

FRANCIS PARKMAN

A HALF-CENTURY OF
CONFLICT - VOLUME II

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Francis Parkman

A Half-Century of Conflict - Volume II

CHAPTER XV

1697-1741

FRANCE IN THE FAR WEST

FRENCH EXPLORERS.—LE SUEUR ON THE ST. PETER'S.—CANADIANS ON THE MISSOURI.—JUCHEREAU DE SAINT-DENIS.—BÉNARD DE LA HARPE ON RED RIVER.—ADVENTURES OF DU TISNÉ.—BOURGMONT VISITS THE COMANCHES.—THE BROTHERS MALLET IN COLORADO AND NEW MEXICO.—FABRY DE LA BRUYÈRE.

The occupation by France of the lower Mississippi gave a strong impulse to the exploration of the West, by supplying a base for discovery, stimulating enterprise by the longing to find gold

mines, open trade with New Mexico, and get a fast hold on the countries beyond the Mississippi in anticipation of Spain; and to these motives was soon added the hope of finding an overland way to the Pacific. It was the Canadians, with their indomitable spirit of adventure, who led the way in the path of discovery.

As a bold and hardy pioneer of the wilderness, the Frenchman in America has rarely found his match. His civic virtues withered under the despotism of Versailles, and his mind and conscience were kept in leading-strings by an absolute Church; but the forest and the prairie offered him an unbridled liberty, which, lawless as it was, gave scope to his energies, till these savage wastes became the field of his most noteworthy achievements.

Canada was divided between two opposing influences. On the one side were the monarchy and the hierarchy, with their principles of order, subordination, and obedience; substantially at one in purpose, since both wished to keep the colony within manageable bounds, domesticate it, and tame it to soberness, regularity, and obedience. On the other side was the spirit of liberty, or license, which was in the very air of this wilderness continent, reinforced in the chiefs of the colony by a spirit of adventure inherited from the Middle Ages, and by a spirit of trade born of present opportunities; for every official in Canada hoped to make a profit, if not a fortune, out of beaverskins. Kindred impulses, in ruder forms, possessed the humbler colonists, drove them into the forest, and made them hardy woodsmen and skilful bushfighters, though turbulent and

lawless members of civilized society.

Time, the decline of the fur-trade, and the influence of the Canadian Church gradually diminished this erratic spirit, and at the same time impaired the qualities that were associated with it. The Canadian became a more stable colonist and a steadier farmer; but for forest journeyings and forest warfare he was scarcely his former self. At the middle of the eighteenth century we find complaints that the race of *voyageurs* is growing scarce. The taming process was most apparent in the central and lower parts of the colony, such as the Côte de Beaupré and the opposite shore of the St. Lawrence, where the hands of the government and of the Church were strong; while at the head of the colony,—that is, about Montreal and its neighborhood,—which touched the primeval wilderness, an uncontrollable spirit of adventure still held its own. Here, at the beginning of the century, this spirit was as strong as it had ever been, and achieved a series of explorations and discoveries which revealed the plains of the Far West long before an Anglo-Saxon foot had pressed their soil.

The expedition of one Le Sueur to what is now the State of Minnesota may be taken as the starting-point of these enterprises. Le Sueur had visited the country of the Sioux as early as 1683. He returned thither in 1689 with the famous *voyageur* Nicolas Perrot. [Footnote: *Journal historique de l'Etablissement des Français à la Louisiane*, 43.] Four years later, Count Frontenac sent him to the Sioux country again. The declared purpose of the mission was to keep those fierce tribes at peace

with their neighbors; but the Governor's enemies declared that a contraband trade in beaver was the true object, and that Frontenac's secretary was to have half the profits. [Footnote: *Champigny au Ministre*, 4 Nov. 1693.] Le Sueur returned after two years, bringing to Montreal a Sioux chief and his squaw,—the first of the tribe ever seen there. He then went to France, and represented to the court that he had built a fort at Lake Pepin, on the upper Mississippi; that he was the only white man who knew the languages of that region; and that if the French did not speedily seize upon it, the English, who were already trading upon the Ohio, would be sure to do so. Thereupon he asked for the command of the upper Mississippi, with all its tributary waters, together with a monopoly of its fur-trade for ten years, and permission to work its mines, promising that if his petition were granted, he would secure the country to France without expense to the King. The commission was given him. He bought an outfit and sailed for Canada, but was captured by the English on the way. After the peace he returned to France and begged for a renewal of his commission. Leave was given him to work the copper and lead mines, but not to trade in beaver-skins. He now formed a company to aid him in his enterprise, on which a cry rose in Canada that under pretence of working mines he meant to trade in beaver,—which is very likely, since to bring lead and copper in bark canoes to Montreal from the Mississippi and Lake Superior would cost far more than the metal was worth. In consequence of this clamor his commission was revoked.

Perhaps it was to compensate him for the outlays into which he had been drawn that the colonial minister presently authorized him to embark for Louisiana and pursue his enterprise with that infant colony, instead of Canada, as his base of operations. Thither, therefore, he went; and in April, 1700, set out for the Sioux country with twenty-five men, in a small vessel of the kind called a "felucca," still used in the Mediterranean.

Among the party was an adventurous youth named Penecaut, a ship-carpenter by trade, who had come to Louisiana with Iberville two years before, and who has left us an account of his voyage with Le Sueur. [Footnote: *Relation de Penecaut*. In my possession is a contemporary manuscript of this narrative, for which I am indebted to the kindness of General J. Meredith Reade.]

The party slowly made their way, with sail and oar, against the muddy current of the Mississippi, till they reached the Arkansas, where they found an English trader from Carolina. On the 10th of June, spent with rowing, and half starved, they stopped to rest at a point fifteen leagues above the mouth of the Ohio. They had staved off famine with the buds and leaves of trees; but now, by good luck, one of them killed a bear, and, soon after, the Jesuit Limoges arrived from the neighboring mission of the Illinois, in a canoe well stored with provisions. Thus refreshed, they passed the mouth of the Missouri on the 13th of July, and soon after were met by three Canadians, who brought them a letter from the Jesuit Marest, warning them that the river was

infested by war-parties. In fact, they presently saw seven canoes of Sioux warriors, bound against the Illinois; and not long after, five Canadians appeared, one of whom had been badly wounded in a recent encounter with a band of Outagamies, Sacs, and Winnebagoes bound against the Sioux. To take one another's scalps had been for ages the absorbing business and favorite recreation of all these Western tribes. At or near the expansion of the Mississippi called Lake Pepin, the voyagers found a fort called Fort Perrot, after its builder; [Footnote: Penecaut, *Journal. Procès-verbal de la Prise de Possession du Pays des Nadouessioux, etc., par Nicolas Perrot*, 1689. Fort Perrot seems to have been built in 1685, and to have stood near the outlet of the lake, probably on the west side. Perrot afterwards built another fort, called Fort St. Antoine, a little above, on the east bank. The position of these forts has been the subject of much discussion, and cannot be ascertained with precision. It appears by the *Prise de Possession*, cited above, that there was also, in 1689, a temporary French post near the mouth of the Wisconsin.] and on an island near the upper end of the lake, another similar structure, built by Le Sueur himself on his last visit to the place. These forts were mere stockades, occupied from time to time by the roving fur-traders as their occasions required.

Towards the end of September, Le Sueur and his followers reached the mouth of the St. Peter, which they ascended to Blue Earth River. Pushing a league up this stream, they found a spot well suited to their purpose, and here they built a fort,

of which there was great need, for they were soon after joined by seven Canadian traders, plundered and stripped to the skin by the neighboring Sioux. Le Sueur named the new post Fort l'Huillier. It was a fence of pickets, enclosing cabins for the men. The neighboring plains were black with buffalo, of which the party killed four hundred, and cut them into quarters, which they placed to freeze on scaffolds within the enclosure. Here they spent the winter, subsisting on the frozen meat, without bread, vegetables, or salt, and, according to Penecaut, thriving marvellously, though the surrounding wilderness was buried five feet deep in snow.

Band after band of Sioux appeared, with their wolfish dogs and their sturdy and all-enduring squaws burdened with the heavy hide coverings of their teepees, or buffalo-skin tents. They professed friendship and begged for arms. Those of one band had blackened their faces in mourning for a dead chief, and calling on Le Sueur to share their sorrow, they wept over him, and wiped their tears on his hair. Another party of warriors arrived with yet deeper cause of grief, being the remnant of a village half exterminated by their enemies. They, too, wept profusely over the French commander, and then sang a dismal song, with heads muffled in their buffalo-robcs. [Footnote: This weeping over strangers was a custom with the Sioux of that time mentioned by many early writers. La Mothe-Cadillac marvels that a people so brave and warlike should have such a fountain of tears always at command.] Le Sueur took the needful precautions against his

dangerous visitors, but got from them a large supply of beaver-skins in exchange for his goods.

When spring opened, he set out in search of mines, and found, not far above the fort, those beds of blue and green earth to which the stream owes its name. Of this his men dug out a large quantity, and selecting what seemed the best, stored it in their vessel as a precious commodity. With this and good store of beaver-skins, Le Sueur now began his return voyage for Louisiana, leaving a Canadian named D'Éraque and twelve men to keep the fort till he should come back to reclaim it, promising to send him a canoe-load of ammunition from the Illinois. But the canoe was wrecked, and D'Éraque, discouraged, abandoned Fort l'Huillier, and followed his commander down the Mississippi. [Footnote: In 1702 the geographer De l'Isle made a remarkable MS. map entitled *Carte de la Rivière du Mississippi, dressée sur les Mémoires de M. Le Sueur.*]

Le Sueur, with no authority from government, had opened relations of trade with the wild Sioux of the Plains, whose westward range stretched to the Black Hills, and perhaps to the Rocky Mountains. He reached the settlements of Louisiana in safety, and sailed for France with four thousand pounds of his worthless blue earth. [Footnote: According to the geologist Featherstonhaugh, who examined the locality, this earth owes its color to a bluish-green silicate of iron.] Repairing at once to Versailles, he begged for help to continue his enterprise. His petition seems to have been granted. After long delay, he sailed

again for Louisiana, fell ill on the voyage, and died soon after landing. [Footnote: Besides the long and circumstantial *Relation de Penecaut*, an account of the earlier part of Le Sueur's voyage up the Mississippi is contained in the *Mémoire du Chevalier de Beaurain*, which, with other papers relating to this explorer, including portions of his Journal, will be found in Margry, VI. See also *Journal historique de l'Etablissement des Français à la Louisiane*, 38-71.]

Before 1700, the year when Le Sueur visited the St. Peter, little or nothing was known of the country west of the Mississippi, except from the report of Indians. The romances of La Hontan and Matthieu Saguean were justly set down as impostures by all but the most credulous. In this same year we find Le Moyne d'Iberville projecting journeys to the upper Missouri, in hopes of finding a river flowing to the Western Sea. In 1703, twenty Canadians tried to find their way from the Illinois to New Mexico, in hope of opening trade with the Spaniards and discovering mines. [Footnote: *Iberville à ———*, 15 Fév. 1703 (Margry, VI. 180).] In 1704 we find it reported that more than a hundred Canadians are scattered in small parties along the Mississippi and the Missouri; [Footnote: *Bienville au Ministre*, 6 Sept. 1704.] and in 1705 one Laurain appeared at the Illinois, declaring that he had been high up the Missouri and had visited many tribes on its borders. [Footnote: Beaurain, *Journal historique*.] A few months later, two Canadians told Bienville a similar story. In 1708 Nicolas de la Salle proposed an expedition

of a hundred men to explore the same mysterious river; and in 1717 one Hubert laid before the Council of Marine a scheme for following the Missouri to its source, since, he says, "not only may we find the mines worked by the Spaniards, but also discover the great river that is said to rise in the mountains where the Missouri has its source, and is believed to flow to the Western Sea." And he advises that a hundred and fifty men be sent up the river in wooden canoes, since bark canoes would be dangerