemporaries, Cortés seems to have been filled at the end of his life less with contrition than with mystic pride. He was no longer the conqueror consumed by his conquest, but had at last prevailed over it. He retained of it no more than its spiritual meaning. All the personages he had been—captain, chief of the army, trafficker in gold and explorer—reveal the successive faces of a single person, the defender of the Faith. The victory of which he was proudest was to have planted the Cross above the teocallis. His principal enemy? Huitzilopochtli—that is, the Devil. His master? Not Charles of Spain, but Jesus Christ. 'Esta obra que Dios hizo por mi medio...' By this phrase Cortés defined himself: he had been the instrument of God. He had brandished the Crucifix at the same time as the sword. But the cause was just. At least, he thought so.

In Mexico today no monument commemorates the prodigious adventure of Cortés. His ashes, preserved for three centuries at the hospital of Jesus of Nazareth, were dispersed by revolutionaries—like those of the last Aztec king. Is there no stone, then, to recall the deeds of the Conquistador? Yes, there is one: a statue to Cuauhtemoc.
PART THREE

FRANCISCO PIZARRO IN PERU

OR

WAR IN THE LAND OF INCA COMMUNISM

The Incas governed their subjects in such a fashion that among them there was neither a thief, nor a depraved man, nor an adulterous woman. . . . The mountains and the mines, the pastures, the game, the wood and all kinds of resources were controlled and shared so that each knew and possessed his own, without anyone else being able to take it. . . . Matters of war, although numerous, did not hinder those of commerce. . . . Order and harmony reigned in everything. . . . By our bad example we have destroyed this well-governed people. . . .

(Extract from the Verdadera confesión y protestación en artículo de muerte made by one of the first Conquistadors of Peru, Mancio Sierra Lejesema, in his testament of September 15, 1589).
Pizarro’s caravel as the Indian, Huaman Poma, saw it.
CHAPTER XI

The Empire of the Sun

IN the same year as Cortés had received the title of Captain-General of New Spain from the King, and Charles himself had taken possession of his Spanish Kingdom after having suppressed the revolt of the comuneros with some difficulty, Pascual de Andagoya made his voyage from Panama. After skirting and reconnoitring the western coast of the mainland, Andagoya brought back some strange news from his expedition, foremost among which was the certainty of a vast continent southwest of the Gulf of Darien. Moreover, he had encountered some pirogues that carried Indians who repeatedly used the name 'Piru, Piru ...' as they pointed to the coast—probably indicating a river that led into the interior of the land. The native tales made allusion to a powerful empire, governed by a sovereign of divine origin and fabulously rich. In this land of dreams, gold was used instead of stone.

Such was the report that Andagoya made to the Governor, Pedrarias Davila. In his innermost heart, the adelantado gave thanks to Balboa, for in discovering the Southern Sea his unfortunate son-in-law had struck the true road to gold which started from Panama.

Andagoya's report was passed from mouth to mouth, discussed and interpreted. The spark took flame. It set fire to Spanish minds. The simultaneous triumph of Cortés in Mexico and of Charles the Fifth at Valladolid—consecrating the reality of the Empire—excited the Conquistadors of Panama less than did the vague promise of that unknown realm: la Tierra de Piru.

THREE RESOLUTE PARTNERS

But the Spaniards of the mainland were not the sort of men to be content for long with chimeras. It was not enough simply
to imagine this Eldorado; they had to go and see it. Three brave companions were to open up the track across the waters of the Pacific and through the tropical jungle, by which the Conquest would be extended southwards as far as Tierra del Fuego.

Francisco Pizarro: we have seen him already, a simple sailor, sailing with Diego Columbus. Afterwards, he served successively under the orders of Hojeda, Balboa, Pedrarias Davila and Cortés. He changed his 'patron' according to circumstances—or rather, to better his immediate interests. A faithful collaborator when it was to his benefit, he did not hesitate, at the first contrary wind of fortune, to leave his master of the moment, or even to betray him. Nuñez de Balboa had been his chief and compañero, but he did not hesitate to arrest him and hand him over to the executioner. Among the Conquistadors he was one of the hardest. There was not a glimmer in a heart that beat only for gold.

Natural son of a Spanish colonel and a prostitute, he was born in secret at Trujilla in Estremadura, some thirty miles from Yurta where Charles the Fifth was to die. His mother abandoned him on the steps of a church, and it was said that his first nurse was a sow; without her he would have died. Then, when he was old enough to walk, he earned his living as a swineherd. As an adolescent he enlisted as a simple soldier in the army of Italy and never passed beyond that rank. Could one entrust a command, however modest, to an illiterate? For Pizarro did not even know how to sign his name. Tired of dragging his arquebus along the roads of Italy, without glory and without profit, except for paltry pillage, Pizarro returned to Seville. What was there to do, for an adventurer of his kind, but embark for the Islands? He was enrolled aboard a caravel as one of the crew. He was forty years old. Swineherd, soldier, sailor . . . until middle age he had been engaged only in lowly tasks in lowly company: the picaros of Estremadura, the soldiery of the camps, and the desperados without faith or law who were saved from the gallows by sailing for the west. God? Fatherland? King? These were words that were scarcely uttered in Pizarro's entourage. As to honour, the 'punto de honor' was a refinement for gentlemen only. To make a fortune, that was everything.

It was a fortune that Pizarro went to seek in the New World. Ten years after his arrival in the Islands he had acquired it. While clearing a way for his successive leaders he had filled his pockets. The pearls of the Gulf of Paria and the gold of Panama
had made Francisco Pizarro one of the richest colonists of the mainland. What a revenge for the bastard of Trujillo!

Diego de Almagro: Pizarro's best friend and his companion in arms. He too was a foundling, abandoned, it is said, in the porch of a church at Malagon, near Cuidad Real. Like Pizarro, he too made his fortune in the Islands. Brave and of never-failing strength, Almagro was illiterate. He was an ambitious ruffian, but with a sort of vulgar charm. Almagro knew how to be debonair when he pleased. Such was not the case with Pizarro, whose mailed fist never unclenched, except at the end of his life, when he could afford the luxury of looking pleasant.

Hernando de Luque: this priest had come to Panama in order to teach, which had not prevented him from making excellent investments. The schoolmaster was rich. Beside the two veteran Conquistadors—they were already past their fiftieth year—Father Luque appeared like a neophyte. Andagoya's tales went to his head; he jumped for joy in the streets. They called Luque 'el loco,' the madman, a play upon words which his excitement justified. He already saw himself the discoverer of Tierra de Piru.

These were the three men—Pizarro, Almagro and Luque—who were going to confirm Andagoya's confused information and give it reality. They formed a sort of shareholding company and before a notary undertook to share the profits of the expedition. It involved nothing less than exploring the mysterious southern empire and taking possession of it.

AT THE FRONTIERS OF TIERRA DE PIRU

Each had his part to play in the syndicate. Pizarro was the military leader; Almagro did the recruiting and organising; and Luque did the administrative work. In fact, a soldier, a manager, and a financier. Actually it was Pizarro who commanded, and as for Luque, he confined himself to following the voyages of the two Conquistadors from afar off. He remained on the shore while his two team-mates vanished into the golden mists of the Pacific.

There was nothing mystical about the projected cruise. There was no question of civilising or converting. The object was clear: to make a fortune—and what a fortune it would be if Andagoya's tale was to be believed! Yet, when the moment had come, crosses and banners waved together in the high wind of the Andes. Was this a contradiction? Not for men who had emerged from the Middle Ages. If in fact the aim was not one of evangelisation,
that would be accomplished nevertheless. Pizarro's companions, like those of Cortés, were imbued with dogmatism. Their faith was as solid as a rock, and the religious reflex was to them as natural as the instinct for conquest. Moreover, the two were complementary; one acquired gold and one saved souls, a matter of right and duty. Inspired by both, the Conquistadors showed an equal enthusiasm for brutalising bodies and catechising souls, and an equal sincerity too.

For one can reproach them with everything but hypocrisy. Convinced of the racial inferiority of the natives and of their own excellence, not for a moment questioning the legitimacy of pontifical bulls any more than the rightful hegemony of Spain, and persuaded to the core of the pre-eminence of the Catholic church, why should these rough adventurers from Castile and Estramadura feel even the shadow of remorse or hesitation? They were sure that God and the King were with them, and this quiet certainty gave them a clear conscience, freeing them from any hindering scruples. Not hypocrisy, then, but candid submission to unquestioned laws. And so, once again, as on the road to Mexico, the clatter of swords and the rustle of rosaries were to be heard on the Conquistadors' march.

When Pizarro embarked at Panama in November 1524, he imagined that the prey was quite close. But from the cup to the lip was a long way. Pizarro and his companions were not to enter the mysterious capital until November, 1532, eight years later to the day; eight years of nameless experiences and such incredible struggles against nature and man that one might doubt that these Spaniards were of flesh, so great was the resistance they showed. Their physical endurance was indeed exceptional, but there was something else, and that was their fear of the master. Who could fail to tremble before Pizarro? Of medium build, but of athletic bearing, solidly supported upon strong thighs, the former swineherd of Trujillo knew how to enforce obedience. His sunburned face, with its black beard, was severe; he spoke little and never laughed. His officers secretly detested him; his soldiers feared him. But if they were not devoted to him, both had submitted to him. By his brutal presence alone, in fact, Pizarro imposed respect. He himself slept on the bare earth and was always at the head of his troops; he preached by example, and there was no choice but to follow him. Adelante! Woe to them who showed reluctance or betrayed him, for they were crushed without pity. To bring a superhuman task to success an inhuman hero was doubtless needed.
Duly furnished with the Governor's authorisation, Pizarro set sail. The expedition was a modest one: two ships, and 140 soldiers and sailors. But this was only an advance-guard; Almagro's preparations were proceeding and he reckoned to join his associate later. For the moment, Pizarro was carrying out only a simple reconnaissance. His first goal was the mouth of the River Piru (in reality, the San Juan River) and he reached it only after several weeks of difficult sailing. He anchored one of his two ships on the coast, landed and decided to rest a part of his men while Montenegro, one of his officers, continued the exploration.

Was this where the magic empire began? A sinister bay, wind-swept and infested with caimans, and nothing to eat but the bitter fruit of the mangrove. While waiting for Montenegro to return, Pizarro tried to make contact with the natives, but they fled at his approach. Days passed. Famine entered the Spanish camp, and they were reduced to masticating the boiled leather of their sword-belts. This desolate haven well deserved the name of Puerto del Hambre—Port of Hunger—which Pizarro gave it. At the end of a month and a half Montenegro returned to base; he had been as far as the Perlas Islands, but had no interesting information to bring back. It was then decided to prospect the interior, but they did not get far. Having reached a promontory—Pueblo Quemado, or 'the burned village'—they fell into an Indian ambush. Pizarro left five men on the field and just missed being killed himself. The Spanish troops re-embarked under a rain of arrows. The return to Panama was a melancholy one.

During this time Almagro had not been inactive. Following Pizarro's expedition at a short distance, he had embarked with 70 men in a southerly direction in search of his associate. During his voyage he discovered the San Juan river, and he too tried to establish himself at Pueblo Quemado, from which Pizarro had just been chased. Encouraged by their recent victory, the Indians had no difficulty in routing Almagro's troop, and Almagro himself lost an eye in the battle. Despairing of finding Pizarro, and sorely tried by his reverses, Almagro had turned back to the Isthmus.

In the end Pizarro and Almagro joined up at Chicama, near their starting point. They compared information, which was still vague, though it agreed. There was no doubt of the existence of a vast kingdom south of Panama, nor of the inexhaustible gold-mines. More than ever did the business seem profitable. This was the moment to ratify the famous tripartite contract.
First of all, it was important to keep Pedrarias Davila out of the partnership, for, scenting metal, this person suddenly showed himself demanding. After all, was he not His Majesty's representative on the mainland? Pizarro recalled that Diego Velasquez' claims had failed to wreck Cortés campaign. Learning from this precedent, he got Pedrarias to agree to renounce all rights on the territories they discovered against immediate payment of one thousand pesos. Luque, who was more and more attracted to the project, provided the partnership with 20,000 pesos on the understanding that a third of the riches acquired would be reserved for him. Pizarro and Almagro swore on the gospels to respect the terms of the contract and, as neither knew how to write, they attested their good faith by a large sign of the Cross. After the contract between Christopher Columbus and the Catholic Monarchs, that of the three men of Panama was probably the most daring legal deed that had ever been drawn up. What folly it seemed to divide in advance a treasure that was no more than hypothetical!

Two years after their first attempt, Pizarro and Almagro took to sea again. The flotilla was composed of two ships of fairly heavy tonnage and eight auxiliary vessels. The effectives comprised 160 Spaniards—not exactly the cream, but are angels taken on a voyage to Hell?—and black slaves. Horses were taken too, because of the help they had been to Cortés. The famous pilot Bartolomé Ruiz took the helm. It was full summer and the weather was fine. The auspices were favourable.

The itinerary was the same as on the first voyage: the Bay of San Miguel, the Perlas Islands, the port of Las Penas, and Cape Corrientes. They disembarked at the mouth of the San Juan river on the coast of present-day Colombia. The spot was a lugubrious one. A muddy coast planted with motionless mangroves. A disquieting silence. Sometimes an arrow from they knew not where passed right through a Spaniard's throat. The three captains split up. Almagro was able to collect a few pearls and golden jewels during a raid on an Indian village. Here was something to attract those recruits who were still hesitating! He went back to Panama to seek reinforcements, while Pizarro decided to camp at the river’s edge to investigate the country.

As for Ruiz, he continued his way southwards. He discovered the island of Gallo ('the island of the cock') passed the equator and turned Cape Pasado, facing the Galapagos Islands. On the way he met a balsa, a sort of wide raft with a sail and a rudder. Merchants were aboard this strange vessel and Ruiz questioned
them. Where did they come from? From Tumbez. With gestures the Indians described this marvellous town. They spread out their multi-coloured stuffs, unpacked pearl necklaces, ran powdered gold through their fingers. All this had been bought at Tumbez, but further south were cities still more opulent. When pressed with questions, the Indian merchants became silent and trembled with fear. Woe betide the strangers who tried to enter the forbidden kingdom!

Ruiz returned to the River San Juan. Pizarro's camp was in a sad way. The natives had harassed the Spaniards continuously, riddling them with arrows and making fun of the hair they wore on their chins. Fortunately, Almagro arrived from Panama with a reinforcement of 80 men, and the three captains, uniting their forces, set off southwards. The further they went the more the landscape changed. To the sandy beaches cultivated fields and villages succeeded. They landed, but the people were hostile everywhere, and the expedition had constantly to be on its guard and sometimes to contend with a combative adversary. They advanced step by step, with their eyes watchful and their weapons ready. They came to Tacamez, where thousands of Indians—they had gold studs in their cheeks—prohibited entry to the town. What were the Spaniards to do? Fight? But it was not an equal match, so the expedition retired. Almagro went in search of reinforcements at Panama, while Pizarro and Ruiz established themselves on the island of Gallo.

There was news at Panama. Pedro de los Ríos had succeeded Pedrarías Davila as governor of the mainland, but this appointment robbed Pizarro of an ally. In fact, Pedro de los Ríos meant to put an end to these unsuccessful voyages which until then produced no practical result. Men were dying in vain who could be usefully employed at Panama. And it was said, too, that Pizarro and Almagro were at loggerheads; also that revolt was brewing on Gallo. Scurvy, famine and Indian arrows had exasperated Pizarro's mercenaries, and they had become like wolves ready to devour one another. One morning Pizarro's troop, gathered on the shore, sighted a sail on the horizon: Almagro and his men to their relief at last! The ship came alongside, and an officer landed—Juan Tafur, Pedro de los Ríos' lieutenant. He handed Pizarro a message from the Governor, with the injunction to allow any man who showed a desire to do so to return to Panama. He was free to continue his mad enterprise—alone!

Pizarro did not flinch. Could he possibly oppose so formal an order? All eyes were on him. Almost all the men were desperate
to flee the accursed island, but Pizarro did not avoid their eyes; he was like a lion-tamer facing his growling beasts. It was a grave moment and one that would settle the whole fate of the conquest. Suddenly—he could contain himself no longer—he leapt in front of his wavering troops, and drawing a dagger from his belt, traced a line in the sand. Then, pointing south, he roared: 'Compañeros, on this side are toil, hunger, nakedness, the drenching storm, desertion and death; on this side, ease and pleasure. There lies Peru and its riches; here Panama and its poverty. Choose . . . For my part, I go to the south.' And with a bound, Pizarro crossed the symbolical furrow. Silence followed, while they looked at one another for a last time. Then Bartolomé Ruiz crossed the line. Twelve companions followed his example, and the rest made for Tafur's boat. They had the air of deserters, but they did not hide their relief. Soon the government ship was steering for Panama and on Gallo, where dense warm rain was bending the mangroves, there remained only Pizarro and his twelve men, for Bartolomé Ruiz had left with the fugitives to pilot them on their return journey. He would return after he had brought them safely to port.

Who were these twelve fanatics? Among them were some who would become hidalgos; some were hidalgos already. There were Castilians: Alfonso Briseño of Benavente, Juan de Torre, Francisco de Cuellar, Anton de Carrion was a compatriot of Pizarro, Cristobal de Peralta—his device was ad summum per alta—was a native of Baeza.—Alonso de Molina saw light in Ubeda. Both were Andalusians, just as were Nicolas de Ribera, born at Olvera, and Garcia de Jérez. Pedro de Candia was a Greek; it was he who later burned ten towns and, to expiate his crime, lit ten lamps before the Virgin's altar. Domingo de Soria Luce, Pedro Alcon and Martin de Paz completed the dozen. Gathered about the terrible Pizarro, the twelve Conquistadors only awaited the order to depart for the Empire of Peru. For now the name was spoken.

While awaiting Ruiz' return, Pizarro decided to move his camp to a neighbouring island—Gorgone—six leagues away. The place seemed better. There were springs and soft wood: they could drink and make a fire. But food was lacking, and there was nothing to eat but pimento, crawfish, adders, and sometimes iguano eggs which the Conquistadors collected in their helmets. They disputed this bitter subsistence with the beasts. And what beasts these were! Ferocious creatures, like pumas and jaguars, and foul ones, like toads and alligators. How hardy these
Spaniards were not to have succumbed to snake bites and to the claws of wild beasts! It is true that they never shed their coats of mail, by day or by night, for they slept—if this light doze could really be called sleep—booted, armoured, and sword in hand. They had to defend themselves all the time, but in the sticky darkness they were less attentive to the tread of carnivores than to the stealthy flight of vampires. These monsters were watchful—and waited for their victims to sleep in order to take their fill of blood.

For seven months Pizarro's companions floundered in this fetid mud. Their heavy horses, cased in steel as at the Crusades, sank in to their breasts. Devoured by mosquitoes, trembling with fever, soaked by the rain and suffocated by their armour, how did the conquerors manage to live? Eventually, one morning, Bartolomé Ruiz returned from Panama with a vessel and just sufficient men to sail her. He gave Pizarro an ultimatum from Pedro de los Rios: he was given six months to get back to Panama. Six months! There was not a moment to lose. The little band embarked, not for the north but southwards.

After the equator had been passed, the scene changed, and the coast took on its wonderful tropical finery. In the foreground were the flowers and the variegated insects, sparkling like jewels, while amongst the trees macaws and monkeys kept up a deafening colloquy. Behind that lay the high line of the Cordillera and, already visible, the snowy slopes of Chimborazo. The expedition turned Cape Santa Elena, its beach studded with purple shells, and passing Santa Clara, came to Puna Island in the Gulf of Guayaquil. How soft the air was! The sky seemed as if carved from an enormous sapphire! A last promontory was passed and suddenly the lookout raised a cry, pointing with his arm to Tumbez. This town that stretched along the folds in the gulf was indeed Tumbez, and thousands of cubic houses, palaces and temples reflected the equatorial sun. A port—a real port, such had not been seen since they left Seville—opened to the Conquerors' worm-eaten ship, and a motley crowd was gathered on the quay to watch the Spanish caravel. There was amazement on both sides, the one party at the sight of this floating tower and white men covered with hair and clothed in steel, and the other at this bright city that had succeeded the jungle. 'They are gods!' whispered the people of Tumbez. 'Is this the end of a nightmare?' the Spaniards asked themselves.

The first to land was Pedro de Candia, soon followed by Molina and others. Everyone judged that care was needed. A
local official welcomed the strangers and led them round the town, which was guarded by a triple wall and a large garrison. There was no question of trying to capture it, and Pizarro restricted himself to establishing political contact with the authorities. Courtesies were exchanged. Pedro de Candía, an excellent marksman, performed wonders with his crossbow. Pizarro received presents of golden vases, precious stuffs and jewels. There were salaams and smiles, and they all parted on good terms. The Spaniards re-embarked, taking a few natives of Tumbez and some llamas with them, for they had never seen llamas before.

Besides the treasures, Pizarro took back to Panama a harvest of information. He had learned, this time from a reliable source, that some hundreds of miles south of Tumbez, beyond the high mountains, a very powerful king reigned over an immense empire. He was at war with a neighbouring king who was preparing to take away his throne. This information filled Pizarro with pleasure. Like Cortés in Mexico, he reckoned to exploit the rivalry of these two princes and to apply Machiavelli's formula of 'divide and rule'.

The past three years had not been in vain. Pizarro now knew the name of those who governed in Peru: the Incas. Better still, he knew the secret of their weakness. The eyes that looked on Tumbez were already those of a conqueror.

**INCA COMMUNISM**

If a line is drawn from Quito, the capital of modern Ecuador, to Trujillo, on the Pacific coast of Peru, and prolonged as far as Lake Titicaca, on the Peru-Bolivia frontier, an obtuse angle is obtained which embraces the Inca Empire—the Tahuantinsuyu, although at the height of its power this empire overflowed Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia and absorbed almost all of Argentina and Chile. This immense territory reveals to the traveller three well-defined aspects: the costa, narrow and turned towards the Pacific Ocean, the Andean Cordillera, and between these two a plateau surrounded by the sierra and its ash-coloured puna, the refuge of the llamas, the haunt of the eagles, and the homeland of the god-emperors. Finally, on the east is the selva which stretches its dark fleece as far as Brazil. A tragic and disconcerting landscape that can only be defined by the one word 'solitude.' Sometimes a shepherd
The Inca Empire
can be seen driving his herd before him. Does he ever dream of
the golden shepherd who once, in the metallic garden of Cuzco,
watched over the golden vicunas with emerald eyes?

Strangely similar to the Aztec legend, the Inca tradition relates
the exploits of a white demi-god who came from the sea and
demonstrated his power by blasting a mountain. 'Spirit of the
deeps, founder of the heavenly light,' Viracocha possessed, like
all precursors, the attributes of a leader of men, an architect, and
a priest. Further, he was creator. He modelled men, not in mud
but in stone, and these statues came to life. One day, having
astonished everyone with his prodigies, Viracocha departed
northwards from the edge of the sea.

A long time afterwards, years or centuries, a man appeared on
the Andean plateau, coming from Lake Titicaca. This was Manco-
Capac. He was accompanied by Mama-Ocllo, his wife and sister.
This was the first Son of the Sun. Who were the people, then,
who inhabited the future Inca Empire, and how long had they
been there?

From north to south a series of confederations arranged them-
selves around the principal centres. The Chibchas at Bogota; the
Caras—a race of giants—at Quito, who were to produce the
Schyri dynasty: the Chimus with their capital at Chan-chan, near
Trujillo (they were descended from the Malay—Polynesian flood
which swept against the Pacific coast for thousands of years);
the Quechus, ancestors of the Incas with their capital at
Cuzco, on the high Andean plateaus, the land of the 'Soroche'
or mountain-sickness; and finally, in the south, on the frontier
of modern Bolivia, on the shores of Lake Titicaca, the Aymaras,
the founders of Tiahuanaco.

It seems that these peoples lived on good terms with one
another, but their ethics were rudimentary. They worshipped
trees and beasts. Unskilled at the art of governing, they were
past masters in stonework. Pachacamas, Cuzco, Machu Pichu
... these are so many enigmas. These still surviving ruins, these
sections of walls, these terrifying faces carved in the rock, these
fabrics and ceramics that are covered with incomprehensible
symbols, all bear witness that before the arrival of the Incas a
civilisation that was wild but in some respects very advanced
reigned on the Andean plateau. Meanwhile, the enigma remains
insoluble. Doubtless, we will never know what were the men,
laws and gods who for two thousands years—perhaps much
longer, for some speak of ten thousand years—were settled
between Bogota and Lake Titicaca, before the Inca dynasties took charge of the empire.

Manco-Capac was then part of Tiahuanaco. The first Inca conquistador started his adventure at the very same moment as Quetzalcoatl brought about the unity of Yucatan. These deeds were simultaneous but not connected. For, astonishing as it may seem, the Inca Empire and the Aztec Empire were never at war, nor did they ever contract an alliance. They knew nothing of one another, although the road from Mayapan to Cuzco is not so very long. It would only have been necessary to follow the narrow strip of Central America for them to have met, and what a meeting it would have been! An understanding between Montezuma and Atahualpa, the ruling monarchs at the time of the Spanish conquest, would have given much trouble to both Cortés and Pizarro. But the Inca knew nothing of the Aztec, and the Aztec did not know the Inca.

How was it that neither knew of the other? The great Indian Kingdoms of America lived lives turned in on themselves. When Cortés met Montezuma the Spaniards had been established at San Domingo, about 2,200 miles from Mexico, for twenty years, but the Aztec empire knew nothing about them. And the Schyris of Quito did not suspect that there were white men 750 miles away at Panama. How could they have thought that there were lands and peoples on the other side of the 'eastern' sea?

Wholly occupied with law-giving, providing for the people and reverencing its gods, pre-Columbian America only rarely turned its eyes eastwards. We do not know—we will never know—what the Incas and Aztecs imagined beyond the known lands or beyond the seas, both of which were equally obscure for them. Moreover, so great was their rulers' pride that they could not conceive of other empires than their own. Thus it was that the Aztecs had divided the world into areas corresponding to the four cardinal points, each inhabited by a god. The power of each god was confused with the nature of the climate. The sinister Lord of Death reigned in the north, and the god of rain and cloud lived in the east, a climatic concordance without relation to geography. The first Americans were very advanced in the realm of astronomy and they knew more about the heavens than they knew about the earth. They could follow the movements of the sun, moon and stars, but they did not know about the frontiers of their own world. The significance of geographical dimensions escaped them and the universe appeared to them as a vast continent surrounded by water after
the fashion of Tenochtitlán itself. They showed no curiosity on this subject, and had no teaching about it. Moreover, if the early inhabitants of America had even a presentiment of the existence of a continent in the east, the feeble nautical means at their disposal would have prevented their reaching it. There were human exchanges by sea route between Japan and Australia on the one hand and America on the other, and probably, also, hardy negro navigators had set off from the African coast—Guinea or Congo—towards South America and reached Brazil. But nothing allows us to suppose that there had been attempts of the same kind in the reverse direction. In any case, if there had been, they would have come to no good, if to the mediocre quality of the native fleets one adds the fact that the sea currents and trade-winds are contrary. We can imagine Chinese or Japanese junks carried by the currents to the North American coasts or Congo boats carried towards South America, but these ephemeral ties were one-way. The first Americans to set foot on the Old Continent, after having crossed the Atlantic, were those whom Columbus took back with him from his first voyage. Before then no one of their race had risked himself on the Ocean.

Tiahuanaco was a cyclopean city, built upon a gigantic terrace at nearly 13,000 feet above sea-level in the very heart of the Andean uplands. On the blue-black surface of the legendary lake bamboo canoes glided along in a splash of gold. All around were summits of 23,000 feet forming a violet amphitheatre which merged into the soft blue of the sky. It is a touching landscape, for man has left there the herculean mask of a genius, the meaning and inspiration of which remains obscure but surpasses the limits of possibility.

The originality of Tiahuanaco rests in the superimposition of successive architectures marking the epochs of one of the oldest cities of the world—really the oldest, if tradition is to be believed. Enormous stones, badly squared but bearing human faces in relief, bear witness to the fact that in the most remote periods of prehistory there was a city on the banks of Lake Titicaca. Should we believe those who state that the first Tiahuanaco was the refuge of people driven from their habitat by the great upheavals of the tertiary era? Some have even suggested that, having survived the drowning of their island, the Atlantans reached the Andean plateau; also that it was they who had introduced the bronze industry to Peru. The appearance of iron as a raw material in construction was the characteristic of the second
epoch: it corresponds to a perfection in the art of stone-cutting that has never been equalled.

Tiahuanaco is actually a combination of two cities: Acapana, 'the belvedere,' and Pumapuncu, the 'puma gate,' scarcely half a mile apart. Of Pumapuncu there remain only some enormous monolithic blocks, pillars of a temple or palace of justice. Some of the blocks lie on the earth in a rough state or only half worked. It is probable that the workers, surprised by some cataclysm, abandoned their work precipitately, after moving these colossal stones to the place where they were to be used. What epidemic, invasion or earthquake had emptied the environs of Pumapuncu? Similarly in Upper Egypt, in the Assuan quarry, one can see the desert strewn with rocks that the stone-cutters had scarcely touched. These unfinished Egyptian pylons and the rocks abandoned by Aymara slaves suggest, even more eloquently than the bas-reliefs, the dramatic picture of a terrified people, fleeing under a dark sky from some fearful catastrophe.

Acapana includes two circular walls that rise several yards high and are marked by great square pillars. Inside these walls are scattered blocks, overturned platforms and giant mutilated statues. All around wind the remains of canals. Fortress or temple, Acapana has not surrendered its secret. The substance of the monuments is beautiful: an assembly of red stones of volcanic origin and grey stones. Tiahuanaco is some distance from the quarries, the nearest being about four miles away, and the furthest, but best provided, about forty miles. How did the early Peruvians transport these gigantic blocks, some of which weighed more than ten tons? Doubtless, they knew something about the lever. It is also probable that they used water transport, or even that they cut canals by which the monstrous monoliths were floated to their workshops, torn from the bowels of the earth with tools of which we know neither the shape nor the material.

At the same period the Mediterranean counterparts of Acapana were building the pyramids, erecting obelisks, and planting granite columns on the shores of the Nile. These millions of slaves, their shoulders striped by the whips can be seen in our minds, streaming with sweat and blood, treading the road from the Assuan quarry to the Valley of Kings, or from the Kayapa quarry to the Acapana temple: parallel events that an ocean separates. But their gods were the same and the stones would never be heavy enough nor beautiful enough, nor would their
grain be pure enough, to satisfy the requirements of a pitiless cult—that of the Sun. For the Sun was God both in Egypt and Peru. He was called Inti on the Andean plateau and Amon-Ra in the Nile delta. And the same secondary divinities, hostile or benevolent, peopled the Egyptian and Inca pantheons. Nevertheless, more than six thousand miles separate the portal at Karnak from the Gate of the Sun at Tiahuanaco.

Cut from a single block, 12’ 7” long by 9’ wide by 1’ 8” deep, the Gate of the Sun marks the entrance to a vanished kingdom. Massive, but finely proportioned, it reveals a skilful technique. It reminds one of the Gate of Lions at Mycenae. For what Agamemnon was this proud portico erected and to celebrate what victory? At the centre of the monument is an enigmatical figure with a halo, carrying a sceptre in each hand, while all around are human heads surmounted by falcons’ beaks. Strange creatures, furnished with wings and tails, and provided also with sceptres, seem to flutter around the principal figure like a burlesque swarm of bees or the principal dancers in a sacred ballet. Among the pillars, from which time has not worn the corners, and the statues with mutilated faces, the indecipherable lintel of the Gate of the Sun is the sole complete vestige of ancient Tiahuanaco. But it sheds no light on what the cyclopean city was like when Manco-Capac and his incestuous spouse, in the year 1000 of the Christian era, left the shores of Lake Titicaca to civilise what they thought to be the world.

When the Aymara Manco-Capac reached Cuzco, the Quechua capital, a monarch ruled there, but he was a king of straw, a mere puppet. Actually, the lords gave the orders, for in the Cuzco country the régime was feudal and the intrigues of the nobles were exerted to undermine the little that remained of royal power. Political instability, and the excesses and claims of an increasingly demanding feudalism had their effect on morals. The clergy strove in vain to curb the immorality of governing circles, but the zeal that they brought to this task was not very strong. In fact, they made common cause with feudalism on the political level. Having been hatched for a long time in obscurity, the conspiracy of lords and priests at last broke out and the sovereign was driven from his palace. He left the capital, fleeing to the mountains. Then Manco-Capac took power. Endowed with unusual political genius, he invented—or, appropriated—the formula of a state religion and, obtaining support from the clergy, he curbed the feudal lords. Once the lords were back in their ranks and the priests co-operating, he had nothing to do
but keep his mailed fist firmly on the bent backs of his new people. Henceforth he united the Quechuas and Aymaras under his crown, and to guard his frontiers and maintain internal order he created a strong and disciplined army. His frequent allusions to his divine origin helped, for how could one resist a man who said: 'Viracocha and the Sun, my father, have in their wisdom decided the fate of my race and the path of success which my descendants must follow...'? The Inca dynasty began with Manco-Capac.

While these events were taking place in Cuzco, Europe was passing through a curiously similar crisis. In England, Portugal and Tuscany the feudal lords triumphed. But in France the rise of the Capetians brought about the decline and then the death of feudal power. Louis le Grand, with the support of the clergy, engaged in a merciless struggle against the lords and forced them to disgorge. He restored royal authority, made the crown hereditary and centralised power. That was the end of the great vassals and their arrogance; they were sent back to their domains. The King of France was King, and the Church stood at his right hand. This likeness deserves to be emphasised, for in fact there is nothing new in the government of men.

On his death Manco-Capac left a state whose dimensions were still relatively modest, but endowed with an administrative and political framework that would assure its continuance. Sinchi-Roca, his successor, succeeded in breaking the last vestiges of resistance among the lords. Indeed, he did more. He took possession of their lands and annexed them to the Inca Crown. By so doing, he affirmed the dual character of the policy which the rulers of Cuzco meant to practise and were to practise until the Spanish conquest: to maintain peace and unity within and to extend the empire to the maximum. These two orders every Inca monarch would pass on to his heir and none would betray them. The continuity and the firmness of such a policy, conducted energetically for five hundred years, was the secret of the Empire.

Two hundred years after Manco-Capac's seizure of power, a grave danger almost destroyed the empire. It came from the southeast. Some tribes that were moving along the Paraguay had decided to unite, forming a vast confederation. They organised an army and marched upon Bolivia. Emboldened by their early successes—having overthrown the Chiriguans without difficulty—the Paraguayans then moved towards the plateaus. But before they even had time to lay siege to Cuzco, Inti-
Yupanqui, the fifth Inca, inflicted on them a bloody defeat. Then he subdued them, thus enlarging southwards the territory he had inherited. At the same time, he thrust his armies to the sea, not far from Arequipa, near the Bolivian frontier. He had to have exits to the sea, and from this moment the Incas controlled the Pacific along the whole Peruvian coast.

This movement towards the sea was continued with Yahuar-Huaecac and Pachacutec, who subjugated the Chimu confederation. Tupac, the tenth Inca sovereign, continued and completed this unparalleled expansion. Northwards he subdued the tribes of Quito and the Bay of Guayaquil. Southwards, he launched a campaign against Chile which succeeded beyond all hope. When Huayna, his son, ascended the throne—in the year that Isabella ascended hers in Castile—his power and jurisdiction extended from Quito to Santiago. He transferred his residence from Cuzco to Quito, and from there, Huayna (now called Huayna Capac) directed and strove to co-ordinate the activities of his measureless empire. It was, moreover, an excellent observation point for supervising the Cara and Chimu tribes, who were still unsettled; and it was also, perhaps, a bridgehead to the mysterious north.

To maintain internal peace and unity, and to extend the empire to the maximum. But by what means were these policies pursued? The Inca Empire was brought into being by successive leaps. The method was simple and consisted of two stages: first of all, the military expedition towards a designated point and the reduction of the adversary by arms, then the occupation of the conquered province. The laws of the conqueror became those of the vanquished, the prisoners were freed, and the chiefs and officials made their submission to the Inca. A census was taken of the population, the enemies of yesterday became the allies of today, and the defeated soldiers, now enrolled in the Inca ranks, swelled the imperial army. In brief, political conquest closely followed military action. The supreme ruler, like the Roman Imperator, aimed less at crushing the adversary than at acquiring new subjects. It was a question of absorption and not destruction. Sometimes, also, war was avoided, and the expansion of the Empire was then effected by diplomatic means; a treaty of alliance took the place of an ultimatum. Political marriages were celebrated with great ceremony; thus Lloque-Yupanqui, by marrying the daughter of a powerful neighbour, helped to enlarge the Empire.

If the means used by the Incas to carry out their territorial acquisitions were the result of a certain improvisation, taking
local situations into account, on the other hand those which controlled internal organisation were unalterable. The framework of the Inca state had the rigidity of steel.

The basis of the social system was the aylla, by origin a simple family but extended to a clan or tribe. The chief of the aylla bore the name capac. He was also called the inca-capac, the term “inca” applying not to the function but to the tribe. Consequently, a confusion arose between the name of the tribe and that of the chief. First of all elected by the community, the inca-capaces emerged gradually from the ranks and formed an aristocracy, a college of nobles and then a dynasty. In order that their power might be incontestable, the capaces assumed a divine origin. Descendants of the Sun—Inti—and only awaiting his pleasure to return there, the capaces constituted the nursery of chiefs, the élite of whom the supreme Inca represented the head.

The power of the Inca was absolute, even though it was carefully controlled and limited by his Council. But his authority over the people was fully exercised, an authority simultaneously good-natured and tyrannical, a paternalism of a good god (for was he not God?) combined with the harshness of a pitiless dictator. He was father and judge; nothing escaped him, not even the most secret thoughts of his subjects. He reigned over their minds. No one had the right to look into the face of this dazzling monarch.

How did this enormous administrative and social mechanism function? All the lands of the Empire belonged by right to the Inca, but in practice they were divided into three equal parts, those of the Sun, those of the State, and those of the Community. Each family received a fraction of the community part, and it was called the topo. This fraction of land belonged to the family in its own right, under the reservation that it could not be alienated nor left undeveloped. It was proportionate to the number of members in the family and returned to the State when the family died out. The allotment of a topo to the cultivators did not free them from service on the State’s land from the age of twenty-five to fifty. This kind of obligatory civic service took the place of a tax. The cultivators kept the product of their crops, just as they were proprietors of their houses and livestock. As to the produce from the lands of the Sun and the State, it was usually earmarked for the needs of the clergy and the nation. The citizens, on reaching the age of fifty years, fell to the charge of the State.
Thus the Inca reigned, inaccessible to the common people, shut up in his golden palace. The élite—the priests, officers and high officials—organised and directed. Then, in the absence of a middle class, and more particularly of a bourgeoisie, there was the people, who never changed, whose vital function was to make war and to till the soil. For the idea of work permeated the social system. Above all, no idlers were permitted. The obligation to work and its corollary, the control of the product, was never disputed by anyone. Moreover, the Incas took trouble to make labour bearable, and even attractive. When their turn came to cultivate the lands of the Sun, the Peruvians dressed in festal clothes and went forward singing. Feast days were numerous; they were holidays, but not free, for there were ritual exercises, dances and songs consecrated to the Inca, in praise of the régime. Everything, even leisure, was directed in the realm of the Son of the Sun.

The close dependence of the people on the State, the fact that they drew from it, and from it alone, their subsistence, their raison d'être, their life, created a special frame of mind. Why should the Peruvian have any anxiety for his children, since the State would take care of them and provide for them? Why should he economise on his harvest when, the next year, he could count on an equal crop? At the worst, should there be some calamity, the public granaries would disgorge the cereals destined for the community. Why should he save for his old age when the State would assure him retirement at fifty? And finally, why should he envy the élite, who relieved him of thinking and foresight? What was required of him? To obey—nothing else. What was given him in exchange? Security. Security is not the same as happiness, but this strange word meant nothing to him, for he had never learnt it.

Socialistic and hierarchical at once, the Inca state was also religious. Less peopled than the Aztec pantheon, that of the Incas was presided over by the Sun, Inti, the ancestor of the dynasty. His spouse was the Moon. Two other gods: Pachacamac and Viracocha, 'the spirit of the burning entrails of the earth and of the boiling lava,' were represented on the temple facades. The Inca nation having been formed by the gathering together under one sceptre of several different peoples—Aymaras, Chimús, Quechua, Caras—each of these had contributed its gods. The central power had thought it politic to leave the subjugated tribes or allies the freedom of their cult, but supreme over all these secondary deities there was one official god: Inti.
The splendour of the Coricancha temple, or 'the House of Gold,' built at Cuzco in honour of the Inti, consecrates the glory of the State religion. For Inti was not only the god of the Incas, he was their father. They had striven to emphasise the divine alliance in the eyes of the people by the grandest of monuments. They had to dazzle these primitive people so that not even the shadow of a doubt might touch them. A triple rampart, made of polished stones placed side by side, surrounded the Temple of the Sun. Within were halls dedicated to Inti, the Moon, Lightning, the planet Venus, the Rainbow and the Stars, one behind the other. The inner walls were entirely covered with sheets of gold. A numerous staff lived in the temple: priests of every class, from the capac to those who prepared the chicha, the vestals appointed to look after the sacred fire, the oracles and the servants. Seated on golden chairs or on stone benches encrusted with emeralds, the mummies of the dead Incas mounted a funereal guard.

Thus the heavy Inca machine revolved under the sign of social security and civic peace. Misdemeanours were rare, not so much because of the rigour of the punishments as because crime had no temptation. What purpose was there in stealing from one's neighbour what one possessed at home or what the state made no difficulty about providing? In order to kill one must covet, love or hate, but the ants in the Inca ant-hill knew nothing of passion. Moreover, the police would have prevented the gesture even before it was carried out. Secretly or publicly, the police were everywhere, at every crossroad, in every house. They were the most redoubtable auxiliary of power.

Everything was arranged so that the people should never have cause for discontent. In Cuzco there were no poor. Widows were supported, and war casualties received a pension in the form of clothing and food, since money did not exist. The infirm lived at the expense of the community, but they were obliged every year to provide the Inca with a tube filled with insects, a symbolic tribute which justified their right to live.

This impeccable and transparent world was very like one of those old clocks with its mechanism visible under glass: not a speck of dust on the wheels, not a spot on the immaculate marble of the pedestal. An inexorable perfection.

* * *

Towards the end of his reign, when he could regard the unity
of the empire as accomplished, Huayna-Capac was informed by his spies in the Tumbez region that 'great floating houses,' filled with 'bearded monsters,' were cruising off the Gulf of Guayaquil. Before he was able to take action he died. By his will he had divided his enormous heritage in two: the southern part of the Empire, with its capital at Cuzco, he left to Huascar, his legitimate son, and the northern part, centred on Quito, he left to Atahualpa, his natural son. The two princes took possession of their kingdoms, but although very far apart at Cuzco and Quito, they suffered one another with difficulty. Soon they confronted one another. Did they realise, these brother-enemies, that in breaking their alliance they were going to bring an end to the Empire of the Sun?

At the moment when Huayna-Capac died at Quito and his two sons succeeded him, watching each other with bitter hatred, Francis I of France was defeated by the Spaniards at Pavia, and Spaniards, led by Pizarro, set foot on Inca territory in the land of the Chimus.

These 'bearded monsters' who haunted the death-throes of the old Indian emperor were the Spaniards, the victors over the King of France, and now in search of a prey which would satisfy their hunger. They encountered a static world, mathematical and cold.

The Spaniards shattered this minutely organised clock.

* * *

So this pre-Columbian America was about to vanish into the limbo of history. We must try to grasp its movements and glimpse its essential architecture, which were as follows.

An unceasing mixing of tribes and races, the more robust—or the more crafty—subjugating the weaker: the primacy of the law of stronger.

Invasions and raids, coming almost always from the north and directed southwards, from the desert to the forest, from the glaciers to the burning beaches. To eat and to find warmth were the urges.

Periods of peace, sometimes of plenty, alternating with seasons of misfortune and famine.

Preceding the armies came the priests, bearing effigies of their gods like monstrances. Thus the standard of Constantine, after his victory over Maxentius, bore these words: In hoc signo vinces. Raised aloft before the Roman troops, the imperial eagles
assured immortality to the soldiers. 'You will conquer by this symbol,' the eternal symbol of the gods, witnessing that Heaven approved the warrior and that the cause was good.

These gods were numerous and varied, although they show a certain family resemblance. Evangelists like Quetzalcoatl, blood-thirsty ones like Huitzilopochtli, and benevolent ones like Inti, thirsty for fresh blood or hungry for tenderness, all agree on one point: man is nothing and can do nothing without them. He must obey.

From the hordes, from the tribes, and finally from the peoples, masters, conquerors and generals came to the fore. They were simultaneously military and religious. Dictators imposed themselves, but their careers were rarely long and their ends were often tragic. Others took their places, those who, intentionally leaving the crowd to place themselves at its head, forced the adhesion of the people. This was the mystique of the leader—the mystique of the elected, too—overtaking or preceding the Mosaic tradition of the people's leader, simultaneously their high priest and army chief, and sometimes Messiah too.

There were not only generals and wise men, but scholars too. The Incas were not only architects, surveyors, astronomers and cartographers, but probably the fathers of surgery. In making their sick people chew coca they were the forerunners of cocaine treatment and they invented anesthesia. Better still, they practised trepanning. In 1533, two Peruvian surgeons, who were also enthusiastic archeologists, found obsidian scalpels and lancets in the ruins of what was doubtless a sort of Inca hospital, and attempted to operate on a gravely injured person with these instruments. They opened the patient's cranium, removed a blood clot from the left parietal zone and resorted to the 'Inca tourniquet' for ligature. The intervention lasted forty minutes and was a complete success. What an extraordinary sight it must have been, with these men in modern rubber gloves using the instruments of Inca surgeons!

Empires were made, unmade and remade. Empires? Rather, they were temporary confederations, torn apart by a puff of wind. The spaces were endless. Yucatan, that small spur pointing towards Havana, is bigger than France, and the Inca Empire covered almost the whole of South America. But only a tenth of these lands was peopled. The net which the Red Conquistadors had stretched from Mexico to Santiago had a very wide mesh. There were sumptuous capitals: Tenochtitlán, Cuzco, Tiahuanaco, for instance and some of them counted more than 200,000
inhabitants. But between these powerful cities shadowy zones stretched out—shadowy but inhabited with human monsters—giants or pygmies—who slipped like larvae under leafy vaults denser than cathedral arches. Were they citizens of the Empire too? Certainly not. But they could become so.

Firmly articulated on the mother cities, with their frontiers marked out by fortresses provided with men and arms—like the Inca pucaras, which were similar to the Saracen watch-towers along the crests of the Pyrenees—the territory where the Indian people lived was surrounded and crossed by endless no man's lands, over which, however, the nominal sovereignty of Aztec or Inca was exercised.

These empires were fragile and at the mercy of invasion, earthquake or palace revolution. For they were vulnerable not at the heel like Achilles, but at the head.

Finally the codes, the essentials of which varied little. For the laws of politics and economics were as immutable as the laws of physics, and as inflexible as the movement of the stars.

The 'Auca runa' or 'warlike people' from whom, according to Huanan Poma, the true founders of the Inca dynasty came.
CHAPTER XII

The Death of the Inca

PIZARRO'S reappearance at Panama caused some surprise, for he was thought to be dead and there were some indeed who hoped he was. Pedro de los Ríos received his subordinate coldly, for he had been a long time in getting back to his base. Obviously, the Governor did not like Pizarro, whose turbulence was a nuisance to the administration. Pedro le dos Ríos cast a disdainful glance at the booty brought back; they were in his view baubles and no more. Nevertheless, he had a smile for the llamas which, with their languishing eyes, pivoting necks, small upright and pointed ears, rolling cruppers and thick wool gave him some amusement. As to the natives of Tumbez, he regarded them as savages like the rest, whose only value was as slaves. Was it necessary to go so far in order to bring back so little? It was the Governor's hope that Pizarro, whose pranks had continued too long, would now rejoin his ranks.

But Pizarro had no intention of joining the ranks. In fact, his only thought was of departing from Panama southwards and freeing himself from the tutelage of Pedro de los Ríos. Pizarro was never troubled by words and he coldly informed the Governor of his project of organising a new expedition to Peru; but he needed material, men and assistance. Pedro de los Ríos burst into laughter. Assistance? He would certainly get none from him. On the contrary, as Pizarro's administrative superior he ordered him to abandon his costly fantasies and resume his place among the colonists of Panama. An argument developed, with on one side the brutal obstinacy of Pizarro and on the other the intransigent authoritarianism of Pedro de los Ríos. Pizarro decided not to obey his superior, but to go to Toledo where there was a higher authority to which he could appeal.
PLATE 8
Central America in 1541 (from Alonzo de Santa Cruz' atlas)
PLATE 9

Francisco Pizarro, Conqueror of Peru
Pizarro had scarcely landed at Sanlucar de Barrameda than he was arrested and under strong escort taken to Seville, where he was incarcerated in the municipal prison. The charge was an old matter of unpaid debts at the time of the colonisation of Darien, and the creditor was none other than Enciso, the ephemeral Governor of Santa Maria la Antigua. It was a poor beginning for his embassy; nevertheless he found unexpected support in the person of Cortés then on a visit to Court. The victor of Mexico interceded with the sovereign and secured Pizarro an audience. It was a chivalrous gesture and much to Cortés' credit. The man who had succeeded—for a few more months he was to remain at the height of his glory—held out his hand to the candidate for glory, showing a disinterest that was rare among the Conquistadors. Perhaps Cortés thought that nothing henceforth could check his rise; Pizarro could not obstruct him. Actually, he had reached the moment in his career when to acquire disciples was a necessity, not so much to set him off as to complete his own personality.

Toledo in the summer of 1528. Philip II had not long been born and the Spanish Court was merry. A male heir! This was something to compensate for the vexations that Charles was then suffering on the battlefields of Italy. Toledo blazed in the sun under its carapace of ochre-coloured stone. A troop of horsemen crossed the Alcantara bridge and trotted to the Imperial Palace. These were Pizarro and his faithful friends. How long the road had been to Toledo from the island of Gorgone!

Charles was in a good humour and welcomed the Conquistadors kindly. The former swineherd from Estremadura knelt before the most powerful emperor in the world. While he lent an ear to Pizarro's recital, Charles passed his fingers absent-mindedly through the thick llama fleeces and weighed the Peruvian jewels in his hand. He leaned over the maps that had been drawn by Bartolomé Ruiz: it was all very interesting, though very vague! Was the affair worth pursuing or worth the sacrifice of the precious blood of Spanish cavaliers? Pizarro drew himself up. In the kingdom of Peru there was not only gold to be gained, but souls for Christ and territories for Spain. Pizarro had touched a sensitive spot. He had discreetly reminded the Emperor of the spiritual mandate he held from the Pope and the hegemonical concept bequeathed by the Habsburgs. In the end Charles
agreed to support Pizarro's cause before the Council of the Indies.

Some months later, at Toledo, the Queen, in the absence of the Emperor, signed a convention reserving to Pizarro the privilege of conquering Peru, which had been named 'New Castile' in anticipation. The bastard from Trujillo became Captain-General for life and Supreme Judge of the new province, and furthermore was awarded the collar of the Order of Santiago. His twelve companions of Gallo—thirteen including Ruiz—were not forgotten. These commoners saw themselves awarded the titles of nobility: Caballeros de la Espada Dorada, Knights of the Golden Sword. Luque was appointed Bishop of Tumbez, subject to pontifical authorisation, and Universal Protector of the Indians. Bartolomé Ruiz was given the title of Grand Pilot of the Southern Sea. In brief, no one was forgotten, not even Almagro, who was given command of a fortress at Tumbez. Of the three associates he had the worst deal, although on paper he was awarded an annual payment of 100,000 maravedis, to be taken from the future revenues of the lands to be discovered. More generous with honours than with money, the Crown gave Pizarro a modest subvention towards the early expenses of the expedition, but the heaviest financial charge fell to Pizarro, who had, by the very terms of the contract, to recruit and equip 150 men and embark for Peru within six months.

Pizarro's first concern, now that he was furnished with his new dignities, was to go to his native place, Trujillo. It is easy to understand that he was unable to resist the desire to show his Cross of the Knights of Santiago to his childhood friends. Captain-General and favourite of the Emperor, this was indeed something to inflate his pride. He donned his breast-plate; he jangled his spurs; he amiably poked the ribs of the picaros. Doubtless, too, he breathed for the last time the odours of his youth. At the same time he started recruiting, and first of all enrolled his three brothers—Hernando, Gonzalo and Juan—and his half-brother, Martin de Alcantara. There were others too, but enrolments were few, for the people of Trujillo were difficult to convince. Peru? That was a long way off! So the six months expired and Pizarro had been unable to assemble the contingent fixed by the contract. What should he do? Set out nevertheless, which was, moreover, the advice that Cortés gave him. To go ahead without long delay had been the tactics of the hero of Mexico. One morning in the month of January, 1530, Pizarro
hoisted sail on his three ships at Sanlucar de Barrameda and put to sea.

**THE REAL START**

Twenty-five years earlier Christopher Columbus had landed at this same port of Sanlucar on his return from his last voyage. Such was the continuity of the Discovery, an invisible chain that connected the Conquistadors and the ports; and on this day, under the great shadow of the Genoese discoverer—the Father of the New World—Francisco Pizarro sailed westwards, no longer in search of the Great Khan, but of the Inca. He too, like Columbus, had in his pocket a contract from the King of Spain. But times had changed. Pizarro knew where he was going, or at least he had a good idea. His contract was precise. Nothing had been forgotten. It was, in fact, a merchant's contract. Columbus had been like a blind man inspired, and for him faith took the place of certainty. The Santa Fe convention contained a mystic meaning breathed into it by Isabella: God would lead Columbus's caravels. Pizarro's ships carried hardened men, and among them were a few churchmen, forced on Pizarro by the Crown, with the task of ensuring the evangelical character of the Conquest. In this they did everything they could, but found much difficulty in keeping the pack under control.

Having put in at the Canaries and at Santa Maria, Pizarro's flotilla anchored at Nombre de Dios. Luque and Almagro were on the quay, and the interview between Pizarro and Almagro was a stormy one. The command of a fortress! Was this all that the new 'Captain-General' could get from Charles for his earliest associate? Thanks to Luque's diplomacy and Pizarro's promises, a real quarrel between the two ship-mates was narrowly avoided. Nevertheless, the poison worked its way in secret and the two Conquistadors were to die of it, though not yet.

A year after leaving Spain, Pizarro embarked from Panama for Peru. He had three ships, 183 men and 27 horses, and his expedition had been minutely prepared. He had forgotten nothing, not even an accountant, Antonio Navarra, and a treasurer, Alonso Requelme. The Dominican priest, Vicente de Valverde, represented the Church. The start was solemn. The Bishop of Panama blessed the fleet and the army. The flags were hauled to the mainmasts and the three caravels sailed away to the singing of Ave maris Stella. Before separating, Almagro
(who was remaining at Panama to gather reinforcements) and Pizarro took communion. Under the united symbols of the Faith and Spain the true conquest of Peru began.

The first objective was Tumbez. But contrary winds forced the flotilla to drop anchor in the Bay of San Mateo, a hundred leagues from its goal. Pizarro and his troop continued the journey by land. On the way they traversed the province of Coaque, halting in inhabited and well-constructed villages. They were received affably, but the Conquistadors could not resist the urge to pillage their hosts. In the houses were objects of gold and emeralds, and a large booty was amassed. A fifth part was put aside for Charles and Pizarro proceeded to the share-out. As soon as the soldiers were served, the Captain-General sent a few samples from the booty to the Spanish colonies of Panama and Nicaragua. This was good propaganda and succeeded splendidly. Lured by the gold and the gems, other Conquistadors joined up with Pizarro. Thirty men, including Juan Flores and Sebastian Belalcazar, rallied to the expedition at Puerto Viejo, which Pizarro had just founded in the Bay of Guayaquil. Everything was going fine, although the spines of tropical plants tried the Spaniards cruelly. But of what importance were warts and ulcers! Pizarro whipped everybody along, for there was no time to lose.

Now the rainy season approached and it was a bad time to set off into the interior. Pizarro set up his camp on Puna Island, facing Tumbez. The Indians attempted an attack, but it was easily repulsed. At the same time, Hernando de Soto, coming from Nicaragua, joined Pizarro with two ships and 100 men. The Captain welcomed this choice reinforcement with open arms, for Soto was an experienced man. He was a tough companion and a famous swordsman. And he too was a native of Estremadura—the province of Conquistadors.

While the men cared for their sores as best they could—they cut the cactus spines from their flesh with their lance-heads—Pizarro sought information. Following Cortés example, he had made interpreters of captured Indians, and with their help he was kept informed of events that were taking place in the Peruvian kingdom. The quarrel between the enemy brothers—Huascar and Atahualpa—had entered an acute stage. Under the pretext of paying homage to his brother, Atahualpa had left his residence at Quito and had moved towards Cuzco at the head of a powerful army. On the way the Inca raised other contingents, subdued the caciques and massacred Huascar partisans. On his
side, the legitimate son of Huayna-Capac, who was not very combative and clung less to his throne than to his mistress, Golden Star, went to meet his half-brother. The meeting took place in the neighbourhood of Cajamarca, half-way between Cuzco and Quito. The numerical superiority of Atahualpa's army was crushing: Huascar's troops were put out of action, falling back towards the Peruvian capital, and Huascar, who was captured, was taken under strong escort to Cuzco. Atahualpa had triumphed.

Such was the news that spread rapidly, and despite the enormous distances reached Pizarro. The legitimate sovereign of Peru was being taken to Cuzco in chains and Atahualpa, temporarily encamped at Cajamarca, was preparing his victorious entry into the Inca city. One throne overturned and another still poorly secured; could there be a more favourable combination of circumstances for Pizarro's plans?

AMONG THE CONDORS

A legend had preceded Cortés on the road from Mexico: that Quetzalcoatl was fulfilling his prophecy and the white god was taking possession again of his altars. This myth, more than anything else, made Cortés' victory possible. Obsessed with his model, Pizarro willingly let the natives believe that he was one of the sons of Viracocha, the god of Tihuanaco, who was also white-skinned. The same trick served the two conquerors, and it succeeded even better among the Peruvians, since Viracocha controlled the thunder. Now, Pizarro had cannon, powder, horses, shining armour. . . . The apparatus of terror was ready. How could it be doubted that Viracocha was the organiser of the march that was just beginning.

Pizarro's army crossed from Puna Island to Tumbez. It descended southwards and reached the river Piura, where Pizarro founded a colony, San Miguel. Then he made for the Cordillera, with 110 foot-soldiers and 67 cavalry. Yet they had hardly left San Miguel when of these 177 men, five cavaliers and four foot-soldiers turned back, so that there were no more than 168 in all, only a third of the number of Cortés' companions when he set out from Tlaxcala.

The Cajamarca plateau stretches like a thread between the western and central chains of the Cordillera of the Andes. As the crow flies it is little more than 300 miles from Tumbez to
Cajamarca, but it took Pizarro's expedition more than two months to cover this distance—two months to pass from the furnace of the Sechura Desert at sea level to the chill of Cajamarca, nearly 10,000 feet up. While they were on the Peruvian coast the Spaniards found neither trees nor springs; the sun was burning and they were maddened by thirst. Then they reached the foot of the Cordillera. Paths were cut in the basalt and the Conquistadors set off along them. The more they rose the wider the landscape spread. At a turn in the road the Spaniards came face to face with the glaciers. The sky was translucent blue and a cold sun lit the summits vertically. Sometimes a bunch of cistus, a prickly pear, or the streaming of a cascade, reminded the Spaniards of the scenery of Estremadura, enormously enlarged, and even the toughest of them shed a tear. But further on the horizon changed. Snow succeeded rock and the soldiers shivered under their armour. The frozen horses refused to advance. The mirage had vanished: it was no longer the valley of the Tajo, but a sort of frozen hell. Only a few animals lived on these high Andean lands: the llama with a fine maroon-spotted coat, the alpaca with its heavy black fleece, the fierce vicuna whose wool was used to plait the royal headband of the Incas, and the condor—invisible in the plains—which appeared only on the peaks.

106 men on foot and 62 on horses advanced along the cliffs, skirting the precipices. If Pizarro had not been there, how many of the Spaniards would have chosen to turn back? But the Captain was watching and it was forbidden to complain. Clothed in steel, like a mediaeval knight, he had thrown a gentleman's capa over his armour. He was at the head of his troop and such was his power over men that not one of them faltered. There was no need to speak to be obeyed; a glance sufficed, for none could withstand his look.

The Spaniards had reached the summits where the condors soared. Cajamarca was not far off, and Pizarro had already received two embassies from Atahualpa. The first encouraged him to continue his journey; the second, on the other hand, dissuaded him from going further. In the same way had Montezuma, in an attempt to restrain Cortés' progress, despatched contradictory messages. It was the same confusion in both the princes, even though Atahualpa's position was more delicate than that of the Aztec sovereign. Atahualpa had just had difficulty in ascending his throne. Although ratified by the Inca Council, his power, torn by arms from Huascar, was the result of usurpation,
and the legitimate son of Huayna-Capac still had partisans, who had already approached Pizarro. What a fine opportunity for the Conquistador to play the arbitrator! From this moment he was prodigal with friendly words for the envoys of both parties. He wished nothing but good for the inhabitants of this land!

One fine afternoon, having traversed vertiginous passes and crossed abysses by bridges of lianas, the Spaniards entered the valley of Cajamarca. On the opposite mountain the slope rose in tiers: from base to summit there was nothing but gardens and terraces. Thousands of tents flapped in the evening breeze. This was Atahualpa’s camp.

Pizarro decided to make his quarters in the city of Cajamarca, which had been abandoned by the Inca. It was silent and deserted, for the population had fled to the mountains. Pizarro’s 168 soldiers were at large in a depopulated town. They shamelessly installed themselves in Atahualpa’s own palace. Then they took counsel.

From all the evidence, the first essential was to contact the Peruvian king without delay. The matter was urgent. Pizarro ordered Hernando de Soto—the most brilliant of his lieutenants—to prepare the way, and on the very evening of the Spaniards entry into Cajamarca, Soto, at the head of twenty horsemen, went off at a trot towards Atahualpa’s camp, some three miles from the city.

Everyone came out of the tents to see the cavalcade pass. The Peruvians were amazed. Who were these fabulous beings, clothed in metal and carried by unknown beasts? The Spanish embassy cut a passage through the crowd and reached Atahualpa’s residence. It was a house of fine appearance, with a large courtyard in front. The floor was fine sand and in the middle a basin of cut stone distributed both cold and warm water. A gathering of lords stood beside the basin, and the importance of their duties could be gauged by the differences in their clothing. Standing out from the rest by the simplicity of his costume was Atahualpa. He was squatting in Turkish fashion on a sort of low seat, and he was further distinguished from his nobles by the royal headband taken from Huascar. His face, moreover, was handsome, like the profile of a bird of prey carved in mahogany.

How did the dialogue begin? The Inca maintained silence and did not deign to reply to the courteous words which the interpreter passed on to him. Hernando de Soto considered whether he should substitute actions for words. He was a brilliant
cavalier, and he decided to demonstrate the fact. He quickly mounted his horse and with his legs glued to his mount's flank he made one piece with it, a centaur in silver armour. With a slight pressure of the knees and a touch of the reins, the horse galloped, circled, capered, reared, remained upright for a moment and fell back on to its four feet in a shower of sparks. Throughout this equestrian exhibition, Atahualpa never blinked. At the very most his eyes had flickered a little when Soto, to prove his skill, had thrust his horse towards a group of Peruvians, who had fled in terror. They were put to death for such shameful cowardice. Meanwhile, Hernando Pizarro and fifteen horsemen joined Soto in the Peruvian camp. A few words were exchanged, and little by little the ice melted. Hernando protested his brother's good intentions, himself a simple envoy of the King of Spain. Atahualpa stated that he was well disposed to the foreigners, provided that they returned to his subjects the booty collected since leaving Tumbez. The Inca was willing to meet Francisco Pizarro the next day. They separated good friends—at least in appearance—after drinking chicha. Each had shown the other of what he was capable: Atahualpa had executed some of his own soldiers under the eyes of the Spaniards, and Hernando de Soto had done his turn like a real master of horsemanship. The Inca exercised absolute power over his subjects: they belonged to him body and soul. The Spaniard tamed monsters. In each camp they noted points while reckoning the strength of the eventual enemy. But they took care not to let this be seen. Their faces were impassive; they feigned indifference; they 'bluffed'.

A USEFUL SACRILEGE

In reality, this reciprocal 'bluff' concealed a great anxiety on both sides. Atahualpa pondered upon the old legends that he had heard from his father. The unusual appearance of the strangers, their mysterious origin, and the allusion that they made to a powerful white emperor, certainly connected them with the descendants of Viracocha. Having just captured his brother's empire, Atahualpa asked himself if he would have to do battle with the white warriors in order to keep it. Or should he interpret the coming of the strangers as a warning from the gods? Enslavement and death for the usurper!

While the Peruvian was struggling with his conscience, the
Spanish embassy arrived back at Cajamarca. The caballeros were anxious. It was not Atahualpa’s promise that made them anxious, but the disproportion of the armies that faced one another. They had been able to estimate the number of the Inca’s soldiers: they were a hundred, perhaps two hundred to every Spaniard, and though their armament was primitive—darts, javelins, slings and lassos—their number was something to be reckoned with. A thousand well directed arrows could do as much damage as a cannon ball. Night had now fallen over the Cajamarca valley and on the flanks of the mountain could be seen the great glow of the camp-fires of the Inca’s army.

Hernando Pizarro and Soto made their report to the Captain-General, but he was untroubled. Nevertheless he did not hide from himself the gravity of the situation. Only a bold stroke could give him the mastery of events, and once again he turned his thoughts to the Mexican campaign. When Cortés was in difficulties he had drawn inspiration from Plutarch, Caesar and various others, but Pizarro’s classic was Cortés himself. Montezuma’s arrest by the Spanish leader had greatly facilitated the Mexican affair, so why not cast over Atahualpa the net that had caught the Aztec emperor so well? Once the Inca was under lock and key, Pizarro would be in a stronger position to subdue the whole country. He disclosed his plan to his lieutenants. Capture Atahualpa! The undertaking was a daring one. There were only a few dozen Spaniards against thousands of Peruvians. But Pizarro had spoken and there was nothing to do but obey.

There was no question of sleep, and indeed, no one wanted to. Pizarro perfected his battle plan. The rendezvous with Atahualpa must take place on the main square of Cajamarca, which the Spaniards had already named the plaza. It was a vast terreplein, flanked on three sides by low rectangular constructions very like military buildings. The central building—the most imposing—opened upon a spacious courtyard planted with trees. The disposition of the buildings lent itself perfectly to a tactical operation analogous to that which Cortés carried out successfully at Cholula. Pizarro divided his cavalry into three bodies, each commanded by one of his brothers, and hid them in the buildings. He did the same with the infantry, of which he kept the command himself. As to artillery, under the orders of Pedro de Candia, he placed it inside a sort of fortress or pucara. Pizarro kept for himself only a small number of soldiers, whose purpose was to deceive the Inca about the real number of the Spanish effectives. Everyone was camouflaged and in position,
and it was absolutely forbidden to move before the pre-arranged signal.

But Pizarro had taken his dispositions for battle only after putting everything right with God. The day that was being prepared was for Spain, certainly, and also for Francisco Pizarro, but above all it was for the Cross. Father de Valverde confessed the soldiers and captains, and celebrated mass by torchlight. All the Conquistadors took Communion, but it was Pizarro and not the Dominican who delivered the sermon. The pitiless warrior promiscuously evoked the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Catholic calling, and the necessity of converting idolaters. Did they think they had come to Peru only to make their fortunes? God demanded his share too, and the time had come to give it him. The glare of the torches lit the helmet, armour and brassards of the leader. He firmly held his sword in his steel-gauntleted hand. Was this the archangel St. Michael preparing to crush the Devil? What was there in common between this sombre sermoniser and the plunderer of Peruvian temples? Actually it was one and the same person, for Pizarro had a passion for gold and a hatred of the devil. This outlaw was respectful to the ley divina. Each of the Conquistadors, kneeling before the improvised altar, knew well that he was a child of God. They struck their breasts, proclaimed their guilt, moaned over their sins. And all of them intoned the song of Israel: Ex surge, Domina, et judica causam tuam! For Pizarro's cause was certainly God's cause too.

Day broke and the Spanish trumpet sounded in the clear morning. The summits of the Andes were rosy, and the valley gently absorbed the mists of night. As in fairyland, the hanging gardens appeared through the dawn vapours. Pizarro and a few companions, grouped in the square, scanned the horizon, while the rest of the troop was hidden in the buildings. It was going to be a hard day.

Pizarro was kept informed by his spies about what was happening in the Peruvian camp. Atahualpa had also made his preparations for battle. He had passed the command of his troops—about 5,000 Indians—to one of his best officers: Ruminagui. It seemed that the Inca planned an enveloping manoeuvre, since he enjoined Ruminagui to occupy all the crossings by which the Spaniards had penetrated the Cajamarca valley. To cut every chance of the enemy's retreat and to encircle and capture him, appears to have been Atahualpa's plan. In any case, the Peruvian army set out by mountain roads
unknown to the Spaniards. The Indian camp was deserted. Not a single tent still stood. The valley was silent. Where was the army?

The morning passed. Nerves were strained. Pizarro grew impatient. Any solution was preferable to waiting! At last a messenger asked to see the Captain. Atahualpa excused himself to the strangers, but he was unable to make the rendezvous at the time and place arranged. The meeting would have to take place the next day at the city gates. But Pizarro knew that a battle postponed was a battle lost. His men were still inflamed with a mystic and warlike ardour, and he did not know if they could maintain it till the next day. The messenger returned to his master with an invitation to dine with Pizarro. The reply was not long in coming and, contrary to Pizarro’s fears, the Inca accepted the invitation: he would come that very evening and an unarmed escort would accompany him. It was a friendly visit that he meant to make to the foreign leader.

A friendly visit! Pizarro trembled with joy. He would receive this friendly démarche in his own way. He inspected his troops, checked the horses’ harness and the condition of the artillery. The powder was dry and the swords as sharp as razors. The horsemen pinched the noses of their beasts to prevent them from whinnying. The artificers loaded their guns. The arquebuses were in position. Everything was ready for the friendly banquet.

Evening came. A rustle of feathers and fabrics announced the arrival of the Inca. Three hundred Indians, dressed in red livery, led the procession, sweeping the earth with palm-leaves, so that no impurity would soil the feet of the royal cohorts. Next came slaves bearing golden vases and silver hammers. Then officers in blue uniform, their ears stretched by heavy charms—these were the orejone, who, recruited from the noblest families of Peru and educated in the art and practice of war, formed a corps d'élite and constituted the Inca’s pretorian guard. Finally, on the shoulders of his principal dignitaries came Atahualpa’s palanquin, decorated with parrot’s feathers and sheets of gold. The throne was of gold, too. Behind the royal palanquin came litters bearing the Emperor’s familiars. On this day Atahualpa’s clothing, which the day before had been modest, was sumptuous. On his head, besides the ritual headband, was a crown surmounted by black and white plumes, and around his neck was a collar of emeralds. On his breast he wore a golden pectoral, set with precious stones. His bearing was dignified and not a line of his face trembled. Sometimes, however, he cast upon the Peruvian
crowd the anxious look of one who was not accustomed to command or who doubted his own power, for he had held the sceptre so short a time. The procession reached the Cajamarca square: it was empty. He penetrated the courtyard that lay before the palace: it was deserted. What a silence there was in this caravanserai, but lately alive with voices! Then the Inca leaned towards his courtiers and asked them: "Where are the strangers?"

How were the pieces on the chess-board placed? Atahualpa was in the palace courtyard with six hundred unarmed Peruvians. Pizarro and his men were posted inside the palace. The Spanish army was coiled up in neighbouring buildings. Ruminagüi and his five thousand Indians surrounded Cajamarca. The Spanish troops and those of Ruminagüi only awaited the signal from their respective masters to come into action. Two war-chiefs were about to embrace, but this was the kiss of Judas. Hidden behind the scenes, the soldiers only awaited this signal to invade the stage and begin the slaughter. Who would give the signal? Alas! It was to be a priest, Vicente de Valverde.

With a crucifix in one hand and the Bible in the other, Father de Valverde left the palace and came face to face with Atahualpa. The silence became even deeper, if that were possible. Valverde began to speak. A lesson in catechism, to begin: the mystery of the Trinity, the creation of Heaven and Earth, original sin, Christ's redemption. Next a lesson in politics: the Pope, St. Peter's successor, had shared the world between the Christian princes and had allotted Peru to the Emperor Charles the Fifth. Finally, an ultimatum: if Atahualpa refused to submit willingly to Pizarro, who was Charles' representative, he would be forced to do so. An interpreter translated the Dominican's discourse as it proceeded. The Inca was stupefied. What was this the stranger was saying about sharing out the world? All this land and all it contained had been conquered by his father and his ancestors; Huascar, his brother, had inherited it and he, Atahualpa, victor over Huascar, was now the lawful possessor. St. Peter had nothing to do with it. As for this god who was simultaneously single and triple, he had never heard of him. He knew only Pachacamac and, more distant in time, Viracocha, both of them emanations of the Sun, the Supreme God.

However, he asked only for information. How did this stranger-priest get his knowledge? 'From this book!' the Dominican retorted, holding out the Bible. Atahualpa took hold of it, turning it over and over in his hands. Doubtless he expected the book to speak to him, but the Bible remained silent and he threw
it to the ground. Outraged by such sacrilege, Valverde picked
the book up and retired in all haste into the palace. He went
to Francisco Pizarro, warned him of the perils that threatened
him—the fields were swarming with Indians, while the discussion
with this arrogant dog had proceeded—and advised him to take
the offensive. In advance he gave absolution to all the
Spaniards. ‘Salid á el—que yo os absuelvo.’

Then Pizarro waved a white scarf. It was the pre-arranged
signal, and from the top of the fortress a musket-shot answered.
At once the Spaniards leapt from their hiding-places crying:
‘Santiago! A ellos!’ The cannons roared. The cavalry dashed
into the square like a hurricane. The infantry advanced at the
charge, and in a few minutes the square and the palace court-
yard were occupied by the Spaniards with arms in their hands.
Terrified by the attack, the Peruvians recoiled. However, their
numerical superiority was crushing: five thousand of them had
just arrived, following the royal procession, but they were struck
with amazement. The lancers on horseback easily opened a
passage through the feeble crowd, and the arquebusiers fired
into the solid mass. Under the fire of the culverins the Peruvians
fell by hundreds. Desperate at being unarmed, the orejones
made a living rampart around the Inca with their bodies. The
Spanish soldiers struck at the gilded and plumed palanquin
with heavy sword-blows; it gave way and collapsed, and the
bearers, clinging to the handles, were beaten down. The Inca
was overturned and at his throat and breast he could feel the
points of the Spaniards’ swords.

But Pizarro ran up to Atahualpa, brushing aside the blows
that were aimed at the Emperor, and the hand to hand struggle
was so tight and the melee so furious that the captain was
wounded by his own soldiers. He seized the Inca’s long hair in
his bloody hand and, dragging him along like a bull on a rope,
placed the fallen monarch in a safe place. From this life that he
had saved, though by no means out of generosity, Pizarro
reckoned to draw the substance drop by drop. He would squeeze
this heathen till nothing more could be got from him.

While some of the cavalry pursued the fugitives, the rush for
the spoils began. The broken litters were searched, the corpses
(were there two or five thousand of them?) were rifled, and the
Peruvian camp was combed through to the least nook and
cranny. What a booty there was! Fabrics, gold and silver vessels,
furniture of precious wood, and finally (a windfall which the
victors did not expect) several hundreds of women who came
to make themselves willing prisoners. Gold and beautiful captives! This time the Conquistadors lived out their dream. Eight years of misery and one day of glory. The price of victory had been high, and the Caballeros de la Espada dorada could surrender themselves to it with joyful heart. They did not spare themselves.

Throughout the battle Ruminagui had remained at the post assigned to him by Atahualpa. His troops were placed at the entries to the defiles commanding the valley, and he awaited his master’s signal. But the roar of the artillery—the mountains vibrated to its echoes—and the furious gallop of the horses told Ruminagui that the game was up and that the signal would never come. The galloping came near. The clash of steel and the famous cry of the Spaniards, 'Santiago!' could already be heard. The Indian general was not going to be taken by surprise; he gathered his five thousand soldiers together and gave the order to retreat. From Cajamarca to Quito is 250 leagues and Ruminagui accomplished this stage without a break. Darkness favoured the flight of the Indian warriors and in the valley of Cajamarca there was nothing left but silence and shadows.

A FANTASTIC WAGER:
ATAHUALPA’S TREASURE

The Spaniards celebrated the victory of Cajamarca with an orgy. Pizarro alone kept a cool head. He had shut Atahualpa up in one of the most solid buildings in the city and a carefully selected guard kept watch on him, which seemed a pointless precaution since the royal captive accepted his lot with complete submissiveness. The gods had spoken: their will be done! Pizarro surrounded his prisoner with consideration. He could receive his ministers and his wives as he pleased, and the appearances of power were left him. But no one—neither Atahualpa nor Pizarro—was taken in, for the Inca knew that he was a hostage in the hands of a pitiless victor, and sooner or later he would have to pay.

The inhabitants of Cajamarca gradually restored their houses and the city came back to life as if nothing had happened. The Peruvian people, trained for several centuries to passive obedience, accepted the new situation without a murmur: for them it was a change of masters, that was all, and those of today were neither more nor less tender than those of yesterday. The
invaders' religion was not so very different from the old, but the Peruvians were surprised at the little relation between the conduct of the Spaniards and the ethics they preached. Under the Inca régime they were more faithful to moral laws, and more respectful, too, of other people's property and women. House visits and searches multiplied and soon there was not an object of value that had not been taken from the Peruvians and carried to the Spanish camp. Everything was confiscated except their working tools. But that was not enough. Pizarro wanted to send Charles the most formidable 'fifth' that had ever crossed the sea. He meant to surpass Cortés and to make Peru eclipse Mexico, and it was with this in view that he kept Atahualpa in reserve. The room in which the Inca was imprisoned was seven yards long by five yards wide, and Pizarro invited Atahualpa, as ransom for his liberty, to fill his room with gold. To what height? The Inca raised an arm: six feet. A line was traced on the wall, making a block of gold of 70 cubic yards. Such was the fantastic wager that the Peruvian monarch undertook. If there was not enough gold, it would be completed with silver.

The Inca's messengers set out at once, for the whole Empire had to be prospected from Quito to Cuzco. They hurried, for Pizarro was pressed for time. In order to go quickly they borrowed litters: they covered ten miles an hour, for they were carried at a run by porters who were constantly relayed. In emergency, the porters handed over to the *chasquis*—the Inca's couriers—who were echeloned along the imperial roads. Atahualpa's envoys had quipous in their hands, the coloured cords of which translated the sovereign's orders. The wheels of the Inca system were well oiled, and no one disputed the ruler's will.

The period of two months fixed by Pizarro expired. The heap of gold rose, but the agreed height had not been reached. The Inca smiled. A little patience! Was it not enough that all the roads converging on Cajamarca were scoured by litters that bent beneath the weight of the precious vessels? There was no hurry. But that was not Pizarro's view. Almagro had just arrived with 150 men and 84 horses, and Almagro was very greedy. He demanded his share and would not be content with promises! Pizarro lost his temper. He had some excellent news to tell the Inca. Hernando de Soto, who had left with the advance-guard for Cuzco, had contacted Huascar, and although prisoner, the legitimate son of Huayna-Capac had not renounced his rights to the paternal throne. He too had promised the Spaniards to
repurchase his crown at the highest price. It was not to the height of a man, but to the roof and beyond that Huascar agreed to fill the room at Cajamarca. The blow struck home and Atahualpa ceased to smile. A few days later Huascar was smothered in his prison at Cuzco on Atahualpa’s orders. Before dying, he voiced these prophetic words: ‘I have been king of this land for only a little while. But that traitor my brother will not be king for longer than I.’

July 1533. The limit fixed by Atahualpa had been reached. The Inca’s room was filled with gold and silver treasure. Pizarro was in possession of a fortune that no European sovereign or banker ever had in his coffers: 52,000 silver marks, and 1,326,000 gold pesos. This heap of metal in 1950 would have represented about £1,225,000 or $3,700,000 on face value! Pizarro proceeded to divide this enormous booty. First of all about £1,100,000 for the King of Spain—a ‘fifth’ that strangely surpassed the true fraction, but Pizarro wished to strike a real blow. Did Charles the Fifth like gold? He would be heaped with it.

Hernando Pizarro had a right to £28,000, Hernando de Soto to £14,000, while for the cavalry there remained £8,000 and the infantry £4,000. As for Francisco Pizarro, he allotted himself Atahualpa’s gold plate at a value of over £70,000.

Atahualpa had paid, but was he going to recover, if not his throne, at least his freedom, which seemed only just? But the Conquistadors’ ideas of justice were otherwise. Although a prisoner and ruined, the Inca was a threat to Spanish authority. In the eyes of the Peruvians he was the Son of the Sun, the last god of the Inca pantheon, the heir of Tahuantinsuyu. It was not enough to have conquered his kingdom, emptied his treasury and subdued his army; the man himself must be destroyed.

What is easier than to prove the guilt of an innocent man when it has been decided to condemn him? A tribunal was set up. Witnesses were called. The most aggressive was a Peruvian, Filipillo, who was employed by the Spaniards as an interpreter. He accused his master of conspiring with Ruminagui. Atahualpa shrugged his shoulders, for the accusation was absurd. Guarded as he was, how could he communicate with his former general at Quito, hundreds of miles away? He knew only too well the motives that inspired Filipillo, for the traitor was enamoured of the Emperor’s favourite and the death of the Inca would favour his amours. But the tribunal took Filipillo’s evidence into consideration. Rebel to the King of Spain, Atahualpa was also accused of having usurped the throne of Peru, assassinated his
The Death of the Inca

brother, practised polygamy and sacrificed to false gods. Father de Valverde was not one of the least strenuous in demanding the death of the Inca. He was prepared to sign the sentence, if that were necessary. Doubtless, he had not forgotten the public affront he had received from Atahualpa in the Cajamarca square. Did one pardon the insults of a heathen hardened in his crimes? At last the verdict was given: the Indian monarch was to be burned alive. At the last moment he was offered baptism, and he agreed, and thanks to this he acquired the privilege of being strangled.

In that same square at Cajamarca where, nine months earlier, Atahualpa had appeared in his gilded and plumed palanquin, a gibbet was raised. Accompanied by Valverde and Francisco Pizarro, and followed by a large crowd, came the Inca. His name was now Juan de Atahualpa, for his patron saint was the Baptist. The new Christian was tied to a stake. A running noose was placed around his neck and pulled tight. Fixing his eyes upon Pizarro, the last Inca emperor, the Son of the Sun, died by the garotte.

Francisco Pizarro entered Cajamarca on November 15, 1532; Atahualpa perished by the garotte on August 29, 1533. In nine months Pizarro and his 168 soldiers had mastered a territory which was soon to stretch between the Pacific Ocean and the Cordillera of the Andes from the 2nd Parallel north to the 32nd Parallel south, an empire that was as great as Spain, France, Germany and Austria-Hungary put together, and inhabited by twelve million people. It was a highly-developed civilisation, with two centuries of Inca rule behind it, with warrior traditions, social levels that seemed fixed for eternity, and political leaders who were rich in wisdom. All of this was ground to dust in nine months by a band of Spaniards. A former swineherd had seized the King-God by his hair and put him under arrest. His punishment had been to erect the most enormous pile of gold that had ever been seen, and as a reward he had been strangled. The mournful crowd that witnessed the crumbling of its fatherland and its gods made no attempt to stop what seemed to them inexorable. It would have been so easy to toss this pack of conquerors down the slopes of the Andean sierra, but they preferred to let themselves be devoured.

On reflection, Pizarro had everything to bring his tour de force
to success: first of all, gunpowder, horses and well-tempered blades. Steel against stones. The surprise effect of 'new weapons' is not a recent invention, for to terrify an adversary with 'modern' machines is a procedure that dates from man's earliest battles. Further, Pizarro was preceded by a legend, that of the avenging white god to whom he had every similarity. Finally, he arrived at the right moment: Huascar and Atahualpa were disputing the Empire and the fruit for which the two brothers were reaching fell into Pizarro's hands. The two Incas died and the Spaniard was master of the situation.

But Pizarro's principal ally was the Inca régime itself. This country regarded itself as the world: Tihuanantisuga—the four quarters of the world! In the Inca universe there was no place for a fifth. Space and time did not exist for the Lords of Peru. The word 'tomorrow' was unknown to the people, and laws and statistics were for eternity. The machine, which was constructed for perpetual motion, was well oiled—too well, for all Pizarro had to do to stop it was to capture Atahualpa and so block the controlling lever. The Peruvian legislator had not foreseen this coup de force, which was a surprising lacuna in a system based upon foresight. Yet, would it not have been sacrilege even to consider the assassination of God when calculating probabilities? The weakness of the régime was that by striking at the head the entire organisation crumbled. Separated from the Inca the officials could no longer administrate and the élite were disorientated. Certainly the people remained, but they had been taught only one thing, to obey, and they obeyed. Twelve million Peruvians, but ten million robots. While some thousands of upper-class subjects devoted themselves to chosen tasks—surgeons practised trepanning and knew how to use cocaine, architects designed aqueducts and roads, and astronomers studied the stars—the people, in festival clothing, went to plough or to harvest singing the praises of the Sun. They had been taught that work was gaiety. This amorphous and sad people worked with joy. For ten generations, ten million Indians had heard it said: 'The Inca knows all. The Inca cannot be mistaken. The Inca is immortal.' But suddenly the monotonous voice was stilled. The Inca was dead. What could they do when they only knew how to obey? Ten million slaves held out their wrists for Spanish chains.
CHAPTER XIII

War Between the Conquistadors

THE day following the execution of Atahualpa, a solemn funeral was given him. Father de Valverde celebrated mass for the dead and all the Spaniards surrounded the catafalque in full uniform. It was a grandiose affair, to do honour simultaneously to the last Inca emperor and to the new convert. While the Conquistadors chanted the Requiem, the Dominican priest gave absolution. Pizarro was chief mourner and wore a black sash across his cuirasse; a crepe veil hung from the hilt of his sword.

When night was come and Atahualpa’s remains had been interred in Christian fashion, a band of the Inca’s faithful friends exhumed him, taking the body in the greatest secrecy to Quito, his native land. Ruminagui took possession of the royal corpse and summoned the Indian people together. An Inca ceremonial followed the Church funeral and for the second time Atahualpa was laid in the earth. A pit had been dug beside his father, Huayna-Capac, and one by one the dead man’s companions stabbed themselves over the tomb of their master.

CUZCO, THE INCA ROME

Freed from Atahualpa and Huascar, Pizarro gave thought to the choice of a successor—a symbolical successor, of course, for he needed an Inca prince at his side when he entered Cuzco. There were two candidates: Tupac, Atahualpa’s brother, and Manco, Huascar’s half-brother. The latter lived in Quito, the other at Cuzco. Pizarro opted for Manco. He welcomed Huascar’s half-brother to his camp and, in exchange for his support, promised to have him crowned at Cuzco. The alliance was concluded and nothing more stood in the way of continuing the adventure.
To go from Cajamarca to Cuzco, the Spaniards took the great road that connects the north and south across the high Andean plateaus. This was 'the Inca Road.' Starting from Pasto, it passed through Quito, Tunipampa, Cajamarca, Huamachuco, Vilcas and Cuzco, skirted Lake Titicaca and plunged further still towards the south. Built of hard mortar, it easily bore the weight of armed cavalry and cannon. Almost wholly straight, the Inca Road was adapted to the nature of the terrain, with steps for ascending mountains, hanging bridges for crossing rivers, and embankments for crossing marshes. Nothing was lacking, not even signposts. The surface was smooth and polished and not an ounce of mud spoilt its impeccable cleanliness.

The Spaniards were astonished. How could they avoid comparing these concreted roads with the dusty tracks of Old Castile? Those who had fought in Italy recalled the Roman roads. What were they compared with the royal arteries of Peru? Pizarro was beginning to discover one of the secrets of Inca power. In order to centralise the administration of this enormous empire—from Colombia to Chile—a strong network of roads was necessary. The political system rested on a communication problem, and the Incas had solved it with good roads, marked out with hostleries and relays, and parties of porters always ready to start. Briefly, meticulously calculated communications enabled the Emperor to send and receive messages, for the administration to distribute merchandise, and the police to make its contacts in a minimum of time. An order from the Inca took ten days to go from Cuzco to Quito, a distance of about 1,250 miles. The chasquis ran in uninterrupted relays, day and night. The Peruvian roads were the ever taut and vibrating nerves that transmitted to the imperial brain the least quiver of this great docile body, the communistic Inca state.

It was November 15, 1533, and two hours before sundown. The Spaniards were within sight of Cuzco, and it was exactly a year to the day since they entered Cajamarca. Yesterday they had crossed the frontiers of the Empire; today they were at the heart of that Empire. Everything, in fact, converged on Cuzco: defiles, roads and canals, as well as thoughts and prayers. Cuzco was for the Peruvians what Rome was for the Latins: the economic, political and religious capital. The skyline is severe, vegetation is sparse and the sky ice-blue, for here we are at a height of nearly 11,000 feet—the same as Etna! The landscape is mineral: quartz, schist, slate. Why did the early Incas choose
this stony valley for their capital? It was as if the precursors needed a combination of space and dryness.

The ramparts of Avila could be completely contained within the shadow of the cyclopean walls that surrounded Cuzco. Nevertheless, they opened to Pizarro and the Spaniards entered. With arquebuses on their shoulders and swords in their hands, they filed by. Here were the districts of Cuzco, that of 'the puma's tail' and that of 'the silver snake.' Here was the fortress of Saxahuaman and its three squat towers. Here was the Temple of the Sun: four edifices in gold and silver, encircled by a triple granite wall. Inside was the image of the sun in gold, and around it the mummies of dead Incas seated in golden chairs. Is it surprising that the Temple of the Sun, or Coricancha, was also known as 'the place of gold'? Here was the 'square of rejoicing' or parade-ground, at the moment when Jesus died in Jerusalem, the High Priest of the Sun, on this very square, held out to the sun a bowl filled with fermented maize. Flagellants and castrated monks circled there slowly, for the rites had not changed for fifteen hundred years.

The day the Spaniards entered Cuzco was also that of a great religious festival, and in the streets of the Peruvian city Pizarro's soldiers ran into sacred processions. Groups of priests bore massive golden idols on shields, accompanied by dancers in black robes. The flagellants flogged themselves until the blood ran. Oro y sangre!—just as at Seville, and, what with the young boys rhythmically stamping the soil, the penitents and the pasas, the Spaniards felt that they were once again at the Fiesta del Corpus. But the illusion did not last long. This heathen masquerade was an insult to the True Faith, and the Andalusians remembered the Virgin of the Sorrows and her shining manton. With swords raised, they plunged into the crowd. The Indians replied with stones and javelins, and though superior in numbers, the Peruvians were soon crushed by the fury of the Spaniards. The canticle to the Sun was dead, and nothing could be heard but the clash of armour, the crack of arquebuses and the cry of the wounded. But Pizarro's men were seeking gold rather than blood, and their hands reached out for the idols. The sack of Cuzco began. Palaces, temples and houses were put to pillage. A mad covetousness possessed the Spaniards, and although it was not long since they had received their share of Atahualpa's treasure and they were rich, it was not enough. They proceeded hurriedly to the distribution of the booty, and no soldier on campaign had ever received such fantastic pay. The Conquistadors were
embarrassed by their fortune. The misers stowed it away in hiding places, but the wastrels staked it on games of chance. On a throw of the dice they chanced what would have given them an income for life. A cavalier named Leguizano received as his share a massive golden disc representing the image of the Sun-God. He staked it, on a night of orgy, on a game of dobladilla and lost it. He was ruined. But his ill-luck became proverbial: *Juega el Sol antes que amanezca*, which means 'to gamble the sun before sunrise.'

Cuzco, the imperial city, 'every street, every fortress and every stone of which was regarded as a sacred mystery' was no more. Without further delay, Pizarro meant to make a Spanish city of what had been the Inca capital, for the conqueror was also an architect and he himself drew up the plan of the new ciudad. Wide arteries replaced the squarely laid-out streets; monasteries and convents arose out of the ruins of four hundred Inca temples; the Cathedral of Santo Domingo rose upon the sanctuary of Viracocha and the statues of saints were set up in the niches reserved for the golden tears shed by the Sun. Miradores and balconies adorned the cubic dwellings of Peruvian nobles. But this work of reconstruction was not done in a day, though manual labour was abundant. Those who had been able to haul the gigantic blocks of the Saxahuaman fortress to the top of the hill could easily cut the stone for Christian churches, and it mattered little to this passive people whether they worked for the Inca or for the King of Spain.

**THE FACT OF RIOBAMBA**

While Pizarro was taking stock of his victory, surprising news reached the Spanish camp. Pedro de Alvarado had landed at Puerto Viejo on the coast of Ecuador at the head of five hundred soldiers, two hundred horses and a large detachment of Indian mercenaries. Alvarado, Cortés' second-in-command, and hero of Tacuba! Pizarro learned through his informers that Alvarado was moving upon Quito by forced marches, and he learned at the same time—for bad news never comes singly—that Ruminagui had gathered together a large force and was preparing for revenge. Quito had become the centre of Peruvian resistance. This double threat had to be countered, so Almagro and Belalcazar were ordered to go and meet Ruminagui's Indians
and Alvarado's Spaniards. The two detachments set out northwards.

Pedro de Alvarado was not in Ecuador by accident. He was continuing a triumphant march. Sent on reconnaissance southward by Cortés, he left Mexico with a few intrepid men. Cutting a path through the fearful Chiapas bush with their swords, the little troop reached and discovered Guatemala. Alvarado had always loved honours, so he proclaimed himself Governor of Guatemala. But the Emperor was informed of Alvarado's prowess and confirmed the title the Conquistador he had given himself. Encouraged by the prince's favour, Alvarado asked for permission to push southwards further still, and it was given him. He was conceded a zone of activity outside that given to Pizarro, but these boundaries were vague, for how could the administration record on parchment the frontiers of an almost unknown country? To permit Alvarado to set foot in Peru was to give him carte blanche. Alvarado, moreover, regarded it as such.

Belalcazar had first of all to face up to Ruminagui, and this engagement took place at the gates of Quito. The Indian chief was not made of the same stuff as Cuauhtemoc; nevertheless, he was the incarnation of the resistance. The ranks had been broken, the Incas dead or imprisoned, and the élites had become powerless. The figure of Ruminagui stood out against this melancholy background like a warrior upright among the dead. It was no longer the dynasty but himself who was the incarnation of the fatherland. There was no need for him to wear the royal headband in order to be king.

Ruminagui was a simple soldier and not particularly concerned with the niceties. His job was fighting, but it did not prevent him from giving expression to a certain savage humour. As the Spaniards were approaching Quito, the Indian whispered to his wives: 'The Christians are coming. You will be able to amuse yourselves.' It was a good joke and the women broke into laughter. But this access of unseasonable gaiety cost them their lives. Ruminagui beheaded them all.

Faced with 12,000 Indians, Belalcazar lined up his 200 infantry and 80 cavaliers. Military science was once more to have the better of numbers. Belalcazar divided his troops into small mobile groups able to move very quickly from one place to another, and Ruminagui's army was tormented as if by swarms of wasps. Unnerved by these attacks, it lost its cohesion. The Indian guerrilleros were attacked from all sides at once and, not
knowing from whence the blows would come, were unable to parry them in time and were demoralised. Confused, they turned about, trying to face in every direction, and exhausted themselves in useless counter-attacks. Soon they were overtaken by panic, and profiting by their disorder, Belalcazar gently thrust them towards the plain. This tactic, invented by Cortés, had stood the test of experience. In the plain the cavalry could be deployed and the adversary surrounded.

When the Spanish captain judged that the Peruvians were sufficiently exhausted, he launched his horses upon them, and a few cannon shots ended in terrifying them. Ruminagui's furious exhortations were lost among the groans of his soldiers, and it was in vain that he shouted to them that the Spaniards were men like the rest, because no one believed him: these creatures that shone in the sunlight and ran on four feet could not be other than gods. They controlled the thunder, and to prove that they were right an unexpected ally lent Belalcazar a hand: Cotopaxi. By a coincidence that the Spaniards regarded as providential, the volcano, which had been quiescent a long time, suddenly began to erupt. How could the Indians doubt now that the strangers were of divine origin? They dropped their arms and fled under a rain of scoria and ash. Ruminagui, followed by his officers, abandoned Quito, and, in a final outburst of anger, set fire to Huayna-Capac's palace. Then he disappeared towards the northern mountains.

While Belalcazar was fighting before Quito, Almagro was searching the coast for Pedro de Alvarado. Cortés' companion was elusive. He had certainly been seen to land at Puerto Viejo and take the direction of the mountains. But how could a handful of men be found in the dense arcabucos of the virgin equatorial forests? Almagro turned about and made for Quito and arrived there in time to help Belalcazar reduce Ruminagui's resistance. While he was collaborating in the common victory and 'cleaning up' the suburbs of the city, Almagro helped himself to his share of the booty. Then, leaving Belalcazar master and governor of Quito, he turned back towards Cuzco.

Ecuador is a staircase rising from the Pacific Ocean towards the summits of the Andes, that project like peninsulas into the sky. On the last step of this gigantic staircase stands a city, Quito, the capital of the clouds, the future 'Light of America.' Now that Ruminagui and his men had evacuated it, Quito was as sinister as the crater of a volcano, but still alive with secret life, like a nest of condors. The Spaniards advanced step by step through
the deserted streets. Temples, towers and tombs, and Belalcazar already dreamed of planting crosses on the cupolas. Meanwhile he gave the name San Francisco de Quito to the Holy City of the Schyris.

Alvarado was not lost. He was climbing the Ecuador staircase, step by step. Across the Cordillera he was pursuing one of the hardest journeys that man had ever accomplished. On the frozen tracks of the 'avenue of volcanoes,' Alvarado's Spaniards staggered along. They killed their horses for food, and sucked snow to quench their thirst. Sixty died from the cold, among them a soldier and his wife and two small daughters; unable to do anything to succour them, he took them in his arms and died with them. The plutonian fury of Cotopaxi and Chimborazo did not spare the little tottering troop. Heavy clouds of smoke, the roar of explosions, and a rain of sulphur completed the décor.

At last, after crossing dizzy passes and nearly breaking their necks a hundred times, the Spaniards came out into the plain of Riobamba. They were repaid for their pains. Only yesterday they had thought they were in Hell, and today they trod the green pastures of Paradise. The province of Riobama is in the middle of the Sierra, in an immense valley enclosed by two branches of the Cordillera of the Andes. It is a land of eternal spring: roses, lilac, tulips and the same carnations as in Andalusia. Waterfalls, birds, fruits, and such a profusion of waters, colours and perfumes that the Conquistadors were intoxicated. Why go further when they could set themselves up in this wonderful province? A shower of javelins and stones brought them back to reality. The inhabitants of Riobamba were not going to let themselves be dispossessed. Sobered by the Indian attack, the Spaniards joined battle. In the front rank of the attackers were women with quivers on their shoulders, who were no less skilful than the men at drawing the bow. A battle such as the mythic record was fought out in the Ecuadorian plain between Spanish cavalry and female archers. Centaurs versus Amazons.

Almagro had scarcely arrived at Cuzco when he learned of Alvarado's presence sixty miles from Quito. Belalcazar received the same information, and each of them, at the head of a column, made for Riobamba. Alvarado awaited his compatriots resolutely. Would he accept battle? It was a chancy business. He had been able to repulse the offensive by the people of Riobamba, but what could his weary troops do, faced with the completely fresh troops of Almagro and Belalcazar? The two captains them-
selves were hesitant, for though they certainly wanted to turn Alvarado out, it must be at the smallest cost. Soon the three columns were face to face and the leaders made contact. The conditions of battle were regularised as if in a duel, but as they were about to draw swords, the combatants changed their minds. Spanish blood was too precious to waste. Instead of forcing Alvarado's expulsion by arms, why not buy it? Almagro offered 100,000 pesos on condition that Alvarado should undertake to return to the coast and set up his government again in Guatemala. Alvarado agreed to the deal, for he had nothing to lose. In fact, although he did not say so, during his perilous journey from Tumbez to Riobamba he had made a fine collection of gold and emeralds. A fortune was worth more to him than power! It was intended that the 100,000 pesos would be paid him by Francisco Pizarro himself. Having agreed, Belalcazar returned to Quito. As for Alvarado and Almagro, they made for Pachacamac, where Pizarro was to be found.

There was no fratricidal battle. At least, not yet.

PRELUDE TO STRIFE

Francisco Pizarro had paid his 100,000 pesos to Pedro de Alvarado. A bargain made and a bargain kept. With his wallet stuffed, oiled with good words, the 'Sun-God' returned to Guatemala; a serious danger had been eliminated. Pizarro could turn his thought to construction, for now his essential preoccupation seemed to be building.

First of all he founded a port on the Peruvian coast. He gave it the name of his native town: Trujillo. Cortés had founded Medellín in the same way. But, more prudent than his model, Pizarro decided to establish the future capital of Peru away from its predecessor. It was not good to instal new gods in old sanctuaries. After a minute search, Pizarro chose a site in the valley of Rimac, about six miles from the sea, between the future port of Callao and the mouth of the river Rimac. Callao would give access to the Pacific and the river Rimac would lead to the interior. Excellent from the commercial and political points of view, the place selected by Pizarro was healthy and the climate reminiscent of Andalusia. Founded on the day of Epiphany, the new city was named Ciudad de los Reyes: the City of the Kings. Later, it was called Lima.

Was Pizarro so absorbed by his new vocation that he would
lose sight of his responsibilities as leader? He was building on soil still scarcely secured and could hardly have any illusions about it. His two brothers, Juan and Gonzalo, were at Cuzco, where they were on bad terms with Almagro. Belalcazar was at Quito, at grips with rebel native elements. His third brother, Hernando, was in Spain, and he himself was on the shores of the Pacific. They were indeed far apart. What confidence, moreover, could they have in the Inca Manco, who must be champing at the bit in his Cuzco palace? Was Pizarro's place really in the valley of Rimac, among the Indian masons, where his cuirasse was dimmed, not with the dust of battle, but with the dust of a builder's yard? Did he really think that the war was ended?

In the midst of all this, Hernando Pizarro returned from Spain. He had seen the Emperor, and the gold of Peru had had its effect. The conquerors of gold must be recompensed! Hernando drew from his doublet a bundle of parchments that contained Charles' gifts. Francisco Pizarro was named Marquis d'Altabillos and all the north of Peru was assigned him under the name of New Castile. Almagro received the south of Peru, or New Toledo. Father de Valverde—in gratitude, doubtless, for his attitude towards Atahualpa!—was named Bishop of Cuzco, and Hernando Pizarro was made a Knight of Santiago. They congratulated one another and embraced, yet the Emperor's decisions contained the germ of future discord. Where did the south of Peru end and the north begin? The day of the geographers had not yet come, and Almagro and Pizarro were to dig their frontiers with their swords.

First of all, to whom did Cuzco belong? Almagro claimed its possession. Juan and Gonzalo Pizarro contested his claim. They were, in any case, already at daggers drawn. Warned by his men, Francisco Pizarro returned in haste from Lima to Cuzco, torn from his town-planner's dreams, The two partners fell into each other's arms. They had known one another for more than thirty years. They had fought together on the battle-fields of Italy. Were they going to alienate their common heritage and break an old friendship for the sake of a misunderstanding? Pizarro promised never to undertake anything against Almagro, and Almagro promised to leave the field free to Pizarro for a radius of 130 leagues from Cuzco. It was understood that he would look further south for a province to his liking; if he did not find it, he would share power with Pizarro. In order to give divine sanction to their oath, the two Conquistadors crossed hands over the consecrated host. Addressing himself to the Holy
Sacrament, Almagro exclaimed in a loud voice: Lord, if I break my oath, may you confound me and punish me in my flesh and in my soul! After this spectacular ceremony, Almagro and Pizarro separated. The former set off southwards, and the latter, after confiding the government of Cuzco and the care of Manco to his brothers Juan and Gonzalo, returned to Lima. A rupture between Almagro and Pizarro had been narrowly avoided.

Several months passed. Hernando Pizarro was on a journey and Almagro gave no sign of life, The Marquis—for Francisco Pizarro was known by this title from now on—gave all his attention to the building of Lima. He seemed to have lost his taste for fighting. One passion consumed him: a passion for stone. Over this city that was taking shape and could already show miradores, and churches with over-elaborate facades, and palaces with heavy doors cut from equatorial woods, he brooded lovingly. It was 'his' city.

Grave events were about to tear the Marquis from his peaceful labours once more. The Inca Manco, who had succeeded in evading the surveillance of the brothers Pizarro, had fled from Cuzco, and had raised the standard of revolt. In a few weeks he had raised an army of 200,000 Indians, and then, sweeping back on Cuzco at the head of his troops, the Peruvian prince attacked the city. Hernando Pizarro, who had been able to rejoin the besieged garrison in time, took command of the Spanish forces beside Juan and Gonzalo. As to the Marquis, he was blocked at Lima, for the Indians had cut the communications between the two cities. The honour of Spain was in the hands of his three brothers. A prisoner at Lima, and aware of the threat that weighed upon Spanish Peru, the Marquis asked for help from the governors of the Islands and of Terra Firma.

Hernando Pizarro was determined to do everything to break the Indian encirclement of Cuzco. Cost what it might, he had to maintain himself in the city; if not, he and his men were lost. The siege began with a bombardment of flaming arrows: Cuzco caught fire, except for its stone buildings. The crux of the battle was in the Saxahuaman fortress and the colossal blockhouse was occupied turn and turn about by Spaniards and Peruvians. For several months the adversaries strove against these enormous walls, that were like the armoured ram of an ancient ship. The keenness of the native soldiers amazed the Spanish fighters, but little by little the fighting turned to the advantage of Pizarro. Hernando eventually succeeded in dislodging the Peruvians from Saxahuaman and from there directed
and orientated the operations. He had the sorrow of seeing his brother Juan die beside him, struck on the head by a stone from a sling. Shortly afterwards the last Peruvian defender, his face covered with soil, threw himself from the top of the fortress, a theatrical suicide that heralded the defeat of Manco. The Inca raised the siege and retreated southwards. Hernando Pizarro had only to open his arms to victory. But another than he was to seize it in passing; It was one whom none expected: Almagro.

Informed of what was happening at Cuzco, Almagro interrupted his expedition and went to the aid of Hernando Pizarro. This apparently generous gesture concealed a treacherous intent. The love that the Marquis had for Lima, Almagro gave to Cuzco. He was not flying to the aid of the Pizarros, but to the conquest of Cuzco. He was not upset to find the city which he had had to abandon in the midst of its rebirth burning and mutilated; like the Marquis, he wanted it to be new. But before becoming its master, he had to reduce the last efforts of Peruvian resistance, that is to say, to complete what Hernando Pizarro had begun.

To be taken in the rear by Almagro’s detachment was something Manco did not expect. At the exit from Cuzco he fell into a Spanish ambush. He could do no more and sought only to disengage. His strategic retreat became a disorderly flight, and for a long while Almagro’s soldiers gave chase to the unfortunate prince, who found refuge only in the desert mountains at the sources of the Amazon, where he announced to his people that the gods had abandoned him. The game was up. To a chorus of cries and groans, the Inca’s companions and his last partisans surrendered to death, and a great silence fell upon the last exploit of Huayna-Capac’s grandson.

Almagro entered Cuzco and demanded of the Pizarro brothers that the city be handed over to himself. It belonged to him, he claimed. But had he forgotten his oath over the host? Almagro brought a new fact to bear: patents that he had received from His Majesty assuring his possession of Cuzco. Hernando and Gonzalo did not see things thus; Cuzco, in their view, was the fief of the Pizarros. Beside himself with anger, Almagro had Hernando and Gonzalo arrested and thrown into prison. Then he proclaimed himself Governor and gave orders that a Te Deum be celebrated in the cathedral in his honour.

Conqueror of the Inca, free now of the brothers of Pizarro, and master of Cuzco, Almagro had only to defy one last adversary in order to complete his triumph: the Marquis himself. Was his ambition going to lead him to take up arms against the friend
of his youth? But youth and friendship counted for little when faced with so exciting a prospect: the possession of Peru and its gold. With clenched teeth, his mind and heart empty of memories, Almagro began his march upon Lima. Gonzalo Pizarro remained behind bars; Hernando, on the other hand, went with the troops. Did Almagro think that he might be of some use to him as a hostage or plenipotentiary?

Once again things were arranged peacefully, thanks to the intervention of a priest, Fray Francisco de Bobadilla, Provincial of the Order of Merced. This ecclesiastic fixed an interview between Almagro and Francisco Pizarro at a place called Chinche. The two Conquistadors met cordially and embraced, as in the days of their youth. The basis of an agreement was set out. Almagro would remain Governor of Cuzco until the Emperor made his decision known, and Hernando Pizarro was freed on condition that he returned to Spain.

Then the Marquis invited his friend to supper, but the feast was cut short, for in the middle of the meal a cavalier ran up to Almagro and whispered in his ear. Gonzalo had escaped from prison and had organised an ambush to assassinate Almagro. The latter had time only to run to his horse and leap into the saddle. His horse's hoofs made the stones fly from the road. He turned round and waved his hand to the Marquis. This was goodbye, for they were never to meet again.

The next day Francisco Pizarro received a despatch from the Emperor. The two captains were maintained in their possessions, which meant that the Marquis was master of Cuzco. Almagro had to be dislodged. Sick at heart—for it was without pleasure that he resolved to do so—Pizarro ordered his brother Hernando to march upon Cuzco. Almagro accepted the challenge: he would not surrender the Holy City of the Incas to the Marquis, but he did not feel strong enough to fight. He was old—sixty-three years!—and his sword seemed heavy. He gave command of his troops to Orgoñez and himself took refuge on the heights overlooking Cuzco. From there he would be able to follow the fortunes of the battle, for the dice were cast and the fratricidal war, so long delayed, was about to begin.

THE DUEL OF LAS SALINAS

It was indeed a duel that was fought between Hernando Pizarro's Spaniards and those of Almagro. A quarrel was being
settled, but the fighting was not courteous, and Almagro's six hundred men recruited by Pizarro fought like dogs. Had they forgotten that they served the same king and that they were born, almost all of them, in Estremadura?

The battle took place in the plain of Las Salinas, thus named because of the salt marshes to be found there, some two miles or so from Cuzco. As colonel Hernando had chosen Pedro de Valdivia, who was later the conqueror of the Araucanians. Ortega was surrounded by gentlemen who had been proved by experience, including Francisco de Chaves and Juan Tello. The two armies confronted one another furiously. Grouped upon the hills, the Peruvians jeered as they tasted the unexpected pleasure of seeing their enemies shoot, charge and disembowel one another as if they were attacking Indians. It was, indeed, their turn to watch the circus. Soon Almagro's soldiers lost ground. They had more lances than the enemy, but fewer firearms, and it was gunpowder that forced the decision. Almagro's army fell back upon the mountains. Ortega, wounded in the head by a shot from an arquebus, was captured by an ambush just when he was preparing to rally his troops. Succumbing to numbers, he surrendered his sword to one of Hernando Pizarro's officers. But Pizarro's order was 'No quarter!', not even for a gentleman, and as he was dismounting from his horse, Ortega received a shot at point-blank and collapsed. The leader's death precipitated a rout. Almagro's game was up.

Was this the same Almagro who, full of arrogance, had forced conditions upon the Pizarro brothers not so long before? Tied up like a sack on the back of a mule he made a pitiful entry into Cuzco. He had lost all pride and implored the victor's pardon, but Hernando Pizarro was not disposed towards indulgence. He cast Almagro into prison and straightway ordered his prosecution. Supercilious lawyers sifted Almagro's slightest deeds and gestures from the day of his departure from Panama, and they had no difficulty in providing proofs of his guilt. Almagro had opposed the Marquis's will with arms in his hand; he had set himself up as master of Cuzco; he had led his army, 'flags flying,' into territory within the jurisdiction of Francisco Pizarro. Accused of high treason, Almagro was condemned to death. When the sentence was announced, the prisoner lost the little dignity that still remained to him and collapsed at Hernando Pizarro's feet, begging Hernando to spare him so ignominious an end. Had he not given Hernando his freedom, when he had been in his power? And going further back into the past, Almagro
recalled the part he had played in the Pizarros’ fortunes. But Hernando was inflexible, and in an icy voice he advised Almagro to commend his soul to God. ‘How should I, man and sinner, not fear death when Jesus Christ himself feared it!’ Did this infirm and dishonoured old man love life so much that he should make this miserable confession!

Almagro—who had been known as ‘Don Diego’—received the last sacraments. Earlier he had dictated his testament, naming as his heirs the Emperor and his son Diego. Then a rope was passed around his neck and Pizarro’s companion died, garrotted, like Atahualpa. His corpse was then dragged into the square at Cuzco and the executioner cut off its head with an axe and presented it to the people. But the next day solemn obsequies were performed for Almagro in the chapel of the monastery of La Merced, and Hernando Pizarro was the chief mourner. The Peruvians, who witnessed the execution and the funeral, were stupefied. Yesterday Almagro’s head rolled on the block, and today Hernando Pizarro intoned the Requiem with tears streaming down his face.

THE END OF THE MARQUISS

The Marquis learned of Almagro’s execution with profound distress. He had not asked for this! But his distress was modified by a feeling of real relief, for the pact that had been concluded fifteen years before was now broken and he was free. Without fear or reflection he could devote himself to the completion of his work.

It was 1541 and the Marquis was 66 years old. He had definitely abandoned military expeditions in order to realise his true passion for construction. Lima had became an important city. Other cities had risen too: Huamanga, Chuquisaca, Arequipa. . . . In the sumptuous palace that was built to his plans in the middle of the Plaza Mayor at Lima, Francisco Pizarro kept up the appearance of a king. Nevertheless, the master of Peru was ‘democratic,’ or at least pretended to be so, when he liked. He played tennis with his servants in his orange-planted patio. He walked the streets without escort, dressed in a black cape and wearing a white felt hat, with only a dagger at his belt. One day, passing along a river bank, he leapt into the water to save an Indian who was drowning. But he could also act as a sovereign. With age and the exercise of power, he
Queen Juana, mother of the Emperor Charles, about 1496
(Portrait by Juan de Flandes in the Thyssen Collection, Lugano)

Plate 10

Philip II, heir to Charles' empire (Portrait attributed to Anthony van Mor, in Earl Spencer's collection, Althorpe)
Bartolomé de Las Casas, the 'anti-Conquistador'

Pedro de la Gasca, victor over Gonzalo Pizarro and pacificer of Peru
had acquired a veritable grandeur. One had only to see him in the great hall of his palace, enveloped in his purple cloak or in the marten furs that Cortés had sent him from Mexico, to see this.

The Marquis's repugnance for war had become a certainty. Was he tired of arms or was it remorse? He built, he administered, he governed, but he no longer wished to conquer or to fight. He left this care to his lieutenants. Pedro de Candia was at Titicaca, Gonzalo Pizarro was exploring eastern Peru, and Pedro de Valdivia was continuing the conquest of Chile which Almagro had begun. As to Hernando Pizarro, he had gone back to Spain, but misfortune had overtaken him. Almagro's partisans at Court had convinced the Emperor of Hernando's felony, and he was to end his days in prison long after, a centenarian. Juan Pizarro had perished in the siege of Cuzco. The Marquis was alone.

A final conspiracy was being prepared in secret, and Diego Almagro, son of the executed man, was its leader. This half-breed—his mother was an Indian woman from Panama—had gathered behind him all the elements hostile to Francisco Pizarro. They were numerous, even when confined to Almagro's companions who burned to avenge his death. The Marquis's faithful friends had not failed to put him on guard against this threat, but the old leader scorned their warnings. He refused to take any precautions. More and more remote and withdrawn into himself, he pursued his imperial dream. Such disdain for death is indeed the sign that the Marquis was approaching those high solitary regions where the man-become-hero believes in his star and in it alone.

One June Sunday the Marquis had invited a few gentlemen among his friends to dinner, including the Bishop of Quito, Francisco de Chaves, and his lieutenant, Juan Velasquez. It was between noon and one o'clock, and through the open window an uproar reached the ears of the guests. The shouts became clearer: 'Death to the tyrant!' Who was the tyrant? None but Francisco Pizarro. About half a score of armed men stood outside the palace, under the command of an officer: Juan de Herrada, Diego Almagro's lieutenant. Very calmly the Marquis ordered all the exits to be closed, and retired to his rooms to change his red cloak for armour. Meanwhile, Francisco de Chaves attempted a parley. He half-opened the door, and Almagro's partisans burst into the palace. Chaves, who was run through by swords, groaned as he died: 'They do this even to their friends!' The conspirators raced for the stairs, reached the t
great hall and came to the Marquis's room. At the approach of the attacking party, Francisco Pizarro's familiars fled, leaping into the street through the windows, even including Juan Velasquez who, in order to keep his hands free, held his stick between his teeth.

The Marquis came out of his room. He had not had the time to fasten the straps of his cuirasse, but, protecting himself with his shield, fell upon his adversaries with raised sword. Five faithful Spaniards fought at his side, but soon the Marquis was alone. Alone against ten. Twirls, thrusts, parries and clinches followed one another, and Almagro's men were amazed. This old man of nearly seventy years handled a sword like a youngster. Juan de Herrada called through the window for reinforcements; then there were twenty against Pizarro, and blows rained upon the still standing man. Was he invulnerable after all? Yet he could do no more. His arm weakened. He was like an exhausted stag. A final thrust and the Marquis crumpled, his throat cut. He cried out his confession and then, unable to speak more, he dipped a hand into his own blood and traced a great cross on the floor. He kissed this cross of blood and died with his lips fixed upon the symbol of Christ.

In this can be seen a fine example of the variety and the uncertainty of the things of this world and the inconstancy of fortune. In a very short time a simple gentleman, who had no great responsibility, had discovered a very large tract of country and powerful kingdoms of which he made himself master and had been made Governor with very great authority. He was possessed of prodigious wealth. To several persons he had distributed goods and revenues so considerable that perhaps in the whole of history not one of the silent and most powerful princes of the world will be found who has distributed so much in so little time. Then, in a moment, everything changed. He died, without time for confession, nor to prepare for death, nor to put his affairs in order nor to arrange his succession. He was massacred in full daylight by a dozen men in the middle of a city, all the inhabitants of which were his creatures, his servants, his kinsmen, his friends or his soldiers. To all of them he had given the means to live comfortably and even grandly. However, none came to his help in his most pressing need. His domestics and those who were in his house fled and abandoned him. Afterwards he was poorly buried. All his grandeur and all his riches vanished, and the means could not be found to pay for candles at his burial.
This was written by a contemporary of Pizarro, the chronicler Augustin de Zarate. It summarises well the prodigious curve of this incomparable destiny.

The outstanding characteristic of this destiny was the continuity of its ascent, but not the continuity of the man. At each point in the life of Pizarro a new Pizarro arose. The Cortés of Mexico and the Marquis of the Valley were not so very different from the student of Salamanca, nor even from the Medellin youth who already dreamed of becoming a Conquistador. The dying Columbus treasured the same chimeras as at Porto Santo. But there was nothing like this with Pizarro. There were as many quite new personalities as there were epochs in his life. The swineherd of Trujillo; the professional soldier; the Jack-of-all-trades of the captains of the Southern Sea; the Island planter; the stubborn sailor who clung on like a dripping shell-fish to the rocks of Puerto del Hambre; the conqueror of the Andes; the gaoler of Atahualpa; the builder of cities; the red-cloaked Marquis—all these figures rushed along like those in a pack of cards. But one tries in vain to give them a family likeness. What could there be in common, indeed, between this purple-clothed patriarch like a Roman Consul and the tough soldier of the Italian wars or the pillager of Tumbez?

However, two pictures—one from the beginning and one from the end—give a sort of moral unity to the personality. A newborn babe was abandoned on the steps of a church in Estremadura. He survived only by luck. He was alone at an age when the most unfortunate are surrounded with care. Sixty-six years later, the Conquistador of Peru succumbed to the swords of the conspirators, like Julius Caesar. The assassins, once the blow was struck, were confounded. They had killed Pizarro! They made off like thieves. No one dared to touch the corpse for fear of compromising himself. At last, a man from Trujillo and his wife dragged the corpse to the nearest church, wrapped it in a shroud and buried it. But despite their anxious haste, they took time to envelop the Marquis in the great white mantle of the Order of Santiago and to fasten his spurs.

Francisco Pizarro died alone. Thus, from the first day to the last he had had no other love and no other companion than himself, and he remained constantly faithful to this austere solitude. Yet it must be emphasised that this solitude was desired. It had become, at the end of his life, the only climate that his pride could bear. When a man believes himself to be the elect of God and the interpreter of History, he can tolerate nobody.
Death of Pizarro, as pictured by Huaman Poma.
PART FOUR

MONKS VERSUS CAPTAINS

OR

THE CONQUISTADORS ON TRIAL

Who authorised you to brand us on the face with a red-hot iron?

(Question put by an Auracanian chief to Don Francisco Nuñez Pineda y Bascuñan, a Spanish captain).
The first settlement of Buenos Aires. From the memoir by Schmiedel, a German mercenary.
CHAPTER XIV

The Araucanians

PIZARRO was dead, Almagro was dead, and to these two men two parties succeeded, the 'Pizarrists' and the 'Almagrists.' Thus the civil war did not end at Las Salinas, nor with the death of the two leaders. On the contrary it was exacerbated. In vain did Almagro's son proclaim himself Governor of Peru, for no one recognised his title except the camarilla which surrounded the half-breed. Disorder reached a climax. At last opportunity was offered the Peruvians to free themselves from Spanish tutelage, but they did not take advantage of it, despite the favourable combination of circumstances.

Charles the Fifth was made acquainted with the situation and was roused. Was he going to see one of his most valued colonies escape him? He sent a judge to Peru with full powers; his name was Vaca de Castro.

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE PERUVIAN ADVENTURE

Skilful and prudent, Vaca de Castro was wary of attacking the enemy frontally. The focal points of insurrection were at Cuzco and Lima. Vaca de Castro avoided them and it was at Quito that the imperial delegate set up his residence. Well received by Belalcazar, he began his inquiry, gathered information and formed his dossier. He quickly realised that only military action, supported by the elements faithful to the dead Marquis, could achieve order and peace.

The decisive encounter took place in the Chupas mountains a few miles from Guamanga. The bravest captains of the Conquest marched at the head of the Pizarrists: Alvarez Holguin, Pedro de Vergara, and especially the terrible Francisco de Carvajal, known as 'the demon of the Andes.' Veteran of the
Italian wars, and formerly Gonzalo Pizarro's colonel, Carvajal was a colossus dreaded by both the soldiers and his equals. Although he had long passed his seventieth year, his brutality and physical energy were still proverbial, as were his bouts of drunkenness. Christoval de Barrientos carried the royal standard. The Almagrists were commanded by Diego Almagro himself, surrounded by officers, of whom some, like Pedro de Candia, had been among Francisco Pizarro's earliest companions. As for Vaca de Castro, he stayed at the rear with a few cavaliers and did not intend personally to participate in the battle. The 'licentiate' was not a man of war.

Better equipped, more numerous and encouraged by the Emperor's backing, the Pizarrist troops had no difficulty in reducing the small Almagrist army. But the fight was a harsh one and the adversaries were so closely intermingled that they would not have recognised their own men if they were not distinguished by the colour of their sashes. Those of Vaca de Castro's men were red and those of Diego Almagro's soldiers were white.

When he saw that the battle was turning against him, the half-breed fled to Cuzco and his troops dispersed, and when night had fallen not a single Almagrist remained at the scene of the fight. A few days later, after burying the dead and beheading those of the prisoners who had taken part in the assassination of the Marquis, Vaca de Castro made a triumphal entry into Cuzco. His first act was to proclaim himself Governor of Peru. This time the appointment was legal, for Vaca de Castro already had it in his pocket when he set out from Spain. His second act was to behead Almagro's son in the square at Cuzco, at the same spot where, four years earlier, his father had also lost his head.

The execution of the two Almagros signified the end of the Almagrists. What was to happen to the Pizarrists? The majority were ranged quite naturally under the King's banner, but not all. There was one who held back: Gonzalo Pizarro. When Vaca de Castro arrived in Quito, the last survivor of the four Pizarro brothers—for one could scarcely count Hernando, imprisoned in Spain, among the living—had made his submission in a forced manner. He had even offered his services, though without enthusiasm. But though he had accepted Gonzalo's submission, Vaca de Castro had politely declined the offer; for the moment he preferred Gonzalo's neutrality to his alliance. By a sort of tacit understanding, Gonzalo had voluntarily kept apart from
the conflict between the Pizarrists and Almagrists, and while the struggle proceeded and throughout the government of Vaca de Castro, he remained on his lands at Chuquisaca, not far from Lake Titicaca. He led the peaceful life of a great landed proprietor: a brief entr'acte before the final scene.

Vaca de Castro had reestablished order in Peru, not without difficulty, and, considering his task completed, he asked the Emperor for his recall. His request was accepted and a successor was appointed: Blasco Nuñez Vela, who landed at Tumbez with the title of Viceroy. A vast staff came with him: corregidores in crimson cassocks, comptrollers, officers of the Crown. Never had so imposing a delegation come from the homeland. The new Viceroy, interpreting the will of Charles, reckoned to make clear in this way that the reign of the adventurers was ended. Henceforth there would be but one master, the King of Spain. But Nuñez Vela was not content simply to bring with him the royal seal, which lay in a casket set upon a palfrey caparisoned in gold, and the rods of justice. He was charged with applying to Peru the Leyes Nuevas which had just been promulgated at Valladolid. Slavery and the encomienda were suppressed, and the Indians were recognised as the free and trusty vassals of His Majesty. The order was given to all the Conquistadors—especially to officials, ecclesiastics and the partisans of Almagro and Pizarro—to free their slaves at once. In brief, Nuñez Vela's mission aimed at nothing less than depriving the conquerors of Peru of all power and dispossessing them of the benefits they had acquired. It was a dangerous mission, doomed to failure because of Nuñez Vela's own character: choleric, dogmatic and brutal.

The reaction was not long delayed. Gathered around Gonzalo Pizarro, the Conquistadors formed an army in the south and marched upon Lima, but the Viceroy did not wait for the arrival of the rebels. He fled towards Quito and Gonzalo entered the deserted palace, where the Marquis had been assassinated, as victor. Nuñez Vela's brief stay had left few traces. Gonzalo was a fine-looking man, and in him the Spaniards and Peruvians saw again the dashing cavalier who—so long ago—cavorted under the amazed eyes of Atahualpa. No one made any difficulty about recognising Gonzalo as Governor of Peru. Beside him old Carvajal, drunk with pride and liquor, shone in his golden cuirasse.

But Gonzalo was not to be satisfied until he had the skin of Nuñez Vela. He raced for Quito, pursued the unhappy Viceroy
into the mountains, captured him and cut off his head on the spot. Then Gonzalo returned to Lima. In his brother's palace he established the court of an oriental despot, for Gonzalo dreamed of making immortal the great name of Pizarro which was thought to have died with the Marquis. He was to be the Great Pizarro, and he dismissed the King's officials, for he himself was King.

But the one who was about to wring the neck of this condor was a monk, Pedro de La Gasca, counsellor to the Holy Office. This time Charles was lucky. La Gasca's arrival in Peru passed almost unobserved. What was he going to do? Carry out a simple enquiry on behalf of His Majesty. This skinny little man, dressed in a threadbare cassock, had a singular gift of authority. He spoke little, but at a single word from him everyone became silent. A gesture and he was obeyed. One by one he approached all those who from far and near were in touch with Gonzalo, and convinced them of his disloyalty. He brought some of the leading captains into play, especially Pedro de Valdivia. Finally, he succeeded in raising an army of 2,000 men, and a great battle took place at the gates of Cuzco, in the Xaguaiguauna plain. Gonzalo Pizarro was beaten, and on the very day of his defeat he was tried and condemned to death. Execution followed judgement, and the executioner cut off Gonzalo's head. Afterwards it was exposed in a cage, hung from the great Lima gallows with this inscription: 'This is the head of the traitor Gonzalo Pizarro, who rebelled against his King. . . .'. At the same time, nine captains were hanged and Carvajal was quartered.

Having spent several months in Peru, Pedro de La Gasca returned to Spain. He had left Spain poor and he returned poor. But he had won an empire for the Crown. The cleric in threadbare clothes and of melancholy face had established peace and restored the colony's administration and finances. There were no more Pizarrists or Almagrists, and Peru was now firmly in the hands of the Emperor Charles. This reconquest was the work of La Gasca. Virtue sometimes has its triumphs. In the foreground of the bloody Peruvian frescoe, with its severed heads and old Carvajal torn apart by four horses, spilling his intestines, rises the cold face of the monk who made 'New Castile' out of the Tierra de Peru and on the shores of Lake Titicaca founded the future capital of Bolivia, Nuestra Señora de la Paz, Our Lady of Peace, which we now call La Paz.
The geographical shape of Chile is rather absurd: a ribbon that stretches between the Cordillera of the Andes and the Pacific Ocean, covering the whole gamut of climates. In the north are the great deserts of Atacama, with immense salt plains the colour of melted lead; in the centre is the Great Valley with its eternal summer; and in the south the wastes begin again, a land of fjords and glaciers. Above this narrow ledge hangs the Cordillera and its summits that reach to nearly 20,000 feet. Chile, the slope of the southern Andes that plunges into the waters of the Pacific, is squeezed between the mountains and the sea.

To reach Chile by sea was already possible at the middle of the 16th century. In fact, the navigators had only to push their caravels a little further in order to reach the banks of the "Valley of Paradise"—Valparaiso, the future great port of the southern Pacific. But to reach Chile from the north by land called for madmen and heroes—in short, the Conquistadors.

The first pioneer of Chile was Diego Almagro, the father. After the Cuzco compromise and the Emperor's decision to award him Southern Peru, Pizarro's companion had but one thing to do: to conquer his kingdom. He got busy at once and pushed southwards. The expedition was a large one: 570 Spaniards and 15,000 Indians. Besides his two lieutenants, Gomez de Alvarado and Ruy Diaz, Almagro took with him the Inca Paulus, brother of Manco, a useful precaution in case of conflict with the natives. Ignoring the counsel of the Peruvian chiefs, who advised him to follow the coast, Almagro plunged straight into the Cordillera. The intense cold and the thick snow surprised the Spaniards, who were badly shod and lightly clothed. Without concern for human losses—150 Spaniards and 10,000 Indians were frozen to death—Almagro continued the terrible ascent. On his return six months later he found standing in the snowfields groups of soldiers petrified by the ice, still holding the bridles of their horses in their hands, like equestrian statues. Having reached the summit of the Andes, Almagro descended upon Copiapo and reached Coquimbo, and from there he came to the mouth of the River Aconcagua. Until then he had met with no resistance from the native tribes. The presence of the Son of the Sun at his side ratified the expedition. But the situation changed when the Spaniards came to the River Rapel, which was where, nearly a century earlier, the Promauca had defeated the army of Prince Sinquiruca, Yupanguí's general, who had come to subdue
them. Since then the Rapel had been the frontier of the Inca Empire. On the other side of the river the Promauca lived free of any allegiance and exempt from tribute; for, powerful as they were, the Incas had never, since that one unfortunate attempt, crossed the Rapel frontier with arms.

Almagro’s pride rose in protest at the very idea of turning back. There, where the Peruvians had been unable to pass, he, a Castilian, would succeed! He gave the order to cross the river. But the Promauca awaited him on the far side of the water with spears in their hands, and a fight was inevitable. Discouraged at first by the Spaniards’ military array, the native soldiers soon counter-attacked with such vigour that Almagro and his men had to fall back, leaving their dead on the field. Full of rage, they recrossed the Rapel.

The return journey to Cuzco was disastrous. More fearful than the Andean passes, the high lands of Atacama almost became the graveyard of the expedition, a stretch 500 miles long without a plant or even lichen (for in human memory rain had never been seen), where a sort of dry rot flourished. Only the blood of battles occasionally moistened its humus—the vestiges of trees or prehistoric algae—mixed with salts and minerals. Even the vulture had fled the Atacama. But men have fought bitter battles there for the possession of fertilisers and iron. The Spaniards almost lost their reason while crossing the ‘Saltpetre Desert’, a phantasmal landscape where the blinding reverberation of the sun outlined long moving spectres on the fields of nitrate. The sight of their companions fixed in the ice ended by terrifying the Conquistadors. In short, Almagro’s campaign, a brilliant ‘sporting’ feat, ended in failure. The interminable journey gave him neither gold nor cities, and he returned to Cuzco empty-handed. We already know what followed: a year after his return Almagro died by the garrote.

PEDRO DE VALDIVIA

Francisco Pizarro’s moral authority and Hernando’s arms would probably not have been enough to defeat Almagro had Pedro de Valdivia not lent a hand. With Almagro eliminated, New Toledo became free. It fell by right to Valdivia, who had shown the extent of his military talents and loyalty.

Valdivia was not a newcomer. Born at Villanueva de la Serena, about six miles from Medellin, where Cortés was born—
Estremadura once more—he had fought bravely in Italy before setting out for America. After seeking a career for some time on the Spanish Main, he had eventually joined up with the Marquis. Colonel to Hernando Pizarro at the battle of Las Salinas, he had been the chief artisan of the Pizarroist victory. A fine fellow, eloquent of speech and noble of manner, still young—thirty years—Pedro de Valdivia was in every way the right person to open for Spain the road to the south, so painfully broken by Almagro. Passing over the claims of Francisco Camargo and Sanchez de la Hoz, who maintained that the Crown had given them authority to explore the south, the Marquis appointed Pedro de Valdivia as his Lieutenant-Governor of Chile.

Profiting by the unhappy experiences of Almagro, Valdivia neglected nothing, before setting out, that could facilitate the success of the undertaking. To his 150 Spaniards, flanked by a large contingent of Indians, he added artisans, workers, and 'technicians' provided with the tools indispensable for building, planting and producing. He took with him not only horses, but pigs and poultry; not only gunpowder, but seed. For beyond the Conquest Valdivia already visualised the business of colonisation.

The expedition took the same route as Diego Almagro, but in reverse: the Cordillera, the Atacama Desert, Copiapó, Coquimbo. Slanting off towards the sea, the Spaniards discovered a smiling valley at the foot of which was a harbour. To this paradisial valley, with almond-trees in flower, Valdivia gave the name Valparaiso. Continuing into the interior, the Conquistadors reached the banks of a watercourse: the Mapocho. To Valdivia this place seemed suitable for laying the foundations of a town, and as the site was at 'the end of the world,' the future city was called Santiago del Nuevo Estremo. Faithful to the legalist traditions of his predecessors, Valdivia, before even the first stone of the new city was laid, set up a municipal council or cabildo, and a deed was drawn up before a notary. Four months later the Marquis was dead, assassinated, and the Council, which was called together at once, recognised as Governor and Captain-General of Chile 'the Most Magnificent Señor Pedro de Valdivia, in the name of God and of His Blessed Mother and of the Apostle St. James.'

Thus was Pedro de Valdivia promoted to omnipotence by a legal trick. But he reigned over a desert. The moment had come to organise the territory of which he was the sole master, since the Marquis had perished. Without waiting for Francisco
Pizarro's successor to ratify his powers, Valdivia set to work, and his doctrine, expressed in few words, was: 'the best sight I know is corn, wine and cattle.' The war-horses were harnessed to primitive ploughs, and Spanish soldiers dressed the vines and milked the cows. Was the Conquistadors' war-cry to change into some Virgilian song? The months passed, and Santiago took on the look of a village, then of a small town. Meanwhile, Valdivia's companions grew weary. Native labour was lacking. The population, moreover, was not reliable. The frequent incursions of the Promauca undid in one day the work of several weeks. Valdivia sent Monroy, one of his officers, to Peru to seek reinforcements. He returned at the head of fifty cavaliers, while a ship full of arms, clothing and food anchored at Valparaiso. Nothing more was needed for Valdivia to acquire new optimism. He extended his conquests. Pedro Bohon founded the town of La Serena in the valley of Coquimbo. The corn grew and the vintage looked promising. What a fine country and what a poetic name! Chile or Thili was the Indian word for a thrush.

While Valdivia tasted the joys of power, and the delights of love with the beautiful Inès Suarez, there was bloody civil war in Peru. The last act had begun: Pedro de la Gasca was face to face with Gonzalo Pizarro, and Valdivia decided to play his part in the tragedy. He arrived at Cuzco while the action was still undecided and in time to take part in the battle of Xaguaixagua. By placing his military knowledge at La Gasca's disposal, Valdivia assured his victory. In token of his gratitude, the Emperor's delegate confirmed Valdivia in his functions as Captain and Governor-General of Chile, or New Estremadura, but made two conditions: that he pay his debts and that he break off relations with Inès Suarez. If he had need of a wife, there was nothing to prevent him from calling to his side his lawful wife, who was cooling her heels at Badajoz.

Having returned to Santiago, which was now 'his' capital, Valdivia took energetic measures. He organised the finances, the administration and police. No government was possible without internal order and economy! And the conquest continued. Francisco de Aguirre pacified Coquimbo and reconstructed La Serena, which had been burnt by the Indians. Valdivia himself took the head of a column and pushed boldly southwards. He reached the town of Penco on the Pacific shore, which he captured and named Concepcion. Would nothing stop the Estremaduran cavalry? Intoxicated with the sense of space, Valdivia left the conquered city to conquer another. To acquire the villages
one by one and to dream of turning them into cities was an intoxicating game. Valdivia had now reached the banks of the river Bio-Bio.

IN THE LAND OF THE ARAUCANIANS

The Bio-Bio is the natural frontier of central Chile. Beyond the river lies southern Chile. The sky-lines change. The Andes fall away and dwindle. The valleys grow wider. It is colder and it rains. The large island of Chiloe is not far off: it commands the entrance to the world of islands and ice in which Chile ends. Further still is the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego, swept by polar squalls, where the Pacific and Atlantic meet.

But the Bio-Bio not only separates two regions of Chile; it marks the frontier of Araucania. The Incas had never ventured beyond the Bio-Bio, for they knew what it would have cost them. Their military science and their arms could do nothing against this elusive people that hid in the depths of the forests: the Araucanians.

Physically the Araucanians resembled Asiatics: big heads with prominent cheekbones, thick lips, broad noses and slanting eyes. On the other hand, they were tall and muscular. Skilful in running, excellent swimmers, clever in handling clubs and excellent marksmen with bows and arrows, the Araucanians possessed a high degree of trickery and courage, qualities which made of them the best hunters in the whole of South America. They were also its most ferocious warriors. Besides hunting and fishing, the Araucanians practised agriculture and stock-raising. They made *chicha* from fermented maize and *ponchos* from vicuna wool. Generally, they fed on fish, game and vegetables, but were cannibal too. Their industry was rudimentary: with fish bones they sewed the skins of animals to make their clothing, and they made tools of stone. For their amusement they played the flute, an instrument which they made from thigh-bones. They had little taste for the pleasures of family life. Women counted for nothing and were bought and sold like merchandise. From their earliest years children were brought up for hunting and for war. Properly speaking, there was no political or social organisation, for the Araucanian found communal life repugnant. Taciturn and proud, he sought solitude. In his wanderings he might come upon a clearing or a river-bank, and if the spot pleased him he settled there. Then he constructed a hut—or *ruca*—and lit his first fire.
Disdaining of others, the Araucanian feared God—the Great Spirit of the Universe—and worshipped the stars. He believed simultaneously in the immortality of the soul and the everlastingness of the body. He surrounded the corpses of his people with great care and respect. He buried his dead seated upright in square pits, and beside them he placed their arms, tools and food. Each year a matron opened the tombs, and washed and dressed the skeletons. Finally, the hierarchy was simply: the military chiefs were called toquis and those responsible for the administration were called ulmens. A last feature: this hard people spoke a harmonious language, with melodious inflexions. What ironic demigurges had placed a language of eloquence and love on the lips of this primitive people?

While Valdivia kept to his own side of the frontier, the Araucanians did not move, for what happened north of the river did not interest them at all. The whinnying of the Spanish horses on the bank of the Bio-Bio gave them the alarm. Like wolves surprised in their haunts, and banded together by the threat of danger, the Araucanians formed an army of 4,000 men who, commanded by the toqui Ayavilu, appeared before the Spaniards. The first engagement took place not far from the Bio-Bio, in the plain of Andalión.

Faced with 4,000 Araucanians with spears raised and clubs whirling, Valdivia debated whether it would not be better to avoid contact and flee. He knew enough of war to realise that he would not overthrow the Araucanians as easily as he had the Promauacas. It was vain, on the other hand, to suggest a compromise, for the Araucanians did not understand diplomacy. But it must not be said that a Spanish captain had refused to fight, so Valdivia gave the order to fire.

The first discharge of muskets was enough to stop the Araucanians. They feared no one, but they respected the gods. Lightning had struck them as a sign of reprobation. The second discharge laid their best captains low and the toqui Ayavilu fell. The cavalry, launched at the gallop, completed their terror. The Araucanians gathered their dead and withdrew in impressive order. Valdivia was victor and, intoxicated with success, continued his advance. He had a free field, so the cavalcade continued, and as the moment had come for the Conquistador to make his name immortal, he gave it to a river and to a town: Valdivia, on the banks of the Valdivia. Had he not already given La Serena the name of his native village? Cities rose like mushrooms: Nueva Imperial, Villarica...
The Araucanians regrouped in the dark forests. In place of Ayavílu, killed in the battle of Andalion, they had elected another toqui: Lincoyan. The new leader was prudent and preached submission to the invader, but a ferocious blunder by Valdivia aroused the anger of the Araucanians who, with a little skill, he could probably have neutralised. In the intoxication of victory, thinking to show his strength, Valdivia had sent the prisoners who had been taken on the Andalion field back to their homes with their hands and noses cut off. This futile and barbarous deed was to cost him dear.

HOW A TRIBE BECAME A PEOPLE

The Araucanians' first reaction to the Spaniards was instinctive. Each, like a beast at bay, defended his own life, not that of others. But the cruel outrage upon 400 of their people inspired the Araucanians with a sense of community. Henceforth they were bound together. They lacked only a leader to co-ordinate their confused aspirations and to make a fatherland out of the Araucanian community. This leader was not long in coming forward. A territory invaded, armed men gathering together, a champion with irresistible speech: thus are nationalisms born.

He who took charge of the welfare and honour of the Araucanians was called Colococo. He was an old man reputed for his knowledge, who had retired a long time from public life. The crossing of the Bio-Bio by the Spaniards and Valdivia's insolent exploit had torn the old sage from his solitary meditations. He gathered the ulmens together and took counsel with them. This Indian Nestor, whose eloquence was famous, begged his compatriots to shake off the foreign yoke before it was too late. The country was already half occupied. The ulmens were convinced and it was decided to get an army into being. A toqui was appointed—Caupolican—and they had only to seize the right moment.

While Araucanians resistance was being organised in the greatest secrecy, Valdivia was extending his penetration and soon all the southern provinces had submitted to him, at least in appearance. He had three small forts constructed in the neighbourhood of Concepcion: Tucapel, Arauco and Puren. Thanks to these works, which were about 20 miles apart and provided with well-armed garrisons, he controlled the land and hoped to hold it.
Keeping an eye on his conquest, Valdivia meanwhile tidied up his love affairs. Who was this Inés Suarez whom he had to abandon on La Gasca's orders? When she arrived in Santiago a few months after the founding of the city, she was the first Spanish woman to have dared that fearful journey. It was love that had brought her, for she had come to join her husband Rodrigo, Valdivia's companion. Lying on the hard earth, and leading the life of the soldiers, Inés shared their perils. She too handled the guns and, an excellent marksman, could shoot her Indian at a range of 100 yards like a man. Moreover, she was beautiful, and Valdivia could not fail to be interested in this Spanish Amazon. Having come to Chile for love, Inés stayed there for love, but the object of her love had changed. Faithful to his undertaking, Valdivia, with death in his heart, resigned himself to sending the companion of the evil days back to Spain. Simultaneously he asked his lawful wife to join him at Santiago. Very beautiful too, Doña Mariana de Gaete loved her husband passionately, and Valdivia's invitation gratified her wishes to the full. The reunion of these two filled the Spanish colony with pleasure, for these conquerors, imbued with chivalry, needed a lady to enable their thoughts and a princess to lead them to victory.

This gallant interlude did not turn Valdivia from his task: the final crushing of the Araucanians. He exerted himself methodically to this end and imagined that he was near his goal. But this intrepid general was badly informed. One day when he was at Concepción, grave news reached him: the fort of Tucapel was besieged by an Araucanian detachment. Valdivia at once gathered some men together and set out for Tucapel. He expected only a skirmish and that he would quickly punish the barbarians for their insolence. Arriving in view of the fort, the Captain-General found himself faced with a heap of ruins, and of the Spanish garrison nothing remained but a severed arm. He had scarcely time to overcome his stupor when he found himself surrounded by an army of some size, which was Caupolicán's. The trap was well laid. There were only 50 Spanish cavaliers and 3,000 Indian mercenaries against 10,000 Araucanians in battle order, and behind this mass of fighters other troops could be seen, ready to intervene.

Surrender or die? For Valdivia there was no other alternative and he chose to die. The fight took place in the marshy plain of Tucapel, which was disastrous for the cavalry. For many hours it remained indecisive, but suddenly an Indian auxiliary detached himself from the Spanish ranks. This was Lautaro, an
Araucanian of 18 years whom Valdivia had carried off and made his page. Having suddenly recovered his patriotic feelings, Lautaro deserted and passed over to his compatriots, whom he upbraided vigorously. Why should they fear these foreigners? They were men like others, for he knew them well.

He put himself at the head of the Araucanian army, turned about and rushed upon his former allies with lowered lance. Electrified by this heroic gesture, the Araucanians intensified their action and launched a last assault upon the Spanish soldiers. Not a single soldier came out of the mêlée alive. Pedro de Valdivia was captured and dragged to the feet of Caupolican and Lautaro, and it was the child who pronounced sentence: death. But Valdivia was made to wait three days for death, during which, dismembered alive, piece by piece, he served as food for his executioners.

In despair at the fearful death of her husband, Mariana de Gaete retired into a hermitage and founded the cult of the Virgin of Solitude.

A DIFFICULT SUCCESSION

Valdivia's testament named as his successor one of the three following captains: Alderete, Aguirre or Villagra. Alderete was in Spain, so power was shared between Aguirre and Villagra, and while the former held Northern Chile, the latter tried to keep the South.

The victory of Tucapel had aroused the Araucanians, but they did not reckon to limit their action to this encounter. They would not rest until not a single Spaniard trod on Araucanian soil. Old Colocolo increased his harangue to the ulmens: 'Illustrious defenders of our homeland, oh caciques! ...' As everyone was eager to secure a command in the liberating army, Colocolo had invented a test in order to decide between them: the chieftain's spear would be given to him who supported longest a great wooden beam at the end of his arm. Caupolican still remained the generalissimo, but at his side Lautaro carried out the functions of vice-toqui. The young hero took on the appearance of a demi-god.

After an interval hostilities were resumed and Caupolican laid siege to Imperial. Lautaro attacked Valdivia and Concepcion at the same time. Valdivia held out, but Concepcion capitulated. Harassed on all sides, the Spaniards entrenched themselves at
Santiago. Lautaro still advanced, while behind him trod 600 Araucanians in good order, chosen from among the best, and 3,000 auxiliaries. Thus they came to the Bio-Bio and had only to cross the river in order to set foot in the suburbs of Santiago. Once Santiago was captured, why not go further, even perhaps as far as Peru? Nothing seemed impossible to that fierce youth Lautaro. But Villagra awaited him on the banks of the fatal river, and opened fire. The Indian archers let fly their missiles. An arrow passed through Lautaro’s breast from one side to the other and the first Chilean caudillo was dead.

With Lautaro gone, Caupolican was left alone to bear the weight of Spanish arms. His experience and his age inclined him to caution. He raised the siege of Imperial and Valdivia and restricted himself to laying a defensive cordon along the frontiers of Araucania. He felt that the time for offensives was over. Meanwhile, the Viceroy of Peru, Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, decided to put an end to Araucanian resistance. Affairs in Chile irritated him. He ordered his son Garcia to the spot to take the situation in hand. The new Governor landed at La Serena with 350 men, provisions and munitions. His first concern was to imprison Villagra and Aguirre. Then he studied the terrain and tested the enemy defences by a series of small local operations. Despite his youth—he was only twenty-one—Garcia, probably under instructions from his father, manoeuvred with patience and without haste.

Garcia had established his headquarters on the island of Quiriquina, facing Coquimbo. Caupolican was established on the shore at the approach to Concepcion. The river-frontier was still the stake of the battle. Araucanians and Spaniards crossed and recrossed it in turn and it was fully realised on both sides that final possession of the Bio-Bio would decide the fate of the conquest.

The adversaries watched one another for several months and the skirmishes they launched did not alter their respective positions. Garcia then decided to undertake an encircling action and take the Araucanians in the rear. He assembled a small squadron and embarked at Coquimbo, taking the direction of Concepcion. Off Valparaiso a violent gale fell upon Garcia’s ships, and the Indian auxiliaries saw in this an evil omen. The Gods had declared themselves against the Spaniards, that was certain. To complete their terror, the Chilean mercenaries discovered in a stormy sky the face of Lautaro, monstrously enlarged. The chronicler, Pedro d’Oña, said of this apparition
later: 'I saw his head emerge like a naked cranium covered with long hair—his mouth, surrounded by a black cloud, breathed thick smoke, and along his lifeless body and cadaverous face ran bloodstained sweat. Through the cruel wound that tore his side the hero's heart could be seen, where blood no longer ran, but pus instead.' A romantic piece of imagery that illustrates clearly the mark left in the memory of the Araucanians by the brief epic of young Lautaro.

García’s fleet escaped shipwreck by a miracle and anchored at Talcahuano, quite near to Concepción. The Spaniards had scarcely landed before they were engaged by Caupolicán’s advance guard, but this time they were in force and powerfully armed. The Araucanians had to give ground. García’s detachment of 600 men crossed the Bio-Bio, gave chase to the enemy and forced him to fight near a muddy lake. This was the battle of Lagunilla. The Indian column, led by the toqui Galvarino, suffered a total defeat, and it might have been a fatal blow to Araucanian resistance if García had not imprudently repeated Valdivia’s gesture of sending the vanquished cacique back to his village with his hands cut off. Thinking to make an example, he revived the spirit of revolt.

Galvarino’s return, raising his mutilated wrists to heaven, was greeted with a roar of hate. The death of Lautaro had brought consternation to the Araucanians, but the torture of the toqui reigned their patriotism. The whole people responded to Caupolicán’s appeal. Children took arms from their fathers. Women tore away the cutlasses or spears that their lifeless husbands still held. The old men exhorted the youths. All Araucania had risen against the invader, and García and Caupolicán faced one another again in the Melipuru plain. The toqui’s strength was impressive, but García aligned his best troops, who were now used to the special technique involved in this sort of fighting. Certain valorous captains stiffened the Spanish army, including Ercilla y Zúñiga, who in his leisure hours wrote the Araucana. The fight was equal and for a long time there was doubt who would prevail. But García’s artillery and horses ended by getting the better of Indian fury, and Caupolicán abandoned the struggle and retreated southwards. At the place where he carried the day, García de Mendoza laid the foundation of a town: Cañete.

The buildings that rose on the field of Melipuru were not houses to live in but military constructions. Cañete was to be a strong point and García had chosen a pitiless man, Alonso de
Reinoso, to command it. The new Governor instituted a reign of terror. He put all the Araucanian prisoners to the sword, but the ulmens had the privilege of a worse punishment: tied to the mouths of cannons they were shot into the air and their shapeless remains fell into the Indian camp. Caupolican, followed by his old guard, prowled around Cañete like an enraged beast, seeking the weakest point to strike. Failing victory, Caupolican wanted vengeance, but he was not to know this bitter pleasure, for a last trial was reserved for the old chieftain: treason. Sold by one of his own men, he was taken in ambush and brought before Alonso de Reinoso's tribunal. Mad with joy to have the generalissimo of the Araucanian army at his mercy, the Governor meant to make the greatest use of his catch. He would make an example of him too, like the others. Caupolican was solemnly led into the square at Cañete; he was impaled upon a pointed stake and a company of archers riddled the derided martyr with arrows. Colocolo had died of grief, Lautaro had been shot down and Caupolican tortured; what now would the Araucanians do? They had lost their wise man, their hero and their warrior, the mystical trio indispensable to the people's advancement. But the fanaticism of the Araucanians owed less to the virtues of their chiefs than to the mysterious call of their native forests. Those who embodied the fatherland were dead, yet the fatherland lived on. Without weakening for a moment, the Araucanians continued their struggle. They kept it up until 1850, three centuries after the foundation of Concepcion by Pedro de Valdivia. Only then was it possible to speak of a sort of assimilation which would never be submission. A succession of heroes assured the constant revival of heroism. Thirty years after the death of Lautaro, an adolescent named Nangoniel captured the fort of Arauco and perished with an arrow full in the heart, like his predecessor. In more or less the same period, Jarquequeo took command of the Araucanian army and defeated the troops of Sotomayor, Captain-General of Chile. A little later the same Sotomayor had to face up to the young Prince Quitunguen. The youthful legend never ceased to inspire Araucanian bravery.

On the margin of the Araucanian epic the reconnaissance of Chile progressed. In the north, the Spaniards had reached Tucumán; in the south, Ercilla had sailed around the Chiloe archipelago in a little ship that was not even ballasted, while Juan Ladrillero explored the Strait of Magellan. The banner of Castile floated at Punta Arenas, for in the same year that Philip II succeeded Charles on the Spanish throne, the Conquistadors
had founded the most southerly city in the world at 53° of latitude south.

Hernando Cortés landed on the Mexican coast in 1519. He took possession of Mexico in 1521. Thus the conquest had lasted two years.

Francisco Pizarro landed at Tumbez in 1531. Atahualpa was executed in 1533. Thus Peru was also conquered in two years.

Pedro de Valdivia founded Santiago in 1541. He reached the river Bio-Bio in 1550. Villagra built the town of Osorno in 1558. The conquest of Chile had taken 17 years.

Thus a few months had sufficed the Spaniards to subjugate two old empires and to dislocate a political system that was safe—it seemed—from the worst trials. On the other hand, it took them long years to assure their domination over a simple people without traditions, a domination that remained precarious for a long time. It was the Araucanians, the 'savages,' who resisted the invaders while the Incas and Aztecs, believing they were fighting a battle of wits, came to terms with them. Between the barbarians and the nobles, on which side is true nobility to be found? If, in fact, one excepts the brief episodes of Cuauhtemoc and Ruminagui, the two great dynasties of pre-Columbian America allowed themselves to slip quietly into servitude and their peoples followed. But with the Araucanians there was nothing of the kind: from the first encounter these misanthropes formed a sacred union, and the unsubmitive disciplined themselves. Compared with the superb nonchalance of the Sons of the Sun and the Lords of Aztlan, the stubborn courage of a handful of cannibals leaves one wondering. But there was a precedent. When Christopher Columbus on a certain Sunday in November 1493 landed at Martinique, the Caribs received him with a shower of poisoned arrows and he had to reembark precipitately. He had the same reception at the Leeward Isles. At Guadalupe the Carib women joined the defenders. For two hundred years the soldiers or monks who tried to set foot in the Lesser Antilles were massacred. Ponce de Leon nearly lost his life there. For the sake of peace, the signatories to the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 agreed that the Caribs should remain their own masters.

With the Caribs the Conquest opened and with the Araucanians it ended. At the dawn and twilight of their battle for the possession of the New World the Spaniards encountered the
same obstacle: the anger of the primitive people. What does this mean, if not that attachment to the native soil—a quasi-animal reflex—has no connection with political genius? That the Conquistadors suffered more from the Araucanian and Carib guerrileros than from Montezuma’s legions is nothing new. For it was thus that the Parthians had held the Roman Empire at bay,
CHAPTER XV

From the Rio de la Plata
to the Meschacebe

CHRISTOPHER Columbus set foot in the West Indies in October 1492. Pedro de Valdivia founded Santiago de Estremadura in February 1541. The area of the great conquests, which had opened at the moment when the Spanish sailors, exhausted and inebriated by the sea air, sang the Te Deum on the beach at San Salvador, ended when Valdivia laid the first stone of the Chilean capital beside the Mapocho. These lines of demarcation are, of course, theoretical, but they correspond to reality. The Conquest—that is to say, the heroic period of the war and of the improvisation—had lasted fifty years: a half-century to take possession of the New World!

But the Spaniards had not restricted their ambitions to the conquest of the great American empires, Aztec and Inca, and to the occupation of operational bases on the coasts and at the mouths of rivers. From the second quarter of the 16th century and even before that, the Conquistadors bravely drew away from their bases into the interior of the continent. It was then a matter less of conquering than of exploring and reconnoitring. But the means at the disposal of the Spaniards was not in proportion to the immense territories they discovered. The essential thing was not to die there. The conquering columns became scientific expeditions and they prepared the ways for the men to follow.

The bridgeheads of these Spanish explorations were the regions already conquered and firmly held, and the three principal ones were, from north to south, Mexico, Central America and Peru. Mexico City, Panama and Cuzco were the three bases from which the Spaniards set off in search a ne plus ultra of which the distances had the colour of the sea.

Let us take for a last time the royal road of the Conquerors.
From year to year it stretched further afield, overrunning the jungle, striding across the rivers, and coming to a halt upon the ocean shores. Soon it was to complete the circuit—or almost—of this world in creation: the Spanish-American Empire.

THE CONQUERORS OF THE MESCHACHEBE

The first Conquistador to reach the northern regions—and also the first to obey the call of the north while others bore southwards—was Cortés. Still Captain-General by title, but actually deprived of his command, the conqueror of Mexico organised some unlucky expeditions in a northerly direction at his own expense. Setting out from Acapulco with three ships, he followed the Pacific coast until he reached the head of the Gulf of California: el golfo de Cortés. But the settlements founded by the tireless conqueror—Santa Cruz and Guaymas—had only an ephemeral life. Of 320 colonists, 23 died of fever, and the rest demanded their return to Mexico. On the practical level, the affair ended in failure.

By an irony of fate it was Panfilo de Narvaez—Cortés' indomitable enemy—who took up and extended the northward move of the Marquis of the Valley, not to the west of Mexico this time, but to the east. After California, it was the turn of Florida. So here he was, once more on the trail, the vanquished soldier of Cempoala, the humiliated captain! He was, moreover, regarded as finished. But the eclipse of the principal star—Cortés—had made it possible for this secondary star to cast its last rays. Narvaez had fitted out four ships and behind his pennon had gathered 400 soldiers and 80 horses—which were for draught purposes as well as for war. Originally an instrument of conquest, the horse was now the vital tool of colonisation: it was scarcely freed from its steel harness before it was tied to a cart. Narvaez' flotilla anchored in the Bay of Tampa on the western coast of Florida and a landing was made. The Conquistador took 300 men with him and plunged northwards into the jungle.

Florida, with its mild winters, its long sandy beaches, the oranges and grape-fruit of Tampa, paradisial islands and the scented sweetness of endless summer. . . . For the time being Narvaez' expedition advanced with difficulty along a low and marshy peninsula, bristling with dense forests. Sometimes there was a lake. After a harassing march, the Spaniards arrived at a
village, called Apalache, where Narvaez set up his camp. The colonists whom he sent off east and west in search of gold mines came back having found nothing. They had to return with empty hands, but reached the coast just in time to see the vessels sailing away. The hundred men appointed to guard the fleet had lost patience. So much the worse for those who remained! Narvaez ordered rafts to be made of pieces of wood tied together with horsehair, and from the masts doublets were hung to serve as sails. These primitive vessels were launched upon the sea. By one means or another they steered westwards in the hope of reaching Tampico and on the way a gust of wind cast four of the rafts upon the coast at the mouth of the Mississippi—known to the Indians as the Meschacebe—not far from the site of the future New Orleans. The fifth raft, on which was Narvaez himself, was carried out to sea, and Diego Velasquez' former lieutenant perished.

Luckier than his captain, one man reached an island near Galveston. This was Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca. Captured by the Indians, he won them over by acting as a healer. A few signs of the cross made at the right moment and he was regarded as a great sorcerer, and once the Indians' distrust was calmed this improvised thaumaturge hastened to desert them. Accompanied by a Moorish slave named Esteban and two other companions, Cabeza de Vaca fled due north: it took them eight years to make contact with the Spanish command in Mexico, but what a journey it was. On foot they crossed the following states from one side to the other: Mississippi, Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. It was at Culiacan, in the Sinaloa country, near the Californian coast, that Cabeza de Vaca, after following the valley of the Sonora and straying in the Chihuahua desert, encountered Melchior Diaz, the commander of the territory. The two Spaniards' abrazo can be imagined. Nevertheless this incredible exploit, like that of Cortés, concealed a failure.

On his return to Mexico, Cabeza de Vaca was inexhaustible in the bombastic speeches he made about what he had seen during his journey. But this intrepid adventurer was, like the rest, a boaster too, which prevented anyone from lending him a ready ear. That there was a 'mysterious north' no one doubted; that the lands visited by Cabeza de Vaca might be those of the famous 'Seven Cities' many began to believe; but there was no means of knowing more until a large expedition had verified Cabeza's tales. A famous Conquistador organised this expedition: Hernando de Soto.
The hero of Darien, Pizarro's lieutenant, had retired to Spain when hostilities broke out between his leader and Almagro. But how could he resist such flattering entreaties as 'You alone can succeed . . . ' and remain deaf to the call of a pride that was thought to be filled to overflowing? De Soto bade adieu to his magnificent retreat in Estremadura and embarked at Sanlucar de Barrameda. Ten ships, 1,000 men and 350 horses: it was a veritable armada. After a brief halt at Havana, the expedition landed in Florida. De Soto left a hundred men to guard the ships and immediately took the northward route. The first stage took him to Apalache, and the second to Mobile, on the present boundary of Alabama and Mississippi. Here De Soto gave battle to the Indian warriors eight years after his embassy to Atahualpa. He had not lost his skill and he defeated the enemy. Then, having accomplished an immense circuit across Alabama and Tennessee, he crossed the Mississippi, traversed Arkansas and penetrated the rich plains of Oklahoma. On the way the Spaniards encountered the fierce resistance of the native tribes, who were lightly equipped but animated by the sombre courage of primitive peoples. The only weapon they had was a sort of axe, but they used it with effect. Furthermore they practised the peculiar custom of cutting off the scalp and hair of their enemies. Tomahawking and scalping were new to Spaniards.

Hernando de Soto tried diplomacy, or rather, trickery. But, unlike Peru, he was not dealing with an organised power. So, abandoning negotiation, De Soto resorted to strong methods: steel and fire, but especially fire. The Indians of the Mississippi lived in thatched wooden houses and with the touch of a torch a whole village blazed. Heaps of cinders, Indian women sacrificing their hair on the graves of their husbands, war cries and screams of pain, . . . De Soto, sword in hand and armoured like a knight, advanced through a tragic landscape. This march through blood and fire resembled a flight. They lost their way, they got involved in swamps, they returned in their own tracks, and then came back once more to the Mississippi. Slowly and with difficulty they approached their goal—but what goal? De Soto claimed to know what it was, but he did not reach the end of his dream, for overwhelmed by fever he died in his tracks at the age of forty-two years. To prevent his remains falling into the hands of the Indians, his companions sank him in the deepest part of the Mississippi. De Soto was to rest in the waters of the old Meschacebe, 'the Father of Waters,' his own conquest.

The Spaniards had lost their captain, but they continued their
mad journey. For a long time now they had abandoned their rags and gaping shoes. They marched bare-foot and covered themselves with the skins of animals, like a prehistoric nomad horde. They headed westwards, and then, one morning, descried a bluish line on the horizon: the Rocky Mountains. Among them were some who had crossed the Cordillera of the Andes in Francisco Pizarro's train and had not forgotten what it had cost them. They were overtaken with vertigo as they faced this barrier which seemed to rise to the very zenith. Only the impossible could make these brave men recoil, but with despair in their hearts they turned their backs on the Rocky Mountains—without suspecting that they prolonged the Cordilleras—and returned to the Mississippi.

Since its start, De Soto's troop had diminished; now there were no more than three hundred with a few horses. Almost all the officers had succumbed and food was lacking, but not courage, for they had need of it to realise their plan of descending the Mississippi to the sea and from there reaching Mexico once more. It was no longer a question, in fact, of trying to find the anchored fleet again on the coast of Florida. None of the Conquistadors felt strong enough to recross Alabama and Florida, and the precedent of Narvaez froze the best wills. None thought seriously that De Soto's ten vessels had waited for the expedition's return, and there was no other solution—except perishing where they stood—than to reach the sea by following the course of the Mississippi. Seven ships were built and launched on the river, but just as the Spaniards were about to start, a thousand canoes barred their passage. Yet they made off southwards, rowing hard, under a storm of missiles.

The Indians did not let them go; they took up the chase, and it was only after several days that the Spanish succeeded in drawing away and losing sight of their pursuers. They were to remember for a long time those sinister canoes, painted blue and black, that harassed them like savage birds. They descended the river in three weeks and came to the mouth of the Mississippi, on the Gulf of Mexico. Bearing off westwards they followed the shore in the direction of Mexico, but a storm arose that handled their wretched boats so roughly that they had to abandon them and reach the shore by swimming. It was on foot that they completed the last stage. The Spanish sentry on duty at the first post of Tampico presented arms to a troop of half-dead soldiers, almost naked, with bushy beards and hair, and eyes that burned with fever in blackened and wrinkled faces. An almost moribund
alferez still found strength enough to wave De Soto’s torn pennon. Not many of the valiant band remained, and those who had escaped were surrounded and plied with questions. Had they found the Seven Cities?

While Hernando de Soto’s expedition was ascending the Mississippi half-way to its source and glimpsing the Rocky Mountains, the Viceroy of Mexico, Antonio de Mendoza, having been interested by Cabeza de Vaca’s story, entrusted Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, the Commander of Culiacan, with a reconnaissance. Esteban the Moor, accompanied by a priest, Father Marcos de Niza, left as an advance party. The two Spaniards, escorted by a few Indians, followed the valley of the Sonora and penetrated to the heart of Arizona. The further they advanced the more certain they felt of the existence of a vast northern city, and they were not long in coming within sight of a large inhabited area, known to the natives as Cibola. Without going further, Father de Niza planted a cross on a hillock of stones as a mark of annexation, and set out on the return, convinced that he had looked upon one of the Seven Cities from afar.

Marcos de Niza had no difficulty in sharing this opinion with Coronado. None cast doubt on the priest’s marvellous tale. Moreover, the less credible a tale was, the more the Conquistadors believed it. The road to the Seven Cities had been found at last, and nothing remained but to take possession of them in the name of the King of Spain. So an expedition led by Coronado himself set out for the new Promised Land, comprising about a thousand men, Spaniards and Indians, numerous cattle and material. The itinerary followed Niza’s: the valley of the Sonora, the Rio Gila. . . . After crossing mountains and immense fir forests, the column found itself before Zuñi, on the frontier of Arizona and New Mexico: this was Cibola.

Cibola! A few hovels of clay and stone built upon a rock. Narrow streets, a filthy watercourse, and a hostile land. A high calcareous plateau situated at a height of over 6,000 feet, without a tree or a blade of grass. The earth was naked and dry, and the climate was unstable, alternating the rigours of cold with a pitiless burning sun. The Spaniards burst into bitter words about Father de Niza’s pictures, and no one doubted that the priest was wrong in the head. Actually they were among the Pueblos of New Mexico. But these villages, consisting of houses of three or four floors, were surrounded with an external wall flanked with watch towers. From afar off and in the light of the setting sun,
they could look like a Saracen city. Don Quixote mistook farms for fortified castles, so was it surprising that some Conquistadors—these straying knights and spiritual fathers of the hero of La Mancha—had thought they had seen cities of stone and crenellated towers where there were only poor hamlets? In the last rays of the sun, adobe had the sombre colour of granite.

 Coronado had no great difficulty in conquering the land of Cibola, that is to say Zuñi and its neighbouring villages. What arms had the natives to match the steel and gunpowder of the Spaniards? A sort of amity was soon established between the invaders and the conquered people, and unable to give them a name, the Spaniards called their new subjects Pueblos. Having come probably from the north, the Pueblos had made their first dwellings in caves, and at that time their industry was basket-making. Then, freed from some mysterious peril, these troglodytes of New Mexico had abandoned their subterranean habitations and built their curious fortified villages. Agricultural and sedentary, the Pueblos wove goat’s wool, practised ceramics and tanned the skins of deer and antelopes. Their customs were pacific. Profoundly religious, they worshipped the Sun. Each morning at dawn, a priest—like the Musulman muezzin—called the people to prayer from the top of the highest terrace. At the summer solstice they celebrated the great festival of the flutes. When the hunting season opened, the dance of the bison formed the prelude to the departure of the hunters, who were armed only with bows and arrows. Choreography, moreover, penetrated all communal activity. The sacred rites were accompanied with dances, and the singers beat time by clapping their hands as in Andalusia. Festivals of germination, of the New Fire (did it derive from, or did it inspire the Aztec rite?) and of the water, were celebrated with dances.

 In the land of Cibola the women were beautiful. They could be seen going towards the fountains with upright carriage, holding amphora on their heads with one hand, like the women of Ancient Greece. They were not only beautiful, but they held a considerable degree of power. They dominated the home and took first place in the city councils. Their very active sisterhoods were busy in politics as well as religion. The women of the Pueblos were not content with bringing up their children, but they ruled their men. They were without doubt the leading municipal advisers.

 The Pueblos can thus, by social and religious organisation, be regarded as a civilised people, with a place somewhere between x
the nomads of the North American plains and the Lords of Mexico and Peru. It was a transitional civilization, the product of spontaneous generation, and strangely contradictory (its tools were neolithic, but feminism had gained its first victory), and perhaps the precursor of Aztec civilisation. How many were they? About 30,000 men, which is few considering that the Cibola country extended over the present states of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, and even overflowed a little into Sonora and Chihuahua in Mexico.

But the Pueblos did not inhabit this vast territory all at the same time. Two great rivers drain it: the Colorado and the Rio Grande. Into the Colorado flow the Rio San Juan to the north and the Rio Gilo to the south before it falls into the Gulf of California. The Rio Grande, the present frontier between Mexico and the United States over a great part of its course, runs into the Gulf of Mexico. As the two rivers are very close in their upper courses, the Pueblos passed from one to the other, though it is not possible to speak of real migration. The centre of gravity of their settlement remained fixed on Zuñi, the capital of Cibola, which was to stay as such always, since under the name of Indian Reservations the descendants of the pre-Columbian tribes are preserved there today.

For several months Coronado continued an absurd and exhausting circuit round Cibola, and such was his madness for gold that he accepted the least credible tale without turning a hair. It was enough for an Indian to indicate some vague point in space—often in order to mock him—for Coronado to go there at once. On one occasion it was a fortified town called Ciuñuy, on the river Pecos, where it was said the chief sat under a gigantic tree from which hung little golden bells; when the evening breeze shook them, the prince fell asleep to the sound of golden music. On another occasion it was the Empire of Quivira, beside the River Arkansas, where they said there were fish like horses—possibly the hippocampus, the sea horse. Each occasion ended in disappointment, and then they set off in pursuit of other chimeras. Actually there was some basic truth in the native directions: gold was not lacking in the neighbourhood of Cibola, but it was under the earth.

An end had to be put to this pursuit of fantasies. Coronado and his men returned to Mexico, where they were received by the Viceroy as defeated men, that is to say badly. Nevertheless, one of them, Lopez de Cardenaz, had accidentally discovered, during an exploration northwards, a natural wonder that sur-
passed all the illusory beauties of the Seven Cities: the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. This was one of the grandest moments of the Conquest. Faced with a landscape from the very creation of the world, the Spaniards crossed themselves, for they had recognised the hand of God.

While Coronado was exhausting himself in the deserts of New Mexico, grave events were taking place in the province of Jalisco, which was within his jurisdiction. Wearied by the presence of the Spaniards, the Indians of Sinaloa, who were allied to the Zacatecas, had raised the standard of revolt. After setting fire to the churches and butchering some of the Jalisco garrison, the rebels had retired into the mountains—or peñas—north of Guadalajara. Oñate, who acted as Governor in the absence of Coronado, was practically besieged in Jalisco, expecting the imminent attack of the Indians. Nevertheless, he was able to send a distress call to the Viceroy. The request greatly embarrassed Antonio de Mendoza, for he had not sufficient effectives to hand to give immediate and effective help to his subordinate; also the reputation of the Zacatecas Indians was well known, for with them there was no quarter and death was slow and torture refined. It was then that the providential man appeared: Pedro de Alvarado, the 'Sun God,' the favourite of the great Conquistadors, the hero of Mexico and Guatemala.

We last saw him at the moment when, following the pact of Riobamba, he took courteous leave of Francisco Pizarro with 100,000 pesos in his pocket, the price of renouncing his interest in Peru. That was six years earlier. Meanwhile Alvarado had returned to Spain and had there provoked a duel with Hernando Pizarro, who had been responsible for the execution of his friend Almagro, reconciled himself with his wife, had won the support of the Emperor Charles for his plans and had set out once more for the New World. With the Emperor's consent and his own capital—the Habsburg was more generous with words than subventions—Alvarado had decided to organise an expedition to China and the Spice Islands. The plan was ambitious, and involved nothing less than setting out from the Mexican coast to cross the whole Pacific Ocean.

The shipyards of Mexico and Guatemala had worked hard for Cortés' former lieutenant. But he paid to the last farthing. In a few months thirteen ships were armed and assembled in the little port of Acaxatla, not far from the isthmus of Tehuantepec. Everything was ready. The flags were hoisted, Alvarado's fleet raised anchor and sailed towards the port of La Purificación on
the way to Jalisco. During the halt at La Purificación, Alvarado learned of the danger that threatened Oñate. Could he leave a Spanish officer to perish by Indian arrows? He ordered everyone to land, reefed the sails and saddled the horses. The Moluccas were forgotten, for the life of one of His Majesty's captains had to be saved.

A hundred cavaliers with raised swords debouched into the peñoles of Guadalajara, and it was high time, for Oñate was on the verge of succumbing to the assaults of the Zacatecas Indians. Alvarado's arrival reversed the situation. He was known throughout America, from Mexico to Chile, and his exploits were like those of the hero of the Iliad. Standing up in his stirrups, firmly gripping his blade in his steel-gauntleted hand, the giant with the glowing beard was as terrible as when he held back the Aztec mob or calmly protected the refugees from Tacuba. He had donned his cuirass as in the great days. He was indeed the 'Sun God,' and the Indians fell back subdued. Their grip relaxed and Oñate breathed again.

But at the height of the struggle, which took place at the abrupt summit of a peñol—a horse slipped on the stones of a track, lost its balance and rolled down the cliff at the foot of which Alvarado was fighting. The Conquistador had no time to leap aside and was struck. The weight of the beast, increased by its battle-harness, crushed Pedro de Alvarado to the ground.

The Spanish adventure in North America came to an end with Alvarado's chivalrous gesture, he who had abandoned the road to the Spice Islands to fly to the aid of a compañero who was about to drop his sword. A pure light surrounds his broken body. None more than Alvarado, perhaps, had need to atone for his bloody past, that he might end 'in beauty.' Was there a single Indian in the Isthmus who had forgotten the invasion of Guatemala by Alvarado's column? From Mexico to Tehuantepec it had been a simple military promenade, but the business had grown worse shortly after the Chiapas country was passed. Irritated at seeing his progress hindered by native elements, the Conquistador had launched all his forces against a practically unarmed adversary. The fights had been so murderous that one of the conquered provinces bore the lugubrious name of Xequiqual, 'under blood.' Although the Guatemalan operation weighs heavily against Alvarado, to his credit must be placed the generous impulse that cost him his life. Of course, because he held out a brotherly hand to Oñate, Alvarado is not absolved of his crimes, but by showing that his heart did not beat for gold
alone, he becomes more likable. He seems to become more human, and his appearance, which had hitherto only a sort of brutal grandeur, softens.

Never, perhaps, had the Spaniards put up so great an effort to penetrate 'the northern mystery,' efforts superhuman but fruitless. The balance-sheet of the northern expeditions was negative. If only Hernando de Soto, setting out from Florida, had joined up with Coronado, coming from California! Their roads had crossed, but each was working for himself. The discovery of the Mississippi, the splendours of the Grand Canyon, the battlements of the Seven Cities: these were fine pictures and fine memories to relate—with embellishments—in the evenings in Estremadura. The realities of North America—its natural resources as well as its geographical outlines—had totally escaped the Conquistadors. This gigantic prey, although attacked on both flanks, east and west, slipped from their grasp, seeming even to withdraw as they advanced. The best of them— including Hernando de Soto and Pedro de Alvarado—struggled vainly. Doubtless at the beginning they lacked a sovereign authority which would have coordinated and 'planned' their haphazard inroads. Doubtless also, the first impulse given to the Conquest by the caravels of Christopher Columbus had some responsibility for the failure, for tradition and routine brought the Spanish ships almost mechanically into the same waters, to the same bases and along the same tracks. These reasons—and others more subtle and concerned with continental politics—had the result that North America, discovered in great part by the subjects of Charles the Fifth, was excluded from the Spanish Imperium to the benefit of the Anglo-Saxon latecomers.

THE MIRAGE OF ELDORADO

The conquest of Central America, which had been begun seriously by Pedrarias Davila, Cristobal de Olid and Hernando Cortés himself, was completed by a series of small local expeditions, the leaders of which had not the wide ambitions of Pizarro or Hernando de Soto but were very capable of bringing their endeavours to successful conclusions. The conquering colonists set out simultaneously from Mexico and Panama. This double stream, working in opposite directions, provoked encounters that sometimes ended in tragedy—like that in Honduras between Cortés and Pedrarias Davila's men. Each
claimed it for his own and would not let go. Like strange 'game preserves,' these lands were bitterly disputed, and passed from one to the other according to the fortunes of the fight. None, of course, respected the rights of the first occupant. Only the right of the strongest regularised possession, and that only for a time. A precarious possession, in fact, constantly menaced by concurrent expeditions.

The history of the conquest of Central America is that of a confused quarrel: a lightning 'general post' of captains who, turn and turn about, installed themselves as masters and then gave way to newcomers, more numerous and better armed, and it was lucky when these dispossessions were not accompanied by bloody settlements. Did these dare-devil Conquistadors ever know where they were, or where they were going? For the most part they had no idea. This 1250-mile isthmus that connects Mexico to Colombia had only one name: Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama were only provinces, and it was not until the 19th century that they became republics. But very soon each province had its Conquistador. Espinosa and Gonzalez Davila, setting out from Panama, penetrated Costa Rica and, pushing onwards, encountered the cacique Nicarao, the ruler of Nicaragua. Following in their tracks, Hernandez de Cordoba explored the River San Juan and made the circuit of the lakes of Managua and Nicaragua. He continued his progress northwards and ran into Gonzalez Davila in Honduras. He did not get further, for Davila gave battle to him, defeated him and obliged him to return to Panama. Meanwhile, Cristobal de Olid landed in Honduras, coming from Mexico at the head of 400 men. This time the enemy was considerable, and Olid was one of Cortes' best officers. He captured Gonzalez Davila, but treated him generously. With Davila eliminated, would Olid stay master of Honduras? In the intoxication of victory, Cristobal de Olid too quickly forgot the exact purpose of his mission; the search for a passage between the two Oceans—a geographical mission! It is easy to understand that Olid aimed at something higher, for he had been one of those who had conquered Mexico for Cortes and he reckoned the time had come to carve out a kingdom for himself. But Cortes got wind of the affair and at once charged Francisco de Las Casas to seize the rebel—a double rebel, since Olid, as we remember, had had a talk with Diego Velazquez on his way through Cuba. But Las Casas underestimated his enemy, and after a short battle, it was he who was conquered and captured. Just as with Davila, Olid
was magnanimous, for he was so sure of himself. He invited his two prisoners to a banquet of comrades-in-arms, but when the Conquistadors raised their goblets to the King of Spain, Davila and Las Casas, who had been quick to come to an understanding, stabbed Ovid to death.

The field was free for new adventures and new adventurers. Prominent at the top is the massive figure of Pedro de Alvarado. Alvarado, as we have already seen, had cut a bloody furrow from Mexico to the frontiers of Nicaragua. He distributed the native women among his soldiers, loaded the men with irons and without scruple broke all who opposed him. It was even said that, not having anything with which to feed the thousands of men he had enrolled for labour or war, he authorised them to eat the flesh of their enemies, that is to say of their fellows from neighbouring villages. His rages were proverbial, like the day when, believing he would find gold on the basis of local information, he found that it was copper. How many times had he not been misled and made the Indian informers responsible for his failures, taking revenge on them cruelly! He was brutal—with that particle of joviality which coloured his worst angers with a false indulgence—brave to madness, worshipping everything that glittered or was of high value. Alvarado was the great 'star' of Central America. Founder of Santiago de los Caballeros and San Salvador, capital of the future Salvador, he extended his dominion as far as Costa Rica. Ostentatious and sensual as a Medici, a lover of fine armour like Menelaus, Alvarado reigned uncontrolled from Guatemala to Panama for close on twenty years, with the intervals we already know of in Spain and Peru. Twenty years of military successes—easy and without glory. One prefers to forget this bantering satrap, presiding over the massacres of the Guatemalans or witnessing their horrible feasts, so that we may remember the hero of the Noche Triste and the Guadalajara peñol.

In actual fact, for a long time the Spaniards did nothing but pass through Central America. The physical structure of the country—its contorted relief, its unstable soil, subject to frequent earthquakes, its lower lands buried under a dense forest entwined with lianas—was badly adapted to permanent settlements. This long corridor, filled with ambushes, was for the Conquistadors coming from Mexico the land route of the Spanish Main as well as the means of access to the region of Darien. It was also the road to Eldorado.

Eldorado! After Atlantis, the Fountain of Youth, Antilia, and
the land of the Seven Cities, this was another of those Edens in which the conquerors' faith was as hard as iron. Eldorado bore the name of its sovereign, the El Dorado, the Man of Gold. He was a naked king, covered all over with grease and then coated with gold dust. At the end of the day, he could be seen shining in the light of the setting sun, standing in his boat. When he bathed, all the gold dissolved in the water, and there was nothing but a flaming patch on the surface of the lake. The Indians of Peru did not doubt the existence of the Kingdom of the Man of Gold and this was how the Spaniards heard them speak of it. But who had seen it? Where was it to be found? In Equador? In Colombia? In Venezuela? In Guiana? Time and space meant nothing to the Conquistadors, and they searched for Eldorado everywhere.

Gonzalo Pizarro left Quito with 340 Spaniards and 4,000 Indians. It was not only gold that drew him, but also the cinnamon in which, it seemed, Eldorado abounded. Would that old dream of spices at last take substance in the land of the shining king? Gonzalo climbed the Cordillera of the Andes, descended the other side and encountered a river—the Napo—which he followed throughout its length. It flowed into another river, the Marañon. A brigantine was built at once. Francisco Orellana—native of Trujillo, too—took command of it. The expedition divided into two. Orellana launched himself upon the river; Gonzalo for a while followed the bank, but was soon forced to stop. Since the start the warm rain had not ceased to fall, rotting the Spaniards' breeches, rusting their swords and spoiling the food. Gonzalo Pizarro and his men—more than half his effectivesthe  had perished—returned to Quito without having discovered Eldorado, though they brought back cinnamon. But Orellana carried out an amazing feat, for in his single brigantine he followed the Marañon and the Amazon to the sea. Once on the waters of the Atlantic he passed within sight of the Gulf of Paria and steered straight for Haiti. But this was not his last stage. He went to Spain to tell the Emperor of his extraordinary Odyssey. In eight months of river navigation, Orellana had traversed South America from Quito to Paria, tracing a sinuous curve that embraced Peru, Amazonia, Guiana and Venezuela. He swore that he was only once afraid, when he found himself face to face with long-haired, pale-faced women who handled their bows as skillfully as men. Orellana had discovered and named the River Amazon.

Next they tried to find Eldorado by starting from the
Colombian and Venezuelan coasts. Both were already well
known. Thirty years earlier some illustrious Conquistadors—
Hojeda and Juan de la Cosa among them—had set foot on the
Colombian shores, the part between Cape de la Vela and Darien
being known as New Andalusia. Bastidas had founded Santa
Marta. Pedro de Heredia had been busy on the western coast
and had not been afraid to push his expedition from Carthagena
to Antioquia, at the foot of the Cordillera. But these brave adven-
tures were without future. They violated graves, they pillaged
and captured slaves. But the appointment of a responsible
governor by Charles the Fifth put an end to such heroic
banditry.

One Conquistador, of the grand manner, then went in search
of the Man of Gold; Jiménez de Quesada. Appointed by the King
as Royal Audience and Chief-Justice of Santa Maria province
(situated on the north-west coast of Colombia, between the Cape
de la Vela and Barranquilla), as soon as he had landed Quesada
was entrusted by the governor, Hernando de Lugo, with a south-
ward exploration, following the course of the Magdalena river.

700 Spaniards, with five times as many Indians and 100 horses,
set out. The effective was classic, or little short of it, but what
was new in an expedition of this kind was the personality of the
leader. Austere to asceticism and of scrupulous piety, Jiménez
de Quesada was strict in his prayers, but attentive to the affairs
of the world. He was one of those great righteous persons who
work ardently for the good of their souls, without however ceas-
ing to cling to the temporal, and who, while living in the world,
strictly observe the three monastic vows. Two priests attended
upon Quesada, which sufficed to show that the inflexible
Audience did not intend to take any other counsel than that of
the church. He marched towards Eldorado, not for gold but for
Catholic Spain and for God. The intention was pure, but his
actions were less so.

Setting out from Santa Marta, the expedition followed the
course of the Magdalena with difficulty. The country was nothing
but a vast swamp covered by dense virgin forest which had to
be cut down with axes. Innumerable muddy water-courses
meandered over the soft earth, more like slime than terra firma.
The Conquistadors were tortured by famine. They tried to stave
it off by the usual means: reptiles, dead horses, and the leather
of their belts. Then they went further; the corpses of Indian
mercenaries and those even of their own comrades helped them
to survive. These shameful dismemberments at nightfall can only
be imagined. Jiménez de Quesada closed his eyes.

Only a sixth of the conquering column reached the confluence
of the Magdalena and the Río Suarez, in the neighbourhood of
Bucaramanga. The jungle gave place to a wide valley, with
fields of maize, pastures, and streams of clear water. The
Spaniards thought they had awakened from a nightmare. Indians
came to meet them, smiling, and spoke a language unknown to
the interpreters. They were Chibchas.

The history of the Chibchas recalls on a lesser plane that of
the Aztecs and Incas. At the beginning one finds the same legend:
a demi-god, a hero and sage called Bochica, and father of their
civilisation, who, having blasted a mountain, disappeared east-
wards. This Messiah, the descendant of the Sun, was the
Chibchas' idol. Altars were raised to him and his cult was cele-
brated. Bochica joins Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha in the pre-
columbian pantheon.

The Chibchas had been established in Colombia for several
centuries. Inhabiting the high plains of the south and the moun-
tains of the north, they concentrated mainly on the Bogota
plateau. It was there that, emerging from the limbos of anarchy,
the Chibcha civilisation took birth, developed and flourished. A
long quarrel between tribal lords had preceded and paved the
way for a sort of Colombian state. As always, it had been possible
to establish supreme power only after murderous eliminations;
the assassin who escaped assassination became the ruler. When
Quesada led his troop of ghosts along the Río Suarez, Chibcha
unity had become a reality as a kind of confederation of tribes,
each led by a zipa or a zaque. In brief, they were dukedoms of
which a sort of archduke held control, whose name was Bogota,
zipa of the town that bore his name. A curious law of succession
transmitted the inheritance from uncle to nephew and not from
father to son. Thus the zipas and zaques had to be the sons of
a sister of the defunct monarch. Their initiation, like that of
future Aztec rulers, was long and severe. In fact, the Chibcha
princes held political power and sacerdotal authority, and they
were prepared for this double role by fasting and maceration.
Legislation was summary but just. It was the same with the
administration, which had regard for the needs of everyone but
did not force anyone beyond his capabilities. They were skilled
cultivators—great specialists in coca—and were also excellent
metallurgists and tasteful makers of ceramics. Long before the
coming of the Spaniards, they exported their statuettes of gold
and copper alloy and vases of cut rock crystal to Peru, where they were admired by the Incas. Their dwellings were primitive: tree-trunks united by a mixture of earth and straw formed the walls, and the thatched roofs were shaped like pyramids. Such was the Chibcha civilisation—still archaic, but sufficiently evolved for the outlines of a political structure to be distinguished, perhaps even the promise of an empire. But in a few days 150 Spaniards subdued the old people of Bochica and the _zipa_ confederation was integrated into the empire of Charles the Fifth.

We are once again the witnesses of an astounding _tour de force_, a company of Spaniards taking possession of a land twice as big as France, and of a capital with 20,000 inhabitants, almost without striking a blow. It all happened with even greater ease than at Cajamarca. There was not even the semblance of a nominal sovereign, such as gave Pizarro's victory over the Incas the appearance of collaboration, if not of alliance. The success was total. But as in Peru, divisions between native chiefs favoured the conquerors, and it was one after the other that Jiménez de Quesada gathered in the Colombian kinglets. The _zaque_ of Hunza—Tunja—and those of Sugamoso and Tundama let themselves be taken without resistance, or almost. As for Bogota, he fled into the savannah and the Spaniards took possession of the City of the Zipas without encountering a living soul. The temple doors were plated with gold and studded with emeralds. Doors were torn off, houses searched and prisoners tortured in order to learn more. Where was the gold? It was the same eternal question!

Nothing opposed the Conquistadors' advance except natural difficulties. So funereal was the region traversed by the River Neiva that the Spaniards called it the Valley of Sorrow. Plains, valleys, plateaus.... On returning to Bogota, a few miles from the city, Quesada's men saw that they were not alone, for two camps were installed in the plain at a respectful distance from one another. The first was Spanish, certainly, but the second appeared unusual. Who were these soldiers who spoke with so guttural an accent?

The leader of the first camp was known to them: he was Belalcazar, the conqueror of Ecuador. He had grown tired of Quito and the lure of Eldorado could not leave Pizarro's former captain indifferent. Setting out from the Ecuador capital, he had ascended the valley of the Cauca and reached the suburbs of Bogota by following the left bank of the Magdalena.

The second camp was that of a German officer, Nicolas Feder-
man. For the first time a Spanish Conquistador found a foreign conqueror on his road. The Germans were also exploring the continent in search of Eldorado, and this was not to the taste of Jiménez de Quesada. However, their powers could not be more regular, for ten years earlier Charles the Fifth had given permission to the Alfinger brothers to undertake the conquest of the Maracaibo region. Above all it was a financial transaction, endowed by the Welsers, bankers of Augsburg, who were creditors of the Spanish Crown and hoped by this roundabout means to recover their money. The pearl-fishing on the coast and the exploitation of the gold-mines in the interior ought, it was thought, to produce great profits for the concessionaires. Part would serve to repay Spanish debts and part would help to refloat the Imperial treasury that had been exhausted by the wars. The idea was good, but the results did not come up to expectations; far from it. So far as concerns mining enterprises, Alfinger was content to establish a rancheria on the banks of Lake Maracaibo. After his death in an Indian ambush, the concession was transferred to Hoermuth, commonly known as Espira, from his birthplace, Spire. After vain explorations in the direction of the Andes, Espira joined up with Federman, who was a protégé of the Welsers, and these two strove to establish a German colony at Coro. It was then that Federman, braver or more daring than his compatriot, had succeeded in penetrating to the heart of the Chibcha realm.

Thus Belalcazar's column, coming from Quito, Federman's, which had set out from Coro, and Quesada's, which had begun at Santa Marta, made an unforeseen meeting in the plain of Bogotá. Who would have imagined that the three expeditions, originating in the north, east and west, would have met at the gates of the ancient Colombian city? It was a grandiose encounter and one that could have been bloody. But the three captains remembered in time that they were subjects of the same emperor. Noblesse oblige! They saluted each other with their swords, slipped them back in their sheaths, embraced and celebrated their meeting with a banquet of venison. Afterwards an arrangement was made: Belalcazar gave up and returned to Quito, while the practical German handed his detachment over to Quesada against the payment of 10,000 pesos of gold.

Jiménez de Quesada's mission had come to an end. In default of Eldorado, he had discovered the future Colombia, a reservoir of gold and emeralds. Before embarking for Spain, he founded the city of Santa Fe de Bogotá and named his conquest the New
Kingdom of Granada, in memory of his native land. Still inflexible and severe, he presented himself to the Emperor and gave an account of his journey. His voice remained cold when he described the difficult journey, the tombs of the Magdalena valley filled to the brim with jewels and animals carved in gold, the surrender of the Chibcha lords, and the loneliness of the valleys. But he became livelier when he recalled the courage of his companions, and even more so when he referred to the thousands of Indians who did not know the true God. A governor was needed for the territory that he, Quesada, had conquered. He awaited nothing more than his sovereign's orders before setting out again, for he did not doubt that the Emperor would confirm him in his functions. But in this he was mistaken. He knew nothing of the minds of princes. Charles gave the post of Governor of the New Kingdom of Granada not to Jiménez de Quesada, its founder, but to a young intriguer, the son of Hernando de Lugo.

As it had not been found in Ecuador, or Colombia, or Venezuela, would they find Eldorado in Guiana? In that hell? A hot and humid climate, with violent rains and impenetrable virgin forests, in short the most disheartening land the Conquistadors had prospected. Perhaps a few grains of gold were scattered in the alluvial deposits of the rivers. Perhaps, too, if one searched well in the suffocating heat of the Guiana forests, one might make out the tall and slender trunks of the tulip-wood trees. But to explore the tiniest part of this region, which was only slightly smaller than France, an army of woodcutters was required, and tools that were not yet invented. The soldiers were few, and had only swords and machetes. Nevertheless, they persisted, and Guiana became their grave. Diego de Ordaz—the conqueror of Popocatepetl—wandered along the Rio Negro for four years and died there. Pedro de Ursua marched straight ahead towards the legendary Lake Parime and coveted Manaos, the City of Gold. He was not far away from it when a volley of Indian arrows laid him low. His companions paid him the last honours and stoically continued an enterprise that was lost in advance. It was only in the plain of Manaos, at the edge of the unfathomable forest and of the aquatic Kingdom of the Amazon, that the faithful friends of Diego de Ordaz, trembling with fever under the yellow sun of the Guianas, abandoned Eldorado.

In relinquishing the search for Eldorado, the Spaniards simultaneously abandoned Guiana. France was able to settle her convicts there, Holland constructed her polders, and Great
Britain annexed a dominion: three Guianas which, three centuries later, were to furnish Europe and the United States with gold, diamonds, strategic bases, and especially bauxite, the raw material of aluminium. For want of perseverance and the means, Spain, the discoverer of Guiana, has no place there today. Thus came into being the only fissure in the Spanish-American block—if one excepts Brazil, voluntarily relinquished.

To the failure of Spain in Guiana there is an echo: the failure of Germany in Venezuela. Federman’s capitulation on the high plateaus of Bogota had not put an end to German expeditions. But the imperial concession had expired, without the beneficiaries having explored a quarter of what had been given them on paper, that is, all the lands between the Cape de la Vela and Cumana, including the islands near the coast and the interior of the land. Meanwhile, a handful of German adventurers persisted. One of the Welsers, accompanied by Hutten, pushed a reconnaissance from Venezuela to Tocuyo. They did not go further. A Spanish detachment commanded by Juan de Carvajal arrested and executed them. For a time the Germans were able to maintain themselves at Coro—with some difficulty, for their rough ways had raised the Spaniards and Indians against them. But had Carvajal and Lopes clearer consciences? Both, moreover, ended their careers by being well and truly hanged.

While the Welsers made representations at the Spanish Court to obtain, if not a renewal of their concession, at least their continuance in the territories they occupied, a fierce and cunning contest for the possession of Venezuela was being played out around the Maracaibo lagoon between the Conquistadors and the German cavalry. These men cared little for legal arguments. Polished chicanery at Valladolid, but war to the knife—a cuchillo—at Coro. The Germans were beaten in the field. After ten years of proceedings, they lost their cause, and it was the Spaniards—Villegas, Villacinde, Fajardo—who laid the first stones of the Venezuelan cities. Hutten and Federman have been forgotten, but Captain Losada, founder of Santiago de Leon de Caracas, future capital of Venezuela, has been remembered. Ejected from the Conquest, the Germans took their revenge three centuries later, by colonising the state of Santa Catarina in Brazil. Another revenge: the same year as Espira was wandering in the Cordillera, a German named Cromberger set up the first printing press of America at Mexico.

So was there no such place as Eldorado? There was: a potential Eldorado. Following the Conquistadors who were
armed only with swords and arquebuses, modern technicians have forced Eldorado to surrender its gold. Tools and machines have torn open its soil, which had remained impenetrable to Charles' men. What was it that the mirage of the Man of Gold concealed? In Colombia: silver, platinum, and emeralds, the finest in the world. In Guiana: rare essences, diamonds and the wherewithal to provide all the war industries of the world with aluminium. In Venezuela, petroleum, the black gold of the 20th century.

THE RIO DE LA PLATA: THE ROAD TO PERU

Around the 35th degree of latitude a vast bay, shaped like a funnel, drives broadly into the Atlantic coast of South America: the Rio de la Plata. This is the common mouth of the rivers Parana and Uruguay, and the natural way into the heart of the continent. At the time of the Conquest, the country known as the Rio de la Plata comprised the present territories of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia.

The Plata had aroused the curiosity of the Spanish conquerors quite early. Disconcerted by the dimensions of this estuary, which was nearly 150 miles wide, they examined it long and carefully before deciding to land. But they very quickly realised that the Plata could offer them a shorter route to Peru than those through Panama or the Magellan Strait. To cross the continent at the point where it was beginning to narrow, instead of turning it on the north or south, would be a saving of time and money. But there was a double objective. Not only were they seeking to shorten the distance between Spain and Peru, but also to reach the Pacific more rapidly, and thereby China and the Spice Islands too.

Some heroic pathfinders prepared the way for the adelantados. Díaz de Solís, the first, set out in search of the famous strait which should permit one to pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific, discovered by Balboa not long before. He touched the coasts of Brazil, dropped anchor in a port which he named Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria and gave the name Mar Dulce to the Rio de la Plata. He perished by an Indian arrow on the bank of the river he had conquered. Eleven years later, Sebastian Cabot (Magellan had meanwhile found his straits) followed de Solís' route, but, continuing northwards along the Parana, extended the road to Paraguay. The way was therefore well worn
when Pedro de Mendoza, one of the noblest gentlemen at the Spanish Court, got under way in the port of Bonanza for the Rio de la Plata.

It was a large expedition: 11 ships, 1,000 men, cattle and
considerable material. A brilliant staff surrounded the hidalgo, including the proud figures of Juan de Ayolas, Martinez de Irala and Felipe de Caceres, all men of talent and high estate. The fleet reached the Rio de la Plata without mishap. Mendoza’s first gesture—haunted doubtless by the person of Christopher Columbus—was to found on the river’s right bank a city which he named Nuestra Señora Santa Maria del Buen Aire, the future Buenos Aires. But Mendoza’s mission was to be of short duration. Having advanced along the Parana in search of supplies, he turned back, seized perhaps by some presentiment, and died at sea on the return journey.

While the Spaniards were striving to make the huts of Santa Maria del Buen Aire habitable, at the very spot where the skyscrapers of Buenos Aires later rose, Juan de Ayolas succeeded Mendoza, but not for long. Two months after the death of his predecessor, Ayolas was caught in an Indian ambush and lost his life, his head crushed by the terrible boleadora of the Querandi natives. During his two months, however, Ayolas had ascended the Parana to the Paraguay and established a post at the confluence of the rivers Paraguay and Pilcomayo. This stage between Buenos Aires and Peru bore the name Asuncion. Thus it was fated that Mendoza and Ayolas would have time, despite their singularly brief careers, to lay the first stones of the capitals of the Argentine and Paraguay: Buenos Aires and Asuncion.

In his lifetime Mendoza had designated Ayolas as his successor. Ayolas’ successor was elected to power by the Spaniards of the Rio de la Plata. The unanimous vote fell in favour of Martinez de Irala, a masterful and ambitious captain, but of great presence, and when the King had ratified his election, Irala set about his task. He began by centralising the administration of the colony at Asuncion, leaving at Buenos Aires only the personnel necessary for maritime operations. Resuming Ayolas’ idea, he reckoned to make Asuncion the base for starting out for Peru, and he was about to set off when disagreeable news reached him: a new adelantado had just landed in the region. This intruder was none other than Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, the healer of the Indians, the hero of the north. The interview between these two captains at Asuncion had all the appearance of cordiality; each, concealing his ill humour, protested his friendliness. Did they not have need of each other? Moreover, their instructions agreed at all points: it was a matter of establishing communications with Peru, so why fight when they were pursuing a common aim? As token of his trust, Cabeza
de Vaca named Ayolas on the spot as his second-in-command. The two leaders having agreed, nothing remained but to open the road to Peru which would bring metropolitan Spain and her empire closer together.

Difficult terrain, hostile populations and internal dissensions indefinitely delayed the meeting of the men of La Plata with those of Peru. To reach Cuzco, in fact, they had to cross the Chaco and the high plateaus of Bolivia, that is to say, to conquer changing natural conditions—from the Pampas and their howling winds to the high Bolivian ranges at 20,000 feet. They had also to be constantly on the watch against wandering native tribes, which were numerous—Querandis, Charrues, Guenoas—among whom there were some that were civilized, like the Diaguites and Guaramis. The Diaguites occupied the present Argentine provinces of Salta, Catamarca, Le Rioja, Tucuman and Mendoza. Early subjugated by the Incas, the Diaguites did not have their own political organization, but were answerable to a curaca, a governor delegated by the Peruvian emperor. They were very bellicose, however, and handled the sling and lasso with skill. The Guaramis lived on the banks of the Parana and Paraguay, and in the southern part of Brazil. More developed than the Diaguites, they governed themselves. An elementary hierarchy united the various groups into a sort of society: fifty families constituted a group under the command of a cacique, the union of these groups forming in its turn a tribe presided over by a superior assembly. Although gentle and melancholy of aspect, the Guaramis were formidable in combat. Brought up from earliest years to the use of the bow and the club—primitive weapons, doubtless, though they rarely missed their mark—Guaramis and Diaguites, like all the tribes of the Rio de la Plata, knew how to make war.

Refractory nature and pugnacious natives: the Spaniards would have mastered these two obstacles with less difficulty and more quickly if they had been able to settle their own quarrels. At La Plata, more than elsewhere, no one worked except for himself. There was no methodical exploration and no overall plan. There were individual entradas—as reconnaissance expeditions were called—direct like sword blows and, like them, sometimes fatal. Actions were isolated, which did not however prevent the entradores from being watchful of the progress of others and from spying on them jealously. Powerless to coordinate the movements of the conquest, the two captains watched one another. Each had his camarilla. Thus the partisans
of Cabeza de Vaca were the leales, the loyalists, by contrast with
the tumultuarios, the turbulent ones who espoused Irala’s cause.
For the sham friendliness of the two men had not lasted long,
and the mask had fallen. Cabeza de Vaca, on his return from
an expedition westward, was arrested by Irala’s guard and cast
into prison at Asuncion on the pretext of conspiracy and was
embarked for Spain. To send the adelantade back to Charles
in irons was a coup of great daring.

Having evicted Cabeza de Vaca, Irala had a free field. He
was alone in the arena, so he plunged forward, head down, and
two years after Cabeza de Vaca’s expulsion reached Lake
Titicaca and eventually Cuzco. The connection between the
Argentine and Peru had been made. Mad with pride, Irala
presented himself to Pedro de La Gasca, who was then govern-
ing in the land of the Incas. He expected to receive compliments
as well as his commission as Governor, and was already opening
his arms for the embrace. But alas! his reception was icy. La
Gasca had known for a long time that the Spaniards on the
other side of the Bolivian plateaus were trying to make contact
with him and he watched them coming with an eagle eye. He
awaited them, not to take them to his heart but to show these
adventurers harshly that the time for adventure was over. There
was but one master, Charles the Fifth, for whom he alone, La
Gasca, possessed and exercised power. Irala and his companions
had only to re-enter the ranks and accept obedience. Irala did
not even obtain confirmation of his functions as Governor of La
Plata. The thing seemed natural to him, but how could Pedro
de La Gasca, the austere defender of legality, sanction a rank
taken by violence from its lawful possessor? Irala returned to
Asuncion, a simple captain under orders from the Viceroy. Yet
what a victory was actually his! By tracing a line on the map of
America from Buenos Aires to Asuncion and Cuzco, and thus
connecting the Atlantic and Pacific faces of the continent, he had
completed the grandiose pattern of the Spanish Empire.

Irala’s expedition to Peru had taken more than a year. In his
absence the colony of Asuncion, delivered to the intrigues of
leales and tumultuarios, had changed masters several times.
Ambitious claimants tried their hands at ruling turn and turn
about, and some, like Diego de Abreu, tried to hold power. It
was time Irala came back and, not without difficulty, he reduced
everyone to obedience. For ten more years Irala governed
Paraguay, harshly but wisely, and some months before his death
he received a parchment from the King officially announcing his appointment as Governor.

Irala designated Gonzalo de Mendoza, his son-in-law, as his successor, but after two years of power Mendoza died. The new Governor was Ortiz de Vergara, Irala's second son-in-law. This monotonous round of adelantados was to last till the end of the 16th century. While the gobernación of La Plata was waiting to become a viceroyalty and seeking to find administrative balance, courageous Conquistadors were continuing the reconnaissance of the country. Núñez de Chaves founded Santa Cruz de la Sierra, and Díaz de Melgarejo founded Ciudad Real. Other cities were born: Cordoba, Corrientes, Tucuman, Santiago del Estero, Santa Fe. It seemed easier to build cities than to conduct good colonial policy.

The conquest of the Rio de la Plata was a long and exacting labour. Begun in 1536 at the moment when Pedro de Mendoza landed at the mouth of the Parana, it was scarcely completed by the beginning of the 17th century. For a long time the Spaniards who were established on either side of the Cordillera Real knew nothing of one another. The only news they had was given them by natives. The Conquistadors of Asunción knew that a white leader ruled at Cuzco, and the Conquistadors of Peru heard of white leaders in the land of the Guaramis. So a double movement in opposite directions enveloped the Andes: while the Spaniards of Peru and Chile tried to take the south-eastern regions from behind, those of the Rio de la Plata headed north-west. This gigantic game of hide-and-seek ended, as we have seen, with the meeting of Irala and La Gasca, but disorder continued no less in the southern colony. The alternation of elected and designated leaders—adding the faults of the elective system to those of nepotism—the hesitations of a central power that was too far away, and local disputes prejudiced the pacification of the territory.

The linking up of La Plata to the viceroyalty of Peru did not facilitate things: too many very difficult men were called upon to have their say in the affairs of La Plata. A permanent quarrel began between these men, such as has existed ever since colonies began: a quarrel of origins. The captains who came direct from Spain to the Rio de la Plata had the presumption of new men; they were for the most part young, imbued with their sense of superiority and preening themselves on imperial favour. They heralded a new class of Conquistadors. But those who came from Peru were old campaigners, strong in their acquired rights
and not intending to be robbed of them. These experts of the Conquest did not allow themselves to be imposed upon by the theoreticians from the homeland, and instead of sharing the prey, young wolves and old wolves tore it from one another fiercely.

Thus the Río de la Plata, discovered by Solis in 1516, reconnoitred by Cabot in 1526 and occupied by Pedro de Mendoza in 1536, was not raised to viceroyalty, independent of Peru, until 1776, 260 years after its conquest. Meanwhile, Juan de Garay had in 1580 carried out a decisive move. Setting out from Asunción at the head of 66 Spaniards, he proceeded on orders from Ayolas to Nuestra Señora Santa María del Buen Aire, abandoned 40 years earlier. On the site of the ruins Juan de Garay and his party traced the plan of a city on the chess-board pattern inspired by the Roman town-planners. On the sand they laid out roads that intersected at right angles. Three buildings were raised around the Plaza Mayor: a church, a town hall and a school. Afterwards, dwellings were built. Each of the 66 Spaniards received an allotment. Before even the first stone of the city was laid, it already had a municipal council, a priest and judges. This move was decisive because the centre of gravity of the Río de La Plata was thus displaced from the marshy plains of Paraguay towards the Atlantic coast. On the debris of the camp erected by Mendoza, Buenos Aires was born, and in four hundred years the capital of the Argentine became the largest city of the Spanish 'New World' and also its masterpiece. Three times greater in extent than Paris, it stretches for nearly twenty miles. Its long straight arteries, intersecting geometrically, reproduce on an enormous scale the primitive squaring sketched out by Juan de Garay.

From the Río de la Plata to the Mississippi, from the pueblos of New Mexico to Tierra del Fuego, the Conquistadors had closed the ring. Our journey now is ended, but a pilgrimage has still to be made to Haiti, not so much to return to our point of departure, to find again the Columbus of the first voyage and once more to watch the Santa María approaching Hispaniola, as to pick up the echo of one ineradicable voice.
CHAPTER XVI

The Voice of an Honest Man:
Bartolome de las Casas

SANTO Domingo, Haïti, at the dawn of the 16th century; Columbus had just founded the first settlement of the New World on the great West Indian island. Only a few hundreds to begin with, the Spanish colonists soon numbered several thousands. They had been told that gold was within hand-reach and that the forests were filled with precious woods and spices. Each of them dreamed of penetrating to the interior of the country, of discovering new lands and being made governor of them. But the reality was quite different, for famine, misery and disease were the constant companions of the Spaniards. The climate was deceptive; it seemed delightful, but in the long run it weakened them and broke them. The breeze that gently stirred the great tropical flowers sometimes became furious and blew in hurricanes. The autumn season was accompanied by suffocating rains to which even the heat of summer was preferable, and the rains brought fevers, too, that ravaged the colonists. To work was certainly not easy and it really was by the sweat of their brows that the Conquistadors made their fortunes. Fortunately, there were always the slaves.

The years passed. One Sunday in the year 1510, in the church of Santo Domingo, Fray Antonio de Montesinos ascended his pulpit with a more assured step than usual. Taking as the theme of his sermon the text of the Evangelist: vox clamantes in deserto—a voice crying in the wilderness—he upbraided his parishioners harshly. How long were they going to exploit the Indians? What did the royal edicts have to say about this? That the employment of the natives in their care—encomiendas—was conditional upon their being protected and instructed in the Christian faith. The dead Queen had been quite clear on this point, but actually the encomiendas had become slave markets
and the encomenderos slave traders. The Spanish colonists were in process of losing their souls.

An ill-concealed tremor passed through the congregation. Such rough speech was obviously not to its taste. Why, when the island of Haiti was beginning to hold out some promise, was it necessary to discourage the well-intentioned? Diego Columbus, son of the Descubridor, had just succeeded Ovando as Governor of Haiti. He had arrived at Santo Domingo with his head full of plans, accompanied by determined men like Diego Velasquez. His scheme was clear: to continue the Conquest, to reconnoitre the near-by islands and complete the exploration of Haiti and Cuba. It was an ambitious programme that did not square very well with Montesinos’ injunctions. The Conquistadors had more need of heroic words than sermons. Be more gentle with the Indians? As if the honour of a Spanish cavalier was not worth a hundred savage consciences! As to the planters, they felt the same. They had shivered with fever long enough in their huts of leaves, but now they lived in houses of stone and were beginning to grow rich. Were they being asked to till the soil themselves?

But the Dominican did not lay himself out to please. Satisfied with himself, he descended from his pulpit. The significance of his words passed beyond the shores of Haiti. For the first time, in fact, and before even colonies were even officially conceived as such, Father de Montesinos had raised ‘the colonial problem.’

While the Conquistadors and colonists returned to their homes in an evil humour, one of them—still young, tall and slightly stooping—stood motionless at the far end of the chapel, as if amazed. It was not the first sermon he had heard; he was regular at the services and received Communion frequently. How was it that his mind was filled with tenderness for the natives on that particular morning? Bartolomé de Las Casas had, in fact, been touched by grace.

Bartolomé’s father, Don Francisco, was of the old nobility and Columbus’ loyal companion, having accompanied him in his later voyages. An ancestor of the Las Casas family—a simple soldier named Casaus, from Limousin in France—had two centuries earlier fought against the Moors under the banner of Ferdinand III the Saint. He was distinguished by his bravery at the taking of Seville, and the pious monarch had ennobled him. Thus the blood of a French mercenary ran in Bartolomé’s veins.

Las Casas’ youth had been divided between study and travel.
As soon as he had graduated at Salamanca—in Letters and Law—he embarked with his father. For about ten years the licentiate, fresh from the University, had led the adventurous life of a Conquistador, fighting against the Caribs and carving a road to fortune with his sword. It was a common destiny for all youth of good social position at that time. Without transition, they passed from the classroom to the battlefield and renewed, sometimes at the peril of their lives, the exploits of which they had heard tell. Bartolomé's two masters were St. Thomas and Christopher Columbus: Reason and Madness, brought paradoxically together to complete the man. In his first youthful period Bartolomé forgot St. Thomas: he was a Conquistador, no more cruel than any other, but as greedy as the rest for power and wealth, and in any event very little concerned with morals and law. Also, he inherited from his father a vast domain in the region of Santo Domingo, and he was now one of the richest planters of the Islands. An army of slaves was at his service. His farming prospered. Bartolomé was a happy man—or at least, he thought himself happy.

Father de Montesinos' sermon revealed him to himself. A Conquistador and a colonist no more! A man of God and soon a priest. He set his slaves free, he sold his properties, he divested himself of all his goods, and a few months after his conversion was ordained at Santiago de Cuba. The first mass celebrated by Bartolomé emphasised an important date in the evangelical history of the New World. It was, in fact, the first solemn High Mass to be sung in Cuba. It was a day of tumult and gaiety. Into the Cuban cathedral squeezed thousands of Indians who had come from all parts, not only to be present at the ordination of Las Casas, but also because this was the day ordered by Velasquez for bringing gold to be marked with the seal of the King of Spain.

Bartolomé began as curé of Zanguarama, the most wretched parish in Cuba. At the same time he performed the duties of military almoner and accompanied Velasquez and Narváez on their expeditions. He restrained the cruel enthusiasms of the soldiers and intervened between Spaniards and Indians. Then he returned to the Dominicans. His public life had begun.

This monk who was stripped of everything, who fed himself on cassava-flour and slept upon straw, was about to give battle to principles and men. First of all, he attacked the requerimiento. This was an institution by which every Conquistador, before taking possession of land, had to call upon the Indians to accept
the teaching of the Christian faith, and if the Indians bowed to this ‘request’ they kept their lives, their freedom and their goods, but if they refused, they were reduced to slavery and dispossessed. Had not Pope Alexander VI’s Bull given America to Spain? And was not Joshua the first to make use of the requerimiento when he called upon the inhabitants of Jericho to surrender their city to him in conformity to the divine will? Today the chosen people were the people of Spain. Bartolomé revolted against this pharisical procedure, for Christ had said that we must go out and teach all the nations—by persuasion and not by threats. The Indian was a free man and must be treated as such.

Bartolomé gave proof of what he expounded. He founded a colony in one of the most sinister regions of Guatemala; his only weapons were evangelical charity and tenderness—for there were no guns, no forced labour, no chains. To this Spanish-Indian community he gave the name Vera Paz. Indeed, peace and goodwill reigned there for a long time and its success was complete. But such an experience could only be ephemeral, for this island of peace was beaten down by the fierce flood of neighbouring tribes. One day Vera Paz was attacked by the heathens; the houses were burned and a great number of the priests were massacred. Bloody repression followed. All the Indians were not ‘good savages.’

But Bartolomé was not discouraged in the least. What he sought so eagerly was the establishment of just laws for the protection of the Indians. He laid siege to the powers at home during his visits, and harassed them with letters: at the time of his first journey to Spain, King Ferdinand was near to death, and the Indians interested him less than the problem of the succession. Bishop Fonseca distrusted Bartolomé. What was the good of mixing sentiment and business? Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros was more understanding. The first results obtained by Las Casas were meagre: the despatch to the West Indies of a Hieronymite mission, his own nomination as ‘Protector of the Indians’—a symbolical title which he turned into a reality—and a few improvements of detail to the principle of requerimiento. On the occasion of his second journey, Cardinal Jiménez was dead and Charles the Fifth was King. What was happening in the New World interested the young emperor, but he had little understanding of colonial matters and had laid the burden of dealing with them on the newly created Council of the Indies. Nevertheless, on the insistence of Las Casas, he promulgated
ordinances in the Indians' favour. Bartolomé struggled on step by step. By sheer tenacity he dragged from the administration legal texts restricting the powers of the Conquistadors and giving the Indians legal protection. Henceforward colonial enterprises were controlled by the priests, slavery was suppressed and the requerimiento lost its absolute character and became a simple exhortation. The encomiendos were abolished.

But it was a long way from Valladolid to Cuba! The official humanity evidenced by the Spanish Court found little echo in the colonies of the New World. In the islands and on the Spanish Main it was a struggle for life. To obtain a maximum return from the conquered territories a numerous and acclimatised labour force was needed. Were these forced and unpaid labourers slaves? What could one pay them with? It was all a matter of words. They had only to call them peones and that was the end of it! In any case, without them no colonisation was possible. This enlightened Dominican was sabotaging the Conquest! So the Conquistadors got busy to complicate his task. He was persecuted in a cunning fashion, and they even went so far as to oppose him with a secular priest, Don Carlos de Aragon, who made fun in the pulpit of Las Casas' chimerical struggle. What exactly had this former Conquistador contrived?—he asked. Burgos had long ago laid down the duties of the colonists, prohibiting them from laying burdens on the Indians, and from striking or imprisoning them. It was for the royal officials and not for the clergy to supervise the execution of the laws. And what a singular conception of justice it was to suggest to the planters that they replace their Indian slaves with negroes! Was the nature of the red people of America superior to that of the black people of Africa? This cleric enjoyed himself to the full. What a godsend it was to be able, under the protection of the Conquistadors, to insult the Dominicans with complete impunity! But such behaviour did not bring the impudent priest much luck. On his return to Spain he tried to continue disparaging the work of Las Casas, but he went the wrong way to work. One day, when he was preaching in the Cathedral at Burgos, the Holy Office came to seize him. He had been too talkative.

Indifferent to the stir his behaviour caused, Bartolomé went on, unrelaxing. In this dangerous contest he waged against principles and men, he gained and lost by turns. He thought he had gained when the Leyes Nuevas were promulgated, with the suppression—final this time—of the encomienda and slavery, and the prohibition of using the services of Indians without pay,
they having become the subjects of the Crown. But suddenly to
free thousands of slaves and to assimilate them as vassals was to
set things afire. Revolt broke out in the Islands and spread to
the mainland. Each Conquistador interpreted the Valladolid
ordinances in his own fashion. In Peru, Gonzalo Pizarro took up
arms against the troops of Charles the Fifth and had himself
proclaimed Governor, and the Viceroy, Nuñez Vela, was
beheaded by the rebels. The royal commissioners were welcomed
with arquebuses. Deprived of manpower, the colonists threatened
to quit the New World, and some of them actually embarked
for Spain.

The Indian question became complicated by the problem of
black immigration. On the recommendations of Las Casas a call
was made for African labourers, regarded as more resistant than
the weakly Indians. What was to be the fate of these increasingly
numerous Negroes? By an unpardonable oversight on the part
of the legislators, the Leyes Nuevas did not cover them, and they
remained slaves. The Indians sneered; the blacks rose; and dis-
order reached a climax. Faced with the grave threat which the
application of the Leyes Nuevas brought to the Empire, amend-
ments were made. The principles remained, but injustice,
although mitigated, continued. Had Las Casas lost?

Bartolomé was 70 years old. He was proposed for the bishop-
ric of Cuzco, but he refused it, because the charge was too
profitable, and this formerly wealthy man hated wealth. On the
other hand, he accepted the bishopric of Chiapas. A more
unhealthy country was scarcely to be found in all Mexico. The
state of Chiapas was in the extreme south, between the Pacific
Coast and Guatemala, bordering upon the isthmus of
Tehuantepec. Bartolomé’s new residence was in the midst of
the ‘tierras calientes,’ swept alternately by the burning breath of
the Pacific and the icy north wind of the Sierra de Chiapas. A
difficult climate and a wretched population. Nevertheless, the
Spanish colony was large and the plantations were prosperous—
cacao, vanilla, sugar cane and sago (or maranta indica, derived
from the bread-fruit tree). But the prosperity of the colonists
was possible only by the exploitation of the Indians. Bartolomé,
more combative than ever, once again embraced the Indians’
cause. His exhortations and his threats being without effect upon
the Spaniards, the Bishop of Chiapas ordered his priests to
refuse absolution to the proprietors of slaves. It was a brave
but effective decision to take. Brutal and greedy as they were,
the Spanish colonists remained passionately Catholic, and there
could be no better sanction for such intrepid men than the thought of hell. At last, Bartolomé had touched the vulnerable spot.

Had Las Casas gone too far in his eagerness to destroy slavery? Had he the right to use his sacramental powers to bring triumph to his principles? Anyway, his decision raised such a wave of anger in the Spanish colony that Bartolomé was forced to flee from Chiapas and take refuge in Mexico. His personal position had become difficult. Everyone was against him, except the Indians. They kissed the hem of his robe and prostrated themselves at his passing. In their eyes he incarnated the white god foretold by all the pre-Columbian traditions.

Spurned by the majority of colonists, supported by the royal officials with bad grace, unappreciated by the clergy, Bartolomé took the road to Spain once more. This was his fourteenth and last crossing. We can imagine this fine old man blessing the crowd of Indians before he embarked. Then the caravel filled its sails and moved away from the shore. Hundreds of canoes escorted him out into the open sea. The caravel drew away and vanished from sight.

Bartolomé arrived in Valladolid, but he did not think of retiring. Twenty years remained to him and he devoted them to carrying his work through to its end. Henceforth the game was played no longer in Indian country but in the Spanish capital and became even more dramatic. He had to face formidable adversaries. He published the Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias occidentales, the most terrible indictment of colonial expeditions ever written. Taking the whole history of the Conquest country by country, he demonstrated with facts and figures that it had only been an enterprise of extermination. What, in fact, was the balance-sheet of forty years of conquest? Fifteen millions of Indian corpses, dead from exhaustion, famine, epidemics or massacres in the struggle; razed villages, whole populations put to the sword, deserts and ruins. And the Conquistadors were responsible. The Brevisima relación rang the knell of the American race. But a reaction took shape against Las Casas. Protests were raised. Bartolomé's accusations were refuted and his figures contested. Father Montolima, Captain Vargas Machuca, and the historian Saavedra Fajardo gave a very different version: the Conquest had not been as Bartolomé stated, but a veritable Conquista, in the mystical sense of the word. The Conquistadors had harvested thousands of sheafs of souls. As to the Indians, how could one defend them? "They eat
human flesh, they go naked, they are liars, improvident, drunkards, ungrateful, cruel..."

For some time the debate remained purely informative. Reports were sifted, archives were examined, evidence was got together. Two parties took shape: for or against the Indians, for or against the Conquistadors. Each praised his own side—exaggeratedly, with the sincere bad faith of the prejudiced. The 'good savage' was contrasted with the unscrupulous conqueror, or the humanitarian colonist with the ferocious Carib. It was a fruitless business, yet the debate became fiercer with the entry of Juan Gines de Sepulveda in the lists. This time the principle, whether it was right to make war on the Indians, was raised. And Sepulveda said it was, in his memorial entitled *Democrates alter, sive de justis bell. causis apud Indos*. The work had the entire approval of the Archbishop of Seville, President of the Council of the Indies. To be published, only the authority of the Council of Castile was wanting, a simple formality if Las Casas was not to be mixed up in it. The old bishop—his position was still considerable in the High Assemblies of the realm—had the publication of the *Democrates alter* forbidden. Sepulveda did not regard himself as beaten, nor was he a nobody, for he had powerful connections in Spain and Italy. He regarded the Council's decision as an affront, so he took up his pen and confirmed his views vigorously. A tribunal was then established at Valladolid, composed of officials and theologians, before which Las Casas and Sepulveda appeared in turn to explain their views.

Taking his stand on the principles enunciated by St. Thomas, Sepulveda claimed that war was right when ordered by the legitimate authority, when fought for a just cause and inspired by pure intentions. Thus, war against the Indians was right because it was the only means of forcing them to give up their barbarous practices and of imposing on them a political and moral system founded on Christianity. Might one reduce the Indians to slavery? Yes, was Sepulveda's answer, for they were inferior by nature, which justified their submission to superior natures. Had not Aristotle distinguished those men who could legitimately be regarded as slaves? Las Casas rose violently against Sepulveda's theory. War was not right from the moment that it became an instrument of oppression. There were no inferior and superior natures, but only men with equal rights. Indians and Negroes, as well as Spaniards, could have access to
civilisation. Bartolomé seized this opportunity to condemn recourse to black labour which he had imprudently advised.

The Valladolid controversy lasted several months, and Sepúlveda and Las Casas defended their theses tirelessly. In the end the judges separated without reaching a decision. Probably the problem was beyond them. But in the practical sphere Bartolomé triumphed. Sepúlveda’s writings were prohibited. The Bishop of Chiapas could die in peace at the age of 92 years, and all America went into mourning.

Bartolomé’s death did not disarm his enemies. The passionate discussion of the man and his work never ceased. It was a facile discussion, for it must be admitted that very often his apostolic zeal had led him astray. He had been reproached with adding two noughts to the number of victims of the Conquest, and his Brevísima relación (fed more on enthusiasm than on the critical spirit) has been blamed for the lack of understanding of Spanish colonisation among French, English and Germans. That he has compromised the work of his compatriots by his blindly generous attitude has been deplored, and there has been astonishment that public authority should have permitted such sabotage of national enterprise. It has even been insinuated that by approving the use of Negro slaves, Las Casas was looking after the interests that he may have had in Portuguese companies trading in Negroes. This last point excepted, one would have to admit the enemies of the Protector right if a very great urgency had not justified his action. That he had been sectarian, naïve, more concerned with justice than with truth, that he had prejudiced his country’s cause by his evangelical anger, that he had sometimes felt a sort of ‘sporting’ pleasure in breaking lances with the powers of the day—all this does not modify the essential aspect of his personality. It is not a bad thing that in certain circumstances, faced with problems that concern humanity, a sectarian should stand forth. The effectiveness of an antidote exists in its violence, and what surer antidote to the brutality of the Conquistadors than the fustigating charity of a Bartolomé de Las Casas? The Bishop of Chiapas was not a saint but ‘a just and God-fearing man.’ In the fight against iniquity, this enthusiast for justice was necessary.

When Columbus landed on Haiti the island counted a million inhabitants; 20 years later only a thousand or two remained. But in the same time all Mexico had been gained for the Catholic faith. In a Panamanian village Balboa had Indian prisoners devoured by his dogs. But Jiménez de Quesada, Conquistador of Colombia,
ordered his soldiers to treat the natives well and to respect their property. Humane at one point, at another the Conquest was atrocious. These were the contradictions of the Conquest, reflections of those that never ceased to torment the Spanish Kings, who had received from the Pope a mandate to convert the Indians, though they also intended to master the New World and to extract from it the gold for financing their European wars. The double imperative—spiritual and temporal—called for the opposing virtues of gentleness and violence. Souls are ruled by love and bodies by force. In the impossibility of resolving such a contradiction, the Spanish sovereigns exerted themselves to put right on their side and the Valladolid conference was one of the manifestations of this anxiety. Certainly, the obsession with giving evangelical and legal protection to their colonial enterprises concealed a political ulterior motive—the necessity of proving to the world that the Conquest was right; but in making appeal to theologians and jurists the Spanish kings equally affirmed their sincere intent to put their consciences and their mission in accord.

Before leaving Bartolomé de Las Casas one observation must be made. Though he stood with indomitable courage against the abuses of the Conquistadors, though he had been the first to demand the abolition of slavery, he had never on the other hand questioned the validity of Pope Alexander VI's Bull which gave the New World to Spain, charging her to instruct the conquered people in the Catholic faith. Thus Bartolomé agreed to the colonisation so long as it respected the liberty of man. He was concerned with procedure and not with the principle itself. The King was the representative of Providence. Bartolomé was an 'anti-Conquistador' and not an 'anti-colonial.'

Another Dominican, his contemporary, Francisco de Vitoria, Professor at the University of Salamanca, stated that the Christian princes had no rights over infidels. The pontifical gift was a diplomatic act without connection with the Conquest. What a wind must have passed through the cold classroom when Vitoria exclaimed: 'Difference of religion does not make war lawful.... The Christian princes, though protected by the Pope, cannot prevent the barbarians from sinning against nature, nor punish them for it.... The extension of the Empire is no just cause for war!' Four centuries before one could speak of 'conscientious objection,' Vitoria dared to say: 'The subject cannot fight, even on the order of a prince, if he knows clearly that a war is unjust.' Thus at the very climax of colonial expansion, a
University teacher could lecture Charles the Fifth *ex cathedra*, at the very moment when the Emperor was bearing arms against the Lutheran princes and Francisco Pizarro was conquering the fabulous kingdom of the Incas; he was, in fact, the first of the 'anti-colonialists'.

The echo of these two voices—those of Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de Las Casas—is not nearly dead yet.
"THERE will come a time when the Ocean will loosen the bonds with which things are encircled, when the immense earth will be revealed, when Tethys will discover the universe anew and Thule will no longer be the end of the world." Seneca's mysterious prophesy was fulfilled. Bermejo's cry of 'Land!' in the night of the 11th to 12th October 1492 answered, fourteen centuries later, to the Cordovan philosopher's predictions. Two Spaniards greeted one another through space and time.

Not only was Thule surpassed, but a whole world emerged from the shadows into the light of dawn. What a world it was! It stretched from California to Chile, from the West Indies to Patagonia, and covered all Central America, over a length of over 6,000 miles, through 67 degrees of latitude and covered nearly 10,000,000 square miles. This was the Spanish Empire, thirty times greater than Spain itself. Brazil remained for Portugal, thanks to the pen of a Borgia, and for those who were to come later humid Guiana and the frozen far north. Spain had taken the largest share, and that was just, for she had been the first to reach the young land of America.

The first Europeans in the New World had been Spaniards and no one has dreamed of contesting their priority. But, from the second quarter of the 16th century, other Europeans followed in their wake, and the first of these were the French.

In 1534 Cabeza de Vaca crossed North America on foot from the shores of Texas to the western coast of Mexico. In the same year a Frenchman, Jacques Cartier, having set out from St. Malo, reached Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, he had discovered Canada. In the years that followed, the colony of Canada step by step gained the Great Lakes and the valley of the Mississippi. Simultaneously, Hernando de Soto ascended the course of the Mississippi while the French descended it, and it was only by a narrow margin that the subjects of Charles the
Fifth and Francis the First avoided spreading to the region of the Mississippi the war which was at that moment in progress between Nice and Perpignan, for the two parties failed to meet. Other Frenchmen, cruising along the American coasts, strove to plant the fleur-de-lys banner of the Capetians. Jean Ribault founded Charlefort, near present-day Savannah, and reached Florida. René Laudonnierre built Fort Caroline.

South America also received a visit from them: Jean Duperot, or La Pèlerine, touched land at Pernambuco—today Recife. The Sire de Villegagnon, following differences with the king, went into exile and founded a protestant colony in the bay of Río Eldorado did not fail to draw the French, and they, too, searched for it in Guiana and Amazonia. A fact worthy of note is that their passage through these territories left an excellent memory in the minds of the Indians. The courtesy and civility of certain gentlemen surprised natives who were used to Spanish arrogance and German stiffness, and it even sometimes happened that the French officers took up arms at the side of the local people against the Spanish or Portuguese occupiers. It has always been the privilege of European minorities established in a territory dominated by another European power, to find for the conquered populations a sympathy provoked for the most part by dislike for the conqueror. Later, France was also to have its piece of Eldorado: Guiana and its sordid towns—Cayenne, St. Laurent du Maroni and Oiapoc—a sinister Eldorado which, after having been the poor relation of French colonies, was in 1947 to become the most backward of French départements.

The Germans were even less successful than the French, since the latter, by securing Guiana—desolate though this equatorial land might be—could reckon that they had laid hands on their part of the New World; but the bank clerks from Augsburg left Venezuela empty-handed and without hope of return. As for the Dutch: a part of Guiana and a few names elsewhere on the map of South America—Cape Orange on the northern coast of Brazil, Waterhuys, Rooehoeck, at the mouth of the Amazon—record their passing. The future founders of New Amsterdam—New York—touched the southern continent but lightly. The English had to wait for Cromwell before becoming aware of their imperial mission. The incursions of Fenton, Withrington and Cavendish on the Brazilian littoral, Raleigh's trip along the Orinoco—yet another!—in search of Eldorado, the descent of the famous corsair Drake on Santo Domingo and Carthagena, were nothing but profitable raids or simple adventures. Easily last in the
Conquest, the English were the first in the share-out. But in South America, like France, they secured only a scrap of Guiana—though, it is true, the best piece.

But all these were only isolated endeavours, without future, nets cast at hazard into the Dark Sea. Lacking in breadth and political spirit, they showed nothing in common with those of the Spaniards, which were matured, long prepared and part of a vast hegemonical plan sketched by an emperor under the benevolent eye of a Pope. Frenchmen, Germans, Dutch, Englishmen—contemporaries of the Spaniards of the Conquest—sailing in similar caravels and disposing the same means, steered for the same shores. To what end, but to conquer?

Here we are faced with a problem of definition: were these conquerors of other races conquistadors too? Further back in time the question can be applied also to Genghis Khan and Kublai, the conquerors of Cathay, or nearer to our own time, to Galliani, Savorgnan de Brazza and Lyautey, the founders of the French Empire, and to Ferdinand de Lesseps, who pierced the isthmuses. Could they too be called conquistadors? When Captain Gouraud captured the Sudanese chief Samory in the heart of his camp, was he so very different from Francisco Pizarro when he captured Atahualpa? These are attractive analogies, but in truth the Conquistador resembles no one but himself. He is a Spaniard, a product of the conquering and mystical Spain of the 16th century, made in its image and reflecting the sombre glory of its contradictory passions. He bears in himself, with a sort of terrible ingenuity, the whole of Spain. He is Spain. And just as we cannot define in one word, or reduce to a single formula the historic face of Charles the Fifth's Spain, so we must consider successively the various aspects of the Conquistador, so that a true portrait may emerge, that is remote both from the 'black legend' and from the romantic image.

NEITHER SAINTS NOR BANDITS

Here are a few judgements on the Conquistadors. Heine was categorical: 'They were bandits,' he said. Canivet claims that they conquered 'by spontaneous necessity, by virtue of a natural impulse towards independence, without other purpose than to reveal the grandeur which hid itself beneath their apparent smallness.' Legendre says: 'Spain, by its Conquistadors, was going to seek outside, by sheer energy, the strength which at
home was only potential and which it was essential for her to realise in order to maintain her independence." Madariaga finds in them 'the typically Spanish trait: the coexistence of contrary tendencies.'

Each of these opinions—even that of Heine, who detested Spain and understood her little—has its share of the truth. Bandits at certain times—cries of panic and greed—the Conquistadors never lost the sense of grandeur. This was one of their contradictions. But the most striking was to have so closely associated the religion of self and the love of country.

The people of Spain, whatever might be her political régime, are the least 'community-minded' possible. They do not believe in the 'collective soul,' that invention of sociologists, useful sometimes as a propaganda theme but as sterile as it is theoretical. How could a collection of individuals form a single individual—at least without denying the personal soul? Deny the soul! An old proverb has it that every Spaniard 'tiene su alma en su almario,' a play upon words, which means that he keeps his soul in his closet: it is his own property, a secret thing. Pride and privation: that was the Spaniard of the 16th century.

For his soul he was accountable to God alone. Calderon makes the mayor of Zalamea say: 'We owe the King our fortune and our life, but honour is the patrimony of our soul. And the soul belongs to God alone.' Honor and alma were, for every well-born Spaniard, the supreme freedom. No law—not even the King's will—might prevail against this faculty of making arrangements direct with God and acting accordingly. Hence the individualism of the Conquistadors. Above their local leader, the visitadores and the royal personage, there was God, that is to say the freedom to be themselves. It was Canivet who suggested: 'The juridical ideal of Spain would be that every Spaniard should have in his pocket a charter of rights, consisting of a single item framed in these brief, clear and striking terms—"This Spaniard is authorised to conduct himself as he chooses." A joke? Scarcely; for one does not joke about such things beyond the Pyrenees. By this extravagant but unwritten charter every Conquistador shaped his behaviour; thus, having concluded an intimate pact with God, he often thought himself exempt from the duty of obedience.

Although fiercely individualistic, the Conquistadors were no less ardently patriotic. Every Spaniard carried in his heart a fragment of Spain and very often bathed it in his solitary tears. Andalusia had provided the first sailors and Castile the majority
of the soldiers. Columbus' sailors were almost all from Palos and Moguer, and the captains of the Conquest came from Estremadura. Francisco Pizarro had recruited his companions at Trujillo, his native village; Cortés was from Medellin, Balboa from Jerez de los Caballeros, Valdivia from Villanueva de la Serena. They must have dreamed constantly of their casa solariega and the herd at the bottom of the field that the elder brother tilled? Manor-houses with nail-studded doors or huts of slate—the same thought evokes them both. That sun-burned landscape of Estremadura, with its wide and melancholy horizons, haunted the Conquistadors; and to their conquests they gave the names of home: Medellin, Guadalajara, Trujillo, Caceres, Badajoz and countless Santiagos. This was the compensation of these voluntary exiles, who were so attached to their homeland that one might have been able, it seems, by scratching the soles of their shoes, to find a scrap of the red clay of the Tierra de Baros.

UNDER THE KING'S EYE

This Conquistador, brightly daring, taking possession of scraps of empire as he galloped along, and listening to nothing but the promptings of his own heart. . . . His plume could be seen on the narrow roads of the Andes, in the vast grasslands, by the edges of leaden lakes, and upon the lava flows, and advancing by night along the rims of craters, white in the moonlight. Could nothing stop him but the fear of God? Yes, the fear of the King, for the Conquistador was not the soldier of God alone. He was the liegeman of the Spanish monarch and his motto was that of Spain: un monarca, un imperio y una espada. There was only one that tried to escape from royal tutelage—Gonzalo Pizarro, and he died under the executioner's axe. He who had no fear of cannibals trembled to incur the King's disgrace. Six thousand miles from Valladolid, his heart froze at the thought of displeasing Charles the Fifth. It was enough for a despatch bearing the royal seal to reach him for his anxieties to be roused at once. At a single word from the King he did not hesitate to cross deserts, mountains and oceans so as to take orders, report or sometimes to give himself up to Justice. All—even the greatest—made this humiliating journey. Columbus (three times), Cortés, the Pizarro brothers. . . . The knee had to be bent before the Caesarian monarch if the sheet of parchment, legalising the enterprise, was to be secured.
Dirge for the Conquistadors

Not a caravel ever left a Spanish port in a westerly direction without a representative of the King aboard. When Columbus left for his first voyage in 1492—for the unknown, moreover—Rodrigo de Escoba and Sanchez de Segovia, royal notary and controller respectively, had been forced upon him. 'Master after God,' the Admiral of the Ocean Sea saw the King come between himself and God. Thenceforward, the two faces could only make one. Intoxicated as they were by sudden fortune, the Conquistadors never omitted to put aside a fifth part of their booty for the Treasury, And if any man happened to swindle the accounts, it was at his own risk and peril. All knew that there was no other punishment but the garrotte for him who took it into his head to defraud the King of his share.

Thus, from the beginning of the Conquest, in the opening phase when it was less a matter of conquest than discovery, the Spanish monarchy signified its intention to regard it as a 'royal affair.' The first act of the Conquest—the *Santa María*’s departure from the port of Palos, was sanctioned by the first administrative act: the charter granted to the Genoese by the Catholic monarchs. The following year, the royal grip on this prey that was scarcely yet imaginable became manifest. A superintendence of Indian affairs was created at Valladolid, which immediately established a delegation at Santo Domingo, and was the first ‘Audience.’ Then, years later, the *Casa de Contratación* was founded at Seville, with the task of watching over the application of the laws concerning trade with America. It registered the vessels which left or entered Spain and legislated on the civil and criminal level for all disputes concerning traffic with the New World. The *Casa de Contratación* also disposed powers properly maritime: it maintained the register of crews, fixed the departure dates of ships and their destinations, and determined freight and tonnage. Furthermore, the *piloto mayor* performed the duties of controller of navigation, technical adviser and chief of marine personnel. The *Casa* was, at one and the same time, a chamber of commerce, a consular office, a naval school and a cartographic service.

Eight years after the foundation of the *Casa de Contratación*, Ferdinand the Catholic created the Royal Council of the Indies—a veritable Ministry of the Colonies, which exercised its jurisdiction over all the affairs of the Indies, civil, military, commercial and religious. All the officials of the New World, from the highest to the humblest were subordinate to it. Charles the Fifth strengthened the powers of this Council and gave it his
full confidence, going so far as to delegate to it his signature in all matters of justice, with the exception of nominations to favours and offices. The seat of the Council of the Indies was at Medina. It was more a directory than an assembly, for there were only seven Councillors, including the president and the fiscal attorney. Deliberations and conferences took place behind closed doors and only the King could be present. Public and secret reports from overseas officials were scrutinised, especially the secret ones; compliments were handed out and penalties fixed. In short, they administered everything, though from a distance.

One very great long-term concern pre-occupied the Council: that of giving this still effervescent America that juridical protection which would ensure that one day—si Dios quiere—colonisation would follow the Conquest. It was to this anxiety that the Laws of the Indies answered. In preparing them, the royal advisers created the first colonial Law. The greater part of these laws were just, even though it might be difficult to disentangle the essentials of a legislation, the 6,000 articles of which embraced all the forms of Spanish activity in the New World, from the running of the schools to bodily hygiene. But respect for the human personality was never lost sight of. Doubtless the men who shaped these laws always kept in mind the spirit of Isabella the Catholic’s testament: 'That the King, my Lord, the Princess, my daughter, and the Prince, my son, do not permit, or will not be the cause, that the Indians, the inhabitants of the Islands and the mainland, should suffer any injury to their persons or to their property. They will keep watch, on the contrary, that these people shall be treated with justice and kindness.'

Humane and just in their principles, the Laws of the Indies bore in them the germ of future emancipation. Meanwhile, by extending the system of fueros (under the name cabildos) to the New World, Imperial Spain of the 16th century laid the foundations of the South American democracies. What, in fact, were the cabildos? They were local municipalities whose members could be non-Spanish, but who were obliged to secure office by popular vote. Nobody therefore opposed the fact that there were Indians among the municipal councillors. The members of the cabildos administered the affairs of the commune, looking after public hygiene, the maintenance of roads and general welfare. The institution of these local assemblies, born of the people, underlines the extent to which the intentions of the Council of the Indies were genuine. Similarly, by creating a third organism
known as the Consulate of the Indies, the central power manifested its will to regulate the profession of privateering and to prevent its abuse. This multiplicity of organs and the abundance of legal texts bears witness to how seriously the Spanish sovereigns took their role as protectors and civilisers of the Indies. In this respect they never ceased to nourish high hopes and noble illusions.

The administration at home—the Casa de Contratación, the Council of the Indies and the Consulate of the Indies—was duplicated by a local administration. First of all the Viceroy, appointed directly by the King, this all-powerful personage enjoyed royal prerogatives in his territories. Captain-General on sea and on land, chief of the departments of Justice and Finance, in effect he held absolute power. Meanwhile, he was obliged, on the expiration of his mandate, to give an exact and faithful account of it. This sincere quasi-confessional report was much in keeping with the minds of the legislators, for it was necessary that officials in the Indies—including especially the high officials—should feel the constant presence of the royal rod.

At the time of Charles the Fifth, Spanish America was divided into two vice-royalties, those of Mexico and Peru. New Granada and Rio de la Plata, long subordinated to Peru, were not raised to viceroyalty until much later, Guatemala, Venezuela, Chile and Cuba were under Captains-General. The provinces of less importance were called gobernaciones and were administered by governors. Finally, each province comprised districts placed under the command of a corregidor. At the head of each commune was an alcalde.

Besides the viceroys and captains-general, the sovereign appointed the governors and corregidors. The latter had to pay a deposit before taking up their duties and firm moral guarantees were required of them. Their powers were rather those of a colonial administrator or an officer for native affairs than of a prefect, since they were skilled in judging the civil and military differences which turned up in the encomiendas. In the event of an appeal, the matter was taken in the second and third instances before the royal audiences which sat in the capitals. Likewise designated by the King, the 'auditors' were subject to very strict rules: they were forbidden to contract a marriage in their place of residence, to take part in public ceremonies, to assume ties of friendship with the Indians, to go into business, or to lend or accept money. Answerable directly to the Council of the Indies, the 'audiences' escaped the authority of the viceroy and some-
times even held it in check. In short, the 'audiences' constituted an intermediate echelon between the administration at home and the local governments. Moreover, the King sent 'visitors' to the spot for enquiries and to seek information. It may be deduced from what has now been said that he neglected no means to keep himself informed of affairs overseas.

The meticulous precautions taken by the Spanish Monarchy in choosing its colonial personnel, its mistrust of its most experienced servants, the hierarchical chain linking the royal cabinet to the alcalde of the smallest Mexican pueblo, was evidence of its understanding of the men. One could not be sure of anybody. By seeking to ensure the total independence of the officers entrusted with judging Indians, by demanding their perfect integrity, the Monarchy showed its solicitude for the conquered people. 'No Indian can be reduced to slavery... since all are vassals of the Royal Crown of Castile...'. Isabella, Ferdinand, Charles and later, Phillip II spoke in the same terms, which expressed an inmost demand, a good faith, a conviction natural to Christian Princes brought up on the Gospel, for whom the 'racial question' did not exist. It must not be forgotten that the first colonial charter of the Spanish Kings had proclaimed the equality of Indians and Spaniards before the law. Doubtless it was a symbolical proclamation, yet it revealed a humane preoccupation on the part of its authors to an extent that no other European sovereign had dreamed of. The distinction between natives and subjects was not a Spanish invention.

Although the system was well conceived, it failed at the bottom. In its naive pride, the monarchy looked upon the territories of the New World in the same way as Milan or Flanders, to which it was simply a matter of adapting the administrative system of Spain. One reproduced the framework of the royal organisation on the map of America and that was the end of it. That was the first error—dogmatism. The countries were different; the natives spoke unknown languages, and for a long time Spaniards and Indians could only converse by signs. It was only from the second half of the 16th century that the conquerors made a sincere effort to assimilate the moeurs and mentality of the local people. The monarchy committed a second error—psychological this time—in giving too much credit to the reports of its creatures or its favourites, an inevitable weakness if one considers the immense liquid barrier between the colonies and the Ministry of Colonies. Is it surprising that, in consequence, certain corregidores, whose principal function was to aid
and protect the Indians, had amassed enormous profits during their regulation five years stay, simply by buying back from the natives at a low price objects that had been sold them very dearly and for which they had no use—like razors, silk stockings and inkstands? Which did not prevent the same corregidores from watching carefully that mixed marriages were celebrated according to the Roman rite.

One Conquistador sighed maliciously: 'Lo que el Rey manda se obedece, no se cumple'—which means: what the King orders is obeyed, but not executed. This was Belalcazar, the master of Quito. One could say no more than that the law was respected, but not applied. Meanwhile, Belalcazar's attitude—and that of a few petty tyrants—towards the authority at home was the exception. The Conquistadors' freedom of action was only apparent and their omnipotence ephemeral. Attempts at rebellion, although they succeeded for a while, always ended by being broken. A Spanish captain never maintained himself long in illegality. Slow to strike, the hand of the King fell, sooner or later, on the head of the culprit, and the King's eye, though it was such a long way off, never left the Conquistadors as they marched on.

THE ROMANTICS

'Weary of carrying their lofty miseries,' 'intoxicated by an heroic and brutal dream,' 'hoping for epic tomorrows,' such was the way in which José-Maria de Heredia, a Cuban descendant of the Conquistadors (Alonso de Heredia had founded the town of Tolu on the river Cauca), pictured his ancestors steering for Cipango in search of the 'fabulous metal.' This is the Conquistador adorned with all the romantic accessories; nothing is missing, neither violence, nor insupportable pride, nor the mirage of gold, nor the confusion of instinct and imagination. Another feature common to the romantics was stoicism, sometimes theatrical but most often silent. Arrogant and dignified when, draped in their ragged capes, they paced up and down the plazuela of their native town, waiting for adventure, the Conquistadors were even more so when in the very midst of the adventure.

Romantics, indeed, with all the credulity and artless wonder that is associated with the word. Into the extravagant pact they had made with fortune the Conquistadors had brought the taste for romance, the passionate quest for risk and the intense
curiosity which always made of them something more than old campaigners. In this respect, however, they differ from the romantics—the eternally unsatisfied. The Conquistadors were overwhelmed. For once, in fact, the imagination had to admit itself surpassed by reality. No adventurer had ever known such adventure as this, and no actor had ever performed on such a platform. This splendid prey, stretched beneath their gaze and within their reach, seemed even more beautiful to the conquerors as the tropical sun burned into their brains. What did that matter? Atahualpa’s treasure and the ostentation of Mexican possessions were not mirages. The enchanted forest emerged from legend to become the tangible virgin forest of America, bathed in twilight shadows. With eyes wide open, the Conquistadors lived out a lucid and endless delirium.

The exploits of the Conquistadors have not lacked chroniclers. But what bard will sing of their amours? It was not always the Indian women of sallow complexion, their long hair pricked out with exotic flowers, stammering puerile words, who took the first indolent step. But they did not repulse the Spaniards’ advances even when they did not provoke them. Who can say what it was that stirred in the hearts and flesh of these girls, or in the wives of the caciques? Submission to the strongest? Curiosity? Voluptuous comparisons? Everything is possible. In any case, no Conquistador was ever repulsed even if he was not solicited. In order to break the usually strict rules of their existing morals so joyfully in favour of the Spaniards, to serve them with such devotion that they sometimes went so far as to betray their brothers, the Indian women must have been lovers or profligates. We recall that, on the very evening of Cajamarca’s fall, the Peruvian women came in a crowd to offer themselves to the victors. Neither princesses of the Sun nor vestals seemed to harbour the least resentment against those who had scarcely completed ‘cleaning up’ the city. Were they, then, without rancour, these heavy-breasted women with copper-coloured skins who did not seem to have the least hatred for the conquerors? Were they yielding to an unfamiliar pleasure, to the prestige of the invader? Or were they simply seeking to put themselves under the protection of a Spanish shield on the advice of their fathers and husbands?

There was not one Conquistador—even among the greatest who did not succumb to the Indian women. Hernando Cortés might not perhaps have conquered Mexico if he had not begun by subjugating Doña Marina. But it did not rest at that. His
residence at Coyoacan was as full of favourites as the Grand Turk's seraglio. Indian women with Spanish names—Doña Inés, Doña Elvira and many others—shared Malinche's favours. Francisco Pizarro—that greybeard—lived in concubinage with the sister of Atahualpa, his victim. Only Columbus appears to have remained chaste, tortured as he was until the day of his death by his double attachment to his wife and his mistress, Felipa Muñiz de Perestrello and Beatriz Enriquez de Arana. All these romantics had their romances, and the history of the Conquest is full of picturesque love stories, like the one that follows.

When Pizarro landed at Tumbes, Atahualpa and Huascar were at daggers drawn, but they had not yet taken off the mask. They were watching one another; it was a period of 'diplomatic tension.' The arrival of the foreign chief in Peru was going to decide the question of war or peace between the two sons of Huayna Capac; but before the final attack an attempt was made at an arrangement. Though preoccupied with their own interests, the two Inca princes were fully aware that by prolonging their quarrel they were playing into the invader's hands. Atahualpa took the first step. He sent an ambassador to Huascar with the task of finding ground for agreement. His name was Quilacou, and he was one of Atahualpa's most brilliant captains. This fine officer left Quito, reached Cuzco, entered the royal palace and stood before the legitimate son of the dead Emperor. By Huascar's side stood a young girl who was his mistress; Golden Star. One look between Quilacou and Golden Star and it was over; they fell hopelessly in love. Quilacou forgot himself, forgot his embassy, and was so daring as to address himself directly to Golden Star. Did he already dream of running off with her? For the moment he was content to smile at her, a rare impropriety that was punished at once. Atahualpa's plenipotentiary was driven from the palace, but not before giving the princess the glance of an accomplice: they would meet again.

Meanwhile, negotiations were broken off. Atahualpa's army moved forward, and war began. Quilacou was gravely wounded in the first engagement and lost consciousness. Rousing from his faint, whom should he see leaning over him but Golden Star. She had abandoned her lover, renounced her position as the favourite of the Inca and followed the army. So that she should not be recognised, she had cut her long hair. Disguised as an adolescent she mingled with the slaves who carried the baggage and, like them, had carried her load. The idyll that had scarcely
begun at Cuzco unfolded in the midst of the fighting, but it was brief. Both were taken prisoner by the Spaniards and led before Hernando de Soto. Pizarro’s captain could recognise true nobility and he saw at once that the captives were not like the rest of the Indians. He questioned them. Quillacou told him their story; Hernando de Soto was moved and wiped away a tear. The tale was a pretty one, but the woman was prettier still. He took them under his protection. Quillacou died of his wounds, but Hernando de Soto married Golden Star, and it was a marriage of love as well as of interest. Golden Star was in fact the only daughter of a rich Peruvian lord, and she brought her husband a dowry that the most fortunate heiresses of Castile would have envied: gold and silver mines and a multitude of workers.

On the day Cuzco was taken, Pedro de Barco, a cavalier, entered the gate of the House of the Virgins, who were consecrated to the Sun. The inmates numbered 10,000! Pedro de Barco set his heart on the one who seemed to him the most beautiful. Passive and smiling, she followed the caballero. Was he not the victor? She surrendered. One evening in the main square of Cuzco, she observed a number of Spanish soldiers about to cast dice for a golden disc representing the Sun—the effigy of Inti! The vestal could not be witness to such profanation without trembling with horror. The Sun must be saved. She who—so fragile and so gentle—had until then asked nothing of Pedro de Barco, was seen to throw herself into his arms, carried away by religious anger. Was he going to allow this sacrilegious game to continue? Had he forgotten that she was still the wife of the Sun? Pedro de Barco shrugged his shoulders. A feminine whim—but he was in love and what will a man not do for the woman he loves? The Spaniard approached the players, took part in the game, made his throw and won. Pedro de Barco took the shining image back to his wife, but the next day Francisco Pizarro demanded that Pedro de Barco should hand over the golden disc, for it had been decided that this symbol of Inca fetishism should be smashed to pieces with hammerblows in the public square before the eyes of the assembled populace. Pedro did not keep them waiting long for his reaction, which was a surprising one for a Spanish cavalier of the 16th century. In defiance of discipline and the faith, he fled with the Indian woman and the disc of the Sun. Love had been stronger than honour.

They rushed in pursuit of the fugitives. These two young people, escorted by a few old priests, took turns in carrying the
image of the god, but the galloping troop drew nearer. Pedro and his companions reached the shores of Lake Titicaca, but Pizarro's men were on their heels. Time was short and they had to move fast. They found two canoes, tied them together with lianas, and laid the golden disc inside. Pedro and the Peruvian woman then leapt into the boats and drew away from the shore, straining on their oars. Twilight enveloped the raft of gold which made its way slowly among the rushes. Then torches lit the bank and a boat moved out from it—then two boats, then three. On the sacred lake their wakes traced long luminous tracks. The two lovers were surrounded, but at the moment when the Spanish boats and the two Indian canoes were almost edge to edge, Pedro and his companion lifted the disc and hurled it into the water. Before being recaptured and without doubt put to death, they had at least saved the god. But instead of sinking to the bottom, the golden disc toppled, rose up and for an instant stood upright on the waves, no longer yellow, but purple with all the blaze of the setting sun. The Spanish cavaliers set up a loud cry of amazement, then the disc tottered, overturned and sank into the depths. Inti was dead.

While this great drama was taking place, Pedro and the Indian woman had been able to escape from their pursuers and were now beyond reach. It was dark. The hours passed and dawn drew near. Pedro murmured to his lover: "The image of your God has sunk. Will it ever cease to haunt the minds of men?" In response the vestal pointed to the horizon and smiled; the first rays of day were beginning to gild the surface of the lake. Having died the day before in crimson apotheosis, the god was reborn in all the youthful beauty of morning.

**UNDER THE PRETENCE OF RELIGION**

"So color de religión—van á buscar plata y oro—Del encubierto tesoro..." 'Under the pretence of religion, they went in search of silver and gold, and of hidden treasure.' These harsh words of Lope de Vega in his play El Nuevo Mundo calls, if not for correction, at least for comment. Certainly, the injustice and the crimes committed in the name of religion revolt the heart as well as the conscience. Certainly, the Conquistadors used the instruments of the Faith to further their ventures. Thus had Ovando, when fighting in Cuba, given the signal to an ambush by placing his hand on his cross of the Knights of Alcantara,
while Valverde warned Pizarro's soldiers that the moment of attack had come by waving the Bible at Atahualpa. The procedure of requerimiento as applied to the primitive people, the mass baptisms, the conversions in extremis that preceded strangulation, the expiatory stake, and the massacres that ended in the Te Deum seem to justify the words of a certain Indian, exhorted by a monk to die in the Christian faith: 'Are there Spaniards in your Paradise? Then I prefer to die a heathen!' Who would dream of denying that, very often, the ceremonial of the liturgy had taken on the look of a funeral procession? But Lope de Vega was wrong on one point: the violent acts of the Conquistadors—abductions, robberies, assassinations—had been sometimes performed 'in the name of' religion, never 'under the pretence of religion.

The Conquistadors were sincere. The legality of the enterprise was guaranteed them by pontifical bulls. It had been put into their heads that they were leaving for a crusade—the one against Islam having but recently ended—and that after the Jews and the Mohammedan, it was now a question of converting the Heathen. They had been born in hate and terror of heresy. They had wept with delight at the capture of Granada, trembled before the Inquisition, and shuddered at the very name of Luther. While still children, they had often spat at the passing of a Moor or set fire to the booth of a Jew. Spain in the 16th century was nothing but a vast monastery, noisy with orisons and bells. They had grown up in the shadow of cathedrals and breathed the odour of incense from their earliest years, while the first words they had uttered had been the names of the saints.

Although for the most part illiterate, the Conquistadors had had no need of letters to feel the same fanatical spirit as did the horsemen of the Prophet when they invaded the old Greco-Latin world, or the Crusaders when they spread over the Syrian plains, or their own fathers at the reconquest of Granada. They had been told—they had been convinced of it—that millions of Indians would burn for ever in Hell if they, the Conquistadors, did not bring them the faith. They believed this quite simply. Religion was for them not a pretext but a banner. The existence of God in three persons, the immortality of the soul, sin, the Last Judgement—it never occurred to any one of them to dispute these facts, or even to discuss them. These men of war and passion had retained the faith of little children. Their confessions were sincere, they participated in the mass not only in the flesh but in the spirit also. The worst of them died in peni-
tence. Pierced by arrows, or with a sword in the throat, or tied to the stake under torture, they called loudly for the last rites. So color de religión. . . What a mistake! No ulterior motive coloured the faith of the Conquistadors. They remained men of the Middle Ages. Religious hypocrisy had not yet been invented; it was to turn up later, covering iniquity with its black cloak. The hypocrite is a creature of the 17th century.

The Conquistador believed in God, fiercely and unreservedly. But they believed also—above all else—in the Devil. Now the New World was the Empire of the Devil—a Devil with multi-form face, always hideous. The sombre Mexican divinities, Huitzilopochtli (the Wizard-Humming-Bird) and Tezcatlipoca (the Smoking Mirror), the horrible Kinich-Kakmo of the Mayas, the Peruvian Viracocha who symbolised boiling lava, the sinister totems of the Araucanians and Diaguites . . . Why! the medieval demon with short horns, lustful eye and a tail that was curled like a vine-shoot, seemed 'a good devil' beside such as these! These Spaniards, who in Estremaduran twilights had taken the flight of a bat for the passing of the Evil One, were naturally terrified before these monsters of stone, with bared fangs and gleaming eyes, that seemed to come to fantastic life as night fell. How could they have watched an Aztec ceremony without nausea? The black-robed priests with matted hair, burrowing with their knives in the breasts of their victims, the human skulls piled up at the feet of the teocallis, the cannibal feasts around statues spattered with putrid blood, and the charnel-house stench which all the perfumes of Mexico were never able to hide. . . .

Such things froze the spirits of the Conquistadors, surpassing the nightmares of their childhood. Satan himself was there, and his worship was celebrated among the dismembered corpses. His maleficent power was honoured. He was no longer, as in Spain, that familiar accomplice that could be driven off by a flick or that shameful spectre slipping furtively through one's conscience but put to flight by a sprinkling of holy water. He was enthroned. Carved in granite, encrusted with precious stones and encircled with golden serpents, he was the superb incarnation of Evil. He glorified sin. Nothing was lacking in this perfect representation of Hell, not even the pots in which certain tribes of the Colombian jungle cooked their enemies alive. This indeed was Satan himself, adorned with all his lugubrious attractions.

Why, therefore, should we be astonished at the reactions of the
Spaniards? In the depths of the Indian sanctuaries they could see the Prince of Darkness standing in all his macabre splendour. Looking heavenwards they could distinguish the silvery figure of St. James galloping across the clouds. The conflict between the True and the False, between Good and Evil, was manifest in this double apparition. The problem was simple and their duty was clear. The Indians were possessed of the Devil and he had to be exorcised, first of all by destroying the material evidence of Devil worship. This is why the conquerors, activated by the same blind zeal as the early Christians when they shattered the Roman statues, overturned the pre-columbian idols and burned the ritual articles and the manuscripts that transmitted the sacred tradition—in short, showed a holy ardour to abolish the very memory of the heathen liturgy. This they counted as pious work and a salutary need.

Iconoclasts? Vandals? These are the epithets with which they have been scandalised. Where, in fact, was the scandal except in the agents of Satan who served their vile master in peace? But the Conquistadors did not limit themselves to casting down the idols. So that the exorcism should be fully effective, it was not enough to drive away the demons; it was proper also to set up in their place the symbols of the True Faith. Just as holy medals were laid upon flesh that was eaten away with ulcers, the soldiers of Charles the Fifth planted Crosses on the tops of the teocallis or at crossroads. On the stones that were still spattered with blood from the sacrificial tables, they raised altars to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Tolerance was not for them. Others would follow who would use gentler methods. No one doubts that these booted and armoured Christians often lacked the Christian spirit and that charity was almost always missing from their pitiless fervour; but their faith and their good faith were whole. More even than the love of God and of one’s neighbour, the horror of Beelzebub explains certain of the Conquistadors’ attitudes, though it is of course understood that to explain is not to absolve.

GOLD AND BLOOD

The Conquistadors never ceased to oscillate between the opposite poles of Idealism and Realism. Were they dreamers or men of action? Does a passion for dreaming master the taste for action? Where does dreaming end and action begin? There is
no end to argument on these themes, but the fact remains that from the day the Conquistadors set foot on American soil they made clear their intention not to be simple voyagers, but to establish themselves there and remain there. They did not wait till they had finished the war before beginning the peace—that is to say, by building. During the intermediate period between the Conquest and the colonisation, in the middle of the 16th century, the conquerors laid the foundations of the colonial edifice which the colonists had the task, later, of completing. So as to appear as builders and architects beyond compare, these pursuers of mirages had to be practical men too.

The first Spanish constructions in the New World were, of course, churches and palaces for the King’s representatives, but houses, hospitals and barracks very quickly rose from the earth as if by magic. Manpower was plentiful and skilled, for masonry and stonework were the arts in which the natives excelled. However, on the instructions of the King himself, the Spanish at once imposed a special style upon the town-planning, which differed completely from the local type of habitat. This was the famous ‘chequer-board’ plan, inspired by Greco-Latin traditions. The style was simple: a central main plaza, quadrangular, with a church, municipal buildings and school. Parallel roads intersected at right angles and formed a regular pattern of squares. Thus the Spaniards transplanted into America an architectural type which had been bequeathed them by their Roman occupiers, who themselves had reproduced Greek models—a curious survival of a scheme some thousands of years old which, revived by Vitruvius and adapted by Hernando Cortés, turned Mexico into a reproduction of the Piraeus.

Had they done nothing but discover the New World, conquer territories, found cities, and teach millions of natives to revere the name of Christ and that of Charles the Fifth, the Conquistadors would have done well by their country. Such exploits justified such royal favours as commanderies, the Cross of Santiago, spurs of honour and marquisates. But the Prince would not have looked on his overseas captains in such a friendly fashion if he had not gained the most precious substance of all: gold. The conquerors were the seekers and purveyors of gold for the Kings of Spain.

The Spaniards had been seekers of gold at all times. Far back into antiquity, in fact, gold mines had been exploited in the Iberian peninsula. Strabo spoke of this in his Geography. Pliny was more precise. He explained the technique for the treatment
of gold at that time: 'It is crushed, washed, burned, ground, and finally treated in a mortar,' and that was the method still used in the 16th century. The Spaniards were therefore not ignorant that gold could be found, either in the form of grains or nuggets, mixed with sand or included in sulphites like quartz. Grains of gold were extracted from rivers or alluvial deposits. Gold incorporated in sulphites was found in mines. When the Conquistadors arrived in America, the Indians were also familiar with gold, but they preferred to seek it in the rivers. The process which they commonly used was that of washing. They ran water over the inclined floor of a sort of trough and into it threw the powdered matter that contained the gold. The latter fell to the bottom and was held by a screen. As soon as it was washed clear of particles of soil, the gold was smelted with four times its weight of silver. The resulting alloy was then treated with boiling concentrated sulphuric acid which dissolved all metals other than gold. This was the refining process. Both operations were known to the Spaniards, although for refining they also used an older process cited by Pliny, which consisted of substituting for sulphuric acid a mixture of copper sulphate, schist and saltpetre.

Thus the Spaniards knew no more than the Indians about the extraction of gold, but they perfected the system and made it more efficient. To begin with, they discovered a new principle of purification: the patio amalgamation. The auriferous material was crushed by teams of women and old men. It was then deposited on a paved surface called an arrastra surrounded by a rim. Beasts trampled the now muddy mineral. It was sprinkled with water, mercury was added, then a final bath separated the gold from its impurities. The Spaniards were not content merely to improve the technique; they created a gold industry. Under their stimulus, the American earth brought forth its hidden treasure—tesoro escondido. As the procedure of seeking gold in the rivers seemed to them to be archaic and its results inadequate, the conquerors increased the exploitation of mines. Thousands of natives were allocated to this terrible labour: to dig into the mountains, to extract the sulphites with picks, to crush them by hand and to pulverise them in mills. Then came the washing and the refining: a gentle task, compared with that of the slaves of gold beneath the earth.

When the Conquistadors arrived in Mexico, they were surprised to note that the Aztecs only extracted silver. Gold did not seem to be of much interest to them. Doubtless the reserves accumulated by the Aztlan dynasties were enough for them or
they thought they had exhausted the resources of the Mexican sub-soil. Anyway, the Spaniards would not hear of this. Would they let the Aztecs rest on the heap of gold piled up by their ancestors? The first concern of the conquerors was to set the Indians to working the gold—without, however, abandoning silver, which was worth acquiring.

It was Carvajal, an officer under Francisco Pizarro, who discovered the famous Potosi mines in Bolivia, south of La Paz, at nearly 14,000 feet. At the summit of this mountain of silver, the Spaniards built the highest town in the world. Under a colourless sky, houses in the Andalusian style raised their arabesques around the yawning pits. Prison and fortress at the same time, the Casa de la Moneda symbolised—by its heavy door and oppressive silence—the power of the Lion of Castile. Here a whole miserable people, secluded for ever, made the King of Spain's silver money. It was better, however—a hundred times better—to live and die between the cyclopean walls of the Casa de la Moneda than to go down into the mine. There they laboured as once the slaves of Solomon laboured in the Maniaca mines that were dug for the Queen of Sheba. And some of the Peruvian mines, with their black figures ceaselessly toiling up and down, recall Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement,' in which terrorised groups of human beings seem to form a sinister chain.

To smell out the gold required enthusiasm and patience. What an event it was when the searcher for gold or silver—the cateador—thought he had discovered a mine! All activity in the surrounding country was suspended, shops were shut, the schoolmaster dismissed his pupils, the padre ordered the bells to be pealed, and Indians and Spaniards raced towards the site of the miracle. If the find was confirmed, a feast was held at the very place where the vein had appeared, and if there had been a mistake, everyone returned home, scarcely disappointed, so strong had been the emotion. It was a curious fact that Spaniards and natives showed the same joyful excitement, although for the latter gold had no more value—even less, being of secondary utility—than copper or lead. Moreover, for them the discovery of a nugget foretold the martyrdom of the mine. It is probable that the Spaniards communicated to the Indians their fever for gold and that they thought it a good thing to spread the mirage of Eldorado.

The gold thus discovered, extracted, washed, refined, moulded into ingots and placed in chests or barrels, had now to be transported to Spain, and the caravels, that once had been the
messengers of hope and the vehicles of the Discovery, now played a new role as carriers of gold. The 15th century was not ended before a double movement of caravels became organised between Spain and the New World and inversely. There were, in fact, those that set out and those that returned, and those that started were more numerous than those that came back.

In August 1492 three caravels—the Santa María, the Pinta and the Niña—left the port of Palos. The moment was a solemn one. Repulsed successively by the Portuguese, French and English, to whom he had offered the keys to the New World, a Genoese adventurer started off on the golden road on behalf of the King of Castile. These three caravels were the first. In 1506 there were 22, in 1507 there were 32, and in 1508 there were 45. There were no more than 17 in 1510, but then there arrived at Seville the astonishing news that Grijalva, coming to Yucatan, had encountered natives who, in exchange for shoddy goods, had given gold—mere crumbs it seemed, of the heaps that could be found further west. Some months later, Cortés, who had made contact with Montezuma’s emissaries, confirmed it all. The consequence of this information was not long in appearing; in 1520 71 caravels crossed the Atlantic and Charles the Fifth, for his twentieth birthday, received the respectable weight of about 13 cwts. of gold from the future victor of Mexico. Eighteen years earlier his grandmother, Isabella the Catholic, had failed to receive a half-ton of gold from Bobadilla, Governor of Haiti, a large part of the load having been lost en route. In short, the number of ships that fitted out for the West Indies and the frequency of their crossings varied in proportion to the traffic in American gold.

A departure from Seville about the year 1540: what a bustle upon the quay! The families of the sailors rub shoulders with the hidalgos who have financed the expedition, the merchants who have provided the merchandise and Jewish moneylenders seeking last moment business. Abrazos, final injunctions, tears, and the rocking of the caravels in the violet waters of the port.

The time is past when such ships sailed alone, for the experience was a cruel one. In the space of twelve years, only 270 vessels had come back to Spain of the 490 that had left. Nearly half had been lost! Storms, contrary currents and reefs had taken their toll, but men had been the cause quite as much as nature. In the first place, the fleets of rival nations or those at war—hot or cold—with Spain. French ships, for instance, lay in wait for the caravels around the Canaries. Returning from his third
voyage Columbus had just missed being stopped off Cape St. Vincent. Yet more formidable than the regular squadrons of Francis I and Henry VIII were the corsairs, who operated either on their own account or for that of the nations who were enemies of Spain and Portugal. In the latter event, they held a commission in good and proper form and levied, of course, an honest share of the prize. The danger of piracy was nothing new. At the beginning of the century, even, Ferdinand the Catholic had defended himself by having strong carracks built after the fashion of the Portuguese and by posting armed vessels at the Canaries. But the most serious incident had been that during which the Florentine, Verrazano, sailing in a French ship, had taken possession of the three caravels containing Montezuma’s treasure, sent to the Emperor by Hernando Cortés. So, to provide against such disasters, costly to the treasury and detrimental to Spanish prestige, Charles the Fifth had ordered that merchant ships should be convoyed by men-of-war. The sovereign’s decision concealed a malicious ulterior motive. By protecting them against the corsairs, the escorting ships at the same time kept watch upon the merchant ships, conducting them safely to the port to which they were consigned. They brought them back quite faithfully to the port of departure, so that there was no longer the opportunity for certain dealers to sell their cargoes in foreign ports. They had to unload at Sanlúcar, Seville or Cadiz, under the eyes of the clerks of the Casa de Contratacion, and it was not easy to swindle His Majesty’s bookkeepers.

The Armada of the Indies draws away. It is a proud sight with its graceful caravels and heavy carracks. A captain of highest rank commands the fleet: Blasco Nuñez Vela, the future Viceroy. The ships are so heavily laden—stuffs of many colours, glass trinkets, flashy laces—that they sink low into the water. How much will they weigh when all this rubbish has been exchanged for bars of gold! The Armada passes south of the Canaries, meets the trade-winds and steers straight for Cuba. Up till now there has been nothing to fear, for the corsairs no longer take the risk of attacking Spanish ships in the middle of the Atlantic. It is not that they have given up the pursuit, but simply that they have moved their hiding-place. They now await the Armada at the very gates of the New World. For these are indeed gateways, opening their doors widely upon America through the West Indian archipelago. There are two: one, the Florida Channel between Havana and the Bahamas, gives access to the Gulf of Mexico, and the other, the Windward Channel
between Cuba and Haiti, commands the entry to the Caribbean Sea. It is by that route that the galleons reach Nombre de Dios, the point of departure for Peru.

Thus, having reached the Islands, the Armada divides into two: one part goes to seek gold in Mexico, while the other steers for the Isthmus of Panama to take delivery of gold from Peru and silver from the Potosi mines. As soon as the news of the arrival of Spanish ships in the port of Nombre de Dios reaches Lima, the Viceroy of Peru orders the fleet anchored at Callao to sail up the Pacific coast to Panama. The cargoes of gold and silver are unloaded and transported across the isthmus to Nombre de Dios on muleback, and there is nothing more to do but fill the caravels.

It was therefore in the region of the Caribbean Sea that the corsairs prowled. They were numerous and of all nationalities. There were Frenchmen—the legendary Brethren of the Coast—established on the small island of Tortuga, off the coast of Haiti. They harassed the Spaniards and maintained the presence of the French in the West Indies. They were the ancestors of the celebrated seigneurs of Haiti, the gentlemen of Guadalupe and the fine people of Martinique of the 18th century. There were the English, above all: Hawkins of Plymouth, Reneger of Southampton, and Francis Drake, that King of the Pirates, whom Elizabeth made a knight as a reward for his services. At San Juan de Ulua and Nombre de Dios, and on the Colombian and Venezuelan coast—at Santa Marta and Cartagena—the raids multiplied. It was not until the reign of Philip II that a Spaniard, Pedro de Menendez, organised a system of coast-guards and protection for the convoys which for a while was effective. Piracy did not end then, but lasted as long as the Spanish Empire itself. The pirates transmitted the tradition of adventure from one century to another. However much they changed their name, they were always the same: buccaneers in the 17th century, or filibusters in the 18th, they ceased to scour the Caribbean Sea only when the Spaniards no longer passed that way.

They always had mysterious and elusive accomplices: the sea, the night, and sometimes runaway slaves—like the cimarrones of Panama who, one evening in 1570, carried off one of the last treasures from Peru under the nose of the Spanish sentries of Nombre de Dios.

The return to Seville: emptied of their junk, but heavily laden with Mexican gold, and with silver from Potosi, the caravels have set course for Spain. They have passed through the narrow
Antillean channels without falling into any corsair ambush, and are now steering in a northerly direction, carried along by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, discovered by the pilot Alaminos. A flotilla coming straight from Colombia has joined them in the Saragossa Sea and they run alongside the Bermudas. When they reach the Azores, Europe is near. The escorting gunboat fires a shot from time to time to put to flight the pirates who, setting out from Dieppe, La Rochelle or St. Malo, circle the galleons like cormorants. The Spanish coast comes into view, and already on the quay the officials of the Casa de Contratación are gathered to weigh and stamp the King’s fifth, together with the merchants who supplied the cargo, the gentlemen and the prelates, concessionaries of the New World, and the good people of Seville, hot-headed and empty-bellied. It is such an exciting moment that social barriers are abolished. The beggars of Triana and Andalusian dukes are elbow to elbow and all have their eyes turned westward, awaiting the Armada. And here it is, the torrent of gold and silver which, from Vera Cruz, Nombre de Dios and Cartagena has cut its shining track across the sapphire-blue sea to mingle with the muddy waters of the Guadalquivir. The Armada has arrived.

A torrent of gold, and silver it certainly was! Two figures will show its extent. From 1503 (the year in which Columbus completed his fourth voyage) until 1560 (that in which Francisco Fajardo laid the first stones of Caracas), the New World had brought Spain 101 metric tons of gold, or nearly 225,000 lbs. weight. The exploitation of the Potosi mines must subsequently have multiplied the production of silver tenfold. In fact, from 1560 to 1600, 6872 metric tons—well over 15,000,000 lbs.—of silver crossed the Atlantic. In 40 years Spain received double the stock of silver existing in Europe before Columbus. If to the precious metals are added the Aztec jewels, the emeralds of Bogota, the pearls of Venezuela, the beaver skins of New Mexico, the precious woods of Guiana, the indigo, vanilla and cacao of the Islands, one might think that Midas and Croesus make small figures besides Charles the Fifth. Beside such a torrent, the Pactolus was merely a trickle.

But the wealth of Spain was only temporary, and she was not long in feeling the drawbacks of so prodigious an acquisition. An abundance of gold involved a rise in prices, without an equivalent stimulus to production. A large part of the monetary wealth remained sterile. The great landed proprietors, enriched by speculation, preferred to live on their capital rather than invest
it in agricultural works. The nobility, resting on its laurels, disdained labour, and left their domains to lie fallow. Certain hidalgos of high rank were even to become money-lenders at high rates of interest rather than increase the revenues of their haciendas. Further, a numerous clergy had to be maintained, and an increasingly heavier administration, a crowd of parasites who encumbered the antechambers of the Escorial in search of pensions or benefits.

Nothing is more costly than a politics of grandeur. But this does not mean that Spain died of hunger on its heap of gold; but in order to live on the level of a Great Power—that is to say, to keep its rank in Europe, and especially to provide for the needs of its American empire—she had to buy abroad what she could not make at home: flax and hemp from Normandy, canvas from Brittany, sail-cloth from St. Brieuc, cloth from England and hard wood for ship-building from the Baltic. Thus, the gold and silver imported from America were exported, in the form of coins, to France, England and Holland to pay for the merchandise necessary to the homeland and the empire. The consequence of this state of affairs was paradoxical. At the same time as the Spain of Philip II and Philip III was at war with the rebellious Low Countries, Anglican England and Huguenot France, the merchants of those same countries were actively trading with Seville. But that is nothing new! The Spanish orders were so considerable that they had the effect of stimulating the industry of these three nations and contributing to their prosperity. Simultaneously the enemy and client of France, England and the Low Countries, Spain was to end by being nothing but a channel for gold between the Atlantic and the Pyrenees until the day when the power founded on the metal yielded irremediably to the power that was founded on industry.

But before it experienced these vicissitudes, Spain had half a century in which to extract the best part of America’s gold. Charles the Fifth’s plan in 1540 was not to make his inheritance fruitful. He had even more wonderful ambitions. The three crowns he had assumed—those of Charlemagne, of Lombardy and of the Romans—were not enough. He wanted to dominate the world. While the crowns of the Capetians and the Tudors still shone in the European sky, the Habsburg had not accomplished the task to which he believed he was destined. He needed gold not for investment, nor to transform into manufactured products, but to pay in ready money for military supplies, soldiers and arms. In short, he needed gold to make
war. Thanks to the immediately available metal, Charles the Fifth kept France in check, though she was twice as populous as Spain, much richer in natural resources and with a regular army of 2,500 men of arms concentrated on national territory against 1,900 Spaniards dispersed on the Iberian peninsula, the Kingdom of Naples and Holland. But France was short of specie, while Charles was glutted with it, and that is why it was possible for him, by mobilising the forces of his empire, to bring a permanent threat to bear upon the French and English monarchies. To the 1,900 infantry and 3,000 light cavalry of his army in time of peace, Charles added several thousands of mercenaries, and he had the means to buy them. One galleon from America paid for a regiment. Charles had won the battle for gold.

A century later, Colbert, that dark seedy genial little man, who had been exasperated by Spanish manners, made the following bitter remark: 'We see the reigns of Charles V, Philip II, Philip III and even Philip IV in such abundance of money through the discovery of the West Indies, that all Europe has seen the House of a simple Austrian archduke achieve, in the space of 60 or 80 years, sovereignty over all the States of Burgundy, Aragon, Castile, Portugal, Naples and Milan; has seen her add to all these States the crown of England and Ireland by the marriage of Philip to Mary Tudor; make the Empire almost hereditary; challenge the pre-eminence of our kings to the crown; by secret practices and by arms, place our kingdom in imminent peril of passing into the hands of foreigners: and finally aspire to the Empire of all Europe—that is, of the whole world.' That Spain was rich irritated this patriot, but that she should spend without thinking provoked him even more. To this devotee of economy it was something rather immoral and upsetting, for Colbert had no liking for people who lived beyond their means.

One last look at the Conquistadores. We know now how and why they lived. But how did they die? In opulence and glory? One imagines sumptuous places of retirement, or comfortable ones at least, for the captains of the Conquest who had returned home with their fortunes made. They would restore the family solar, and those who were literate would write their memoirs. Those who were nostalgic for power would hold some honorary position at Court, and as for the soldiers—those without rank—they would return to their villages in La Mancha and Estremadura. They would be rich and would buy land, and in
the course of endless tertulia they would relate their campaigns, telling the stories of the Caribbean, of treasure and princesses. They would willingly show their enormous scars, for such wounds were not to be seen every day. Think of it! Scimitars of sharpened obsidian, and darts poisoned with the juice of the manchineel-tree! And they would blow out great clouds of smoke from their pipes of Mexican tobacco. . . .

But the reality was quite different. The majority of the Conquistadors died on the job by accident, sickness or violence. Those who survived ended their days in oblivion and—some of them—in poverty. That so melancholy and wretched a fate should have distinguished these enterprises, which at the beginning had been so full of promise, seems scarcely credible. Yet examples abound, and here are some of them, chosen from the most illustrious.

First of all, the Discoverer himself, Christopher Columbus: he died at Valladolid, outcast by the King whose glory he had made. Juan de la Cosa, the father of Atlantic pilots, died riddled with arrows. Nuñez de Balboa was beheaded on his father-in-law’s orders. Díaz de Solis was stoned to death. Nicuesa was lost at sea. Ponce de León died of an arrow in the heart. Hernando de Córdoba was mortally wounded by Indians. Hernando do Soto was carried off by fever. Pedro de Alvarado was crushed by a horse. Juan de Escalante was killed by the natives of Vera Cruz. Hernando Cortés died poor and alone in an Andalusian village. Panfilo de Narváez was drowned. Pedro de Valdivia was devoured by cannibals. Bastidas was stabbed by one of his own lieutenants. Diego de Ordaz died of sunstroke. Pedro de Mendoza died at sea.

And what happened to the Conquistadors of Peru? Hernando Pizarro had Almagro garrotted; the latter’s son assassinated Francisco Pizarro; Vaca de Castro had the younger Almagro beheaded; and Gonzalo Pizarro, before being condemned to death by La Gasca, killed Nuñez de Vela. Fifty captains were hanged. Not one of those who governed Peru during a quarter of a century, except La Gasca, died other than by the sword.

We know now that the alliance of Spain and the New World was sealed with blood. We know, too, that those who fully profited by the venture were not legion. Is it true, then, that wealth acquired by violence never brings happiness and that there is a curse on gold unjustly acquired? A shadow passes over the flamboyant facade of the temple of Mammon: is it the dishevelled figure of the goddess Nemesis?
Dirge for the Conquistadors

The drama is ended. The curtain falls slowly on a pyramid of corpses, as in the last act of a Shakesperean tragedy. It is finished, but another play is about to begin. What is its prologue?

The difficult day of the Conquest has just ended in a blaze of gold and blood. *Oro y sangre*—a funereal apotheosis! Night falls upon the battlefield of the Conquistadors, and silence follows. But at dawn into the shadows that slowly pale, phantoms slip one by one. Then day is here, and the morning light falls little by little upon these new beings, lighting their resolute features with its palid gleam. They wear neither helmet nor breastplate, but robes of monkish homespun or the sober doublets of men of law. They carry no swords, but in their hands is the mason's trowel, or the ivory staff of the alcalde, or the cavalier's lance. At first there are only a few, but soon a numberless crowd emerges from the shadows. They gather up the dead and bury them. The battlefield has become a cemetery. Then, in serried ranks, elbow to elbow, like the Spartan phalanxes, they move off westwards. These are the colonists.

*Seville, March, 1951.*

*Paris, July, 1953.*
## APPENDIX A

### DATES: A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CONQUEST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B.C.</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>The submergence of Atlantis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>The Crucifixion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-300</td>
<td>Middle Civilisations in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>478</td>
<td>Collapse of the Western Roman Empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>509</td>
<td>Clovis master of Gaul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-700</td>
<td>The Toltecs reach the valley of Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>Charlemagne, Emperor of the West.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>Invasion of Mexico by the Chichimecs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900-1000</td>
<td>Quetzalcoatl, at the head of the Toltecs, conquers Yucatan and subdues the Tzentsals, Itzals and Mayas. Quetzalcoatl moves southward and disappears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Cuzco founded by Manco-Capac and Mama Oclo, coming from Lake Titicaca.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1100</td>
<td>Formation of the Inca Empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1168</td>
<td>Beginning of the Aztec migration and the invention of the Mexican calendar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1227</td>
<td>Death of Genghis Khan, founder of the first Mongol Empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1232</td>
<td>Foundation of the Chichimec dynasty at Texcoco.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1238</td>
<td>Capture of Cordoba by St. Ferdinand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1260</td>
<td>Departure from Venice of Marco, Nicolo and Matteo Polo for India and China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1271</td>
<td>Return of the Polo brothers to Venice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1279</td>
<td>Kublai, the Great Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, subdues all China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1294</td>
<td>Death of Kublai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1295</td>
<td>Marco Polo's return to Venice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1350</td>
<td>Foundation of Tenochtitlan, or Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1388</td>
<td>The Mongol dynasty of the Yuans, founded by Kublai, is supplanted by that of the Mings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1375</td>
<td>Appearance of the 'Catalan World Map.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1418-1472</td>
<td>Reign of Netzahualcoyotl at Texcoco.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1422</td>
<td>Charles VII ascends the French throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1431</td>
<td>Joan of Arc is burnt at Rouen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1436</td>
<td>Invention of printing by Gutenberg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1440</td>
<td>Montezuma I succeeds Itzcoatl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1450</td>
<td>Tupac Inca Yupanquil begins the Inca wars of conquest in the direction of Chile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1451</td>
<td>Columbus born at Genoa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1452</td>
<td>Birth of Leonardo da Vinci.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1453</td>
<td>End of the Hundred Years War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capture of Constantinople by Mahomed II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1469</td>
<td>Death of the Infante Enrique, 'the Navigator.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1461: Death of Charles VII; Louis XI succeeds him on the French throne.
1469: Axayacatl succeeds Montezuma I.
Construction of the great stone calendar.
Unity of Mexico.
1470: Ferdinand, King of Navarre.
Beginning of Chibcha supremacy over the other tribes occupying the territory of Colombia.
1474: Isabella, Queen of Castile.
Columbus writes to Toscanelli.
c.1478: Francisco Pizarro born at Trujillo.
1482: Death of Toscanelli.
1483: Columbus's visit to King John II of Portugal.
Louis XI dies; Charles VIII succeeds.
1494: Columbus leaves Portugal for Spain.
He takes his son Diego to the monastery of La Rabida.
1495: Diego de Cañó discovers the Congo.
Accession of the Tudors in England.
Birth of Cortés at Medellín.
1486: Columbus is received by the Catholic Monarchs at Cordoba.
He meets Beatriz Ercina de Arana.
1487: Bartolomé Díaz reached the Cape of Good Hope.
1488: Birth at Cordoba of Fernando Columbus, son of Christopher and of Beatriz de Arana.
1491: Birth of Loyola.
Columbus goes to the Santa Fe camp to find the Catholic Monarchs.
1492: Death at Florence of Lorenzo de Medici, 'the Magnificent'.
Alexander VI (Borgia) is Pope.
Martin de Behaim constructs a globe.
Jan. 2: Capture of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs.
Mar. 31: Proscription of the Jews.
Apr. 17: Capitulations of Santa Fe.
May 12: Columbus goes to Palos.
Aug. 3: Columbus raises anchor.
Columbus halts at the Canaries because of steering trouble in the *Pinta*.
Sep. 6: Columbus leaves the Canaries.
17: First illusion of land.
25: Second illusion of land.
Oct. 7: Third illusion of land.
12: Columbus discovers America (actually Watling's L., in the Bahamas, B.W.I.).
15: Columbus discovers Santa María de la Concepción.
16: Columbus discovers Isabella.
27: Columbus discovers Cuba.
Nov. 21: Martin Alonso separates from the fleet.
Dec. 6: Columbus discovers Hispaniola (Haiti).
24: The *Santa María* runs aground. The fort of La Navidad is built.
1493: Jan. 4: The *Niña* leaves La Navidad.
The Conquistadors

6: The Pinta is found again.
16: Columbus returns to Spain.
18: The Niña calls at Santa Maria in the Azores.
Mar. 15: The Niña and Pinta return to Palos.
Apr. 15: Columbus is received by the Catholic Monarchs at Barcelona.
May 2: Bull from Pope Alexander VI fixing the Spanish and Portuguese zones of influence.
Sep. 25: Columbus's second departure, from Cadiz.
Nov. 12: Columbus discovers the Lesser Antilles: Dominica, Marigalante, Guadalupe, Once Mil Virgenes, Montserrat, Santa Maria la Redonda and la Antigua, La Desirade, Porto Rico.
Dec. 7: Isabella founded

1494
Mar. 12: Columbus sets out for the mountain of Cibao, Haiti.
May 15: Columbus discovers Jamaica.
June 7: Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal, fixing the spheres of influence of the two countries.

1495
Apr. 10: Pragmatical sanction by the Catholic Monarchs giving freedom of trade to all Spaniards.
1496
Mar. 10: Columbus leaves for Spain.
June 11: Columbus lands at Cadiz on his return from his second voyage.

Aug.: Columbus is received by the Catholic Monarchs at Burgos.
1497
June 2: Royal edict modifying the pragmatic sanction of April 10, 1945, in favour of Columbus.
Vasco de Gama turns the Cape of Good Hope.
1498
May 30: Columbus leaves Sanlúcar de Barrameda for his third voyage.
July: Columbus discovers the island of Trinidad.
Aug. 2: Columbus enters the Gulf of Paria, finds himself in the delta of the Orinoco and sets foot on the American continent.
Aug. 15: Columbus discovers the island of Margarita.
Aug. 30: Columbus arrives at Hispaniola.

1499
Feb.: In the spring Venezuela is discovered by Alonso de Hojeda, Juan de la Casa and Amerigo Vespucci.
1500
Feb.: Huayna-Capac, son of Tupac-Yupanqui, conquers the kingdom of Quito.
Vicente Yáñez Pinzon discovers the coast of Brazil.
Cabral also touches Brazil.
Feb. 24: Birth of Charles V.
Aug. 27: Bobadilla arrives in Hispaniola.
Nov. 25: Columbus in chains arrives at Cadiz with his two brothers.
Dec. 17: Columbus and his two brothers are received by the Catholic Monarchs at Granada.

1502
Feb.: Nicolás d'Ovando leaves for Hispaniola.
May 11: Columbus leaves Cadiz for his fourth voyage.
June 15: Columbus sights the island of Santa Lucia and Martinique (Mattinino).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1503</td>
<td>Montezuma II succeeds Axayacatl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1504</td>
<td>Death of Isabella the Catholic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 7</td>
<td>Columbus returns to Sanlínac de Barrameda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 21</td>
<td>Death of Columbus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1513</td>
<td>Ponce de León discovers Florida.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 6</td>
<td>Balboa sets out from the Bay of S. Miguel (Panama Isthmus) to discover the Southern Sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1515</td>
<td>Balboa discovers the Southern Sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1515</td>
<td>Panfilo de Narváez founds Havana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1516</td>
<td>Death of Ferdinand the Catholic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1517</td>
<td>Velasquez lands at Yucatan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The future Charles V takes possession of the Kingdom of Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balboa is executed at Acla on the orders of Pedro Arias de Ávila, his father-in-law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1519</td>
<td>Death of Leonardo da Vinci at Amboise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 21</td>
<td>Cortés reaches San Juan de Ulúa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Fri.</td>
<td>Cortés lands in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magellan leaves on his voyage round the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 5</td>
<td>Battle of Tlaxcala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1</td>
<td>Cortés masters Cholula and turns towards Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Meeting of Cortés and Montezuma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1520</td>
<td>Panfilo de Narváez lands at San Juan de Ulúa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 25</td>
<td>The Spaniards are besieged in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25</td>
<td>The Spaniards abandon Mexico. The Noche Triste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Magellan discovers the strait that bears his name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1521</td>
<td>Cortés undertakes the siege of Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>Mexico surrenders to the Spaniards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 13</td>
<td>Magellan dies in the Philippines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1522</td>
<td>Magellan's expedition returns to Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>Charles V appoints Cortés Captain-General, Governor and supreme chief of the Mexican expedition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First expedition to Peru by Pascual de Andagoya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1523</td>
<td>Alvarado conquers Guatemala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 12</td>
<td>Cuauhtemoc publishes the Texcoco 'Charter for dividing the Great Lagoon.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1524</td>
<td>Accession of Tiquescuahua, the last Chibcha zipta before the Spanish conquest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td>Gonzalo Davila lands in Honduras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.</td>
<td>Francisco Pizarro embarks for Peru at Panama.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1525</td>
<td>Foundation of Santa Maria in Colombia by Bastidas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 28</td>
<td>Death of Cuauhtemoc and Tetlepanquetzin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1526</td>
<td>Cortés' expedition to Honduras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 10</td>
<td>Almagro, Luque and Pizarro make their contract at Chiceam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon attempts an exploration of Florida.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1527</td>
<td>Death of Bastidas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Death of Machiavelli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1527-1531</td>
<td>Diego de Ordaz explores Guiana.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1528: Cortés goes to Spain to clear himself of the errors of which he has been accused. He receives the title of Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca. Creation of a Royal Audience at Mexico.
In the Spring, Pizarro returns to Spain, Charles V awards him the titles of Governor, Captain-General and Alguazil Mayor for life and Adelantado of Peru. Panfilo de Narvaez renews Ayllon’s attempts in Florida.
1529: The King of Spain signs a convention with Pizarro. Alfinger under mandate for the Welsers, bankers of Augsburg, explores Venezuela.
1530: Exploration and foundation of Culiacan by Guzman. Copernicus’s ‘system’ completed.
1531: Atahualpa takes his brother Huascar prisoner. Death of Alfinger.
1532 Nov. 15: Pizarro reaches the Valley of Cajamarca.
16: Pizarro’s capture of Atahualpa.
1533 Jan.: Pedro de Heredia founds Carthagena in Colombia.
Aug. 29: Death of Atahualpa.
Nov. 15: Pizarro’s Spaniards penetrate Cuzco.
1534: New Spain becomes a vice-royalty under Antonio de Mendoza.
Almagro undertakes the conquest of Chile.
1536: At the beginning of the year, Mendoza founds Puerto de Nuestra Señora del Buen Aire.
Apr. 6: An expedition under Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada explores the river Magdalena and conquers the Chibcha empire and Bogota.
1537 Apr.: Almagro attacks Cuzco.
June: Death of Mendoza.
Aug.: Juan de Salazar founds Asuncion.
Lorenzaccio assassinates Alexander de Medici, first Duke of Florence.
1538 Apr.: Almagro is defeated by Pizarro.
July: Almagro is garrotted by Pizarro.
Aug. 6: Jiménez de Quesada founds the city of Bogota.
1539: Valdivia named Lieutenant-General of Chile by Pizarro.
Hernando de Soto lands in Florida and explores the Mississippi.
1539-1556: Irala governs Paraguay.
1540: Cortés finally returns to Spain.
Valdivia sets out on the conquest of Chile.
Garcia Lopez de Cardeñas reaches the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.
Federman sets out in search of Eldorado.
Coronado reaches the frontier of Arizona.
1541 Feb. 12: Valdivia founds Santiago de Nuevo Estremo (the future Santiago de Chile).
June 16: Pizarro assassinated by the men of Almagro the younger.
Death of de Soto in Florida.
Death of Alvarado.
1541-1545: The bankers Welser explore the Rio de la Plata.
1542 Sep. 16: Almagro the Younger is killed. End of the 'Almagrists.'
1543 Aug.: Charles V appoints Nuñez de Vela as Viceroy of Peru.
Death of Copernicus.
1547 Dec. 2: Cortés dies at Castilleja de la Cuesta (Andalusia).
1548: Gonzalo Pizarro beheaded.
1550 Mar.: Valdivia founds the city of Concepción and reaches the Bio-Bio.
1553 Dec.: Caupolican and Lautaro massacre the Spaniards at the fort of Tucapel.
1554 Jan.: Death of Valdivia.
1556: Death of Bartolomé de Las Casas.
1558: End of the Araucanian war and death of Caupolican.
1560: Francisco Fajardo founds Caracas, capital of Venezuela.
1562: Cortés' remains are transported to Mexico.
1567: Losada, officer of Pedro Ponce de León, founds Santiago de León de Caracas once more.
1573: Juan de Garay founds Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz (E. Argentine).
Jeronimo Luis de Cabrera founds Cordoba.
APPENDIX B

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Units of Length

League: old measure of distance.
Kilometric league = 4 kilometres = approx. 2½ miles.
Land league or common league: 25 to the degree, that is 4 km.444, or approx. 2½ miles.
Sea league: 20 to the degree, that is 5 km.555, or approx. 3½ miles.
Tonneau or tonnage: measure of the capacity of a vessel and equal to 1.44 c.metres = approx. 50 c.ft.

Money values

The castellano was the equivalent of the peso de oro, but the latter was not coined properly speaking, but a measure of weight corresponding to 4.218 grs. of fine gold and currently used as money.

The castellano was reckoned at $3.07 in 1847 (Prescott). Its value in 1950 would probably be nearly £3.
1 mark = 230 grs. of fine gold or 50 pesos.
1 ducat = 3.485 grs. fine gold, or 6 ducats = 5 pesos.
1 piece of eight was worth seven tenths of a gold ducat.
100 gold reales was called an Isabelline and were equal to 8.40 grs. of gold.
1 Mexican quadruple equalled 27 grs. of gold.

It is very difficult to make exact estimates by taking as basis the specific or face value of money; in fact, some authors, like Prescott, reckon that the commercial value of this money, that is to say the equivalent quantity of essential commodities it would permit one to acquire, is four times greater. The weight in fine gold seems to us an easier form of reckoning. The estimations of the best authorities vary very widely.
APPENDIX C

SPANISH OFFICIALS

Adelantado: An untranslatable title, to which only the title of President could be compared, although the powers of a Spanish adelantado were not exactly similar to those of a President.

Alcalde: In Spain this name is given to certain judges or municipal magistrates whose functions are simultaneously civil and judicial. They are mayor, justice of the peace and commissioner of police at the same time. Their badge is a white rod surmounted by an ivory hand.

Alférez: Officer who bears the flag or standard.

Alguazil: By this word is implied a sort of Provost-Marshal of the Palace charged with arresting, judging and punishing those guilty of an offence or those whom it pleased the King of Spain to hand over to this kind of expeditions justice. The name was also given to individuals charged with the execution of orders from the Inquisition, from the Orders of Chivalry, etc.

Auditor: Magistrate, member of the 'royal audiences,' whose decrees were without appeal. The 'auditors' intervened in the choice and appointment of several judicial officials, thus exercising control over the cabildos, consulates, governors and administrators. They also intervened in conflicts of jurisdiction which broke out between secular and ecclesiastical tribunals. The Viceroy was by right the president of the 'audience.'

Corregidor: The leading judicial official of a Spanish town was thus named. When there was neither governor nor 'royal audience,' this magistrate was simultaneously judge, administrator and head of the municipal body. He thus enjoyed a real predominance which placed the entire government of a town or a province at his mercy. The former corregidor has today become an alcalde.

At the time of the conquest of America, corregidores were appointed in the viceroyalties and some of them were notable for their bad treatment of the natives. Nevertheless, their principal task was to aid the conquered Indians by providing them with the things necessary to their nourishment and maintenance.

Governor: Official appointed by the King, he filled the task of Captain-General of the place over which he ruled; he directed war operations, the administration of finance, public works, the founding of cities and, like the viceroy, he had the duty of watching over the propagation of Catholicism and good conduct in his province. It was to him that the responsibility fell of appointing the alcalde.

Mestre de campo: Here translated as 'colonel,' designating the officer who commanded cavalry and infantry under the orders of the general.

Viceroy: The viceroy was appointed directly by the sovereign and was the only real representative of the Spanish monarch. His powers were the greater in proportion to the distance from the homeland. He had to spread the Catholic religion, administrate, govern and direct justice; in the event of war he was Captain-General on sea and land.
APPENDIX D

RAW MATERIALS

Adobe: A sort of sun-baked brick, less durable than ordinary bricks. They were much used in Peru where they were valued for the long time they kept the houses cool.

Copal: A Spanish word of Mexican origin given to a kind of resin obtained by cutting the bark of certain Mexican trees.

Obsidian: A dark-coloured vitreous lava or volcanic rock, resembling common bottle-glass. Its name derives from a stone discovered by Obsius (or Obsidius) in Ethiopia, according to Pliny. It is also called the 'mirror of the Incas.'
APPENDIX E

A FEW PLACE NAMES AT THE TIME OF THE CONQUEST

Africa

Fortunate Isles ........................................ Canary Islands

Asia

Cambaluc .................................................. Pekin
Cathay ....................................................... China
Cipango ...................................................... Japan
Quinsay ...................................................... Hankow

North America

Cibola, or the Land of the Seven Cities, or the Lands of the Pueblos Zuñi (modern Indian Reserve)
Florida, or the Isle of Bimini ................................ Florida
Meschacebe .................................................. Mississippi
New Spain .................................................... Mexico
New Navarre and New Biscay ................................ Californian Coast

Central America and West Indies

Antilia, or the Island of the Seven Cities ........................................... West Indies
Baracoa ....................................................... Santiago de Cuba
Borinquen .................................................... Porto Rico
Hispaniola ..................................................... Haïti
Juana .......................................................... Cuba
Southern Sea ................................................ Pacific Ocean
Northern Sea ............................................... Atlantic Ocean
Nombre de Dios ............................................ Colon (Panama)
San Cristobal de la Habana ................................ Havana
San Salvador (Guanahani) ................................ Watling’s Island
Golden Castile ............................................... The Central American coast from Honduras to Darien

South America

Ciudad de los Reyes .................................... Lima
New Castile ................................................ North Peru
New Toledo ................................................ South Peru
The Conquistadors

Terra Firma ........................................ The region of the Gulf of Darien; by extension, this term was applied afterwards to the continental face, turned towards the Caribbean Sea, of Panama, Colombia and Venezuela, then later to the entire territory in South America within the jurisdiction of the Spanish Crown. The term indicated the 'Continent' as distinct from the 'Islands.' Also called the Spanish Main.

El Dorado ........................................ The Guianas
New Andalusia ................................... The Colombian coast from Darien to the Cape de la Vela.
New Estremadura ................................. Chile
New Granada or the New Kingdom of Granada .......................... Colombia
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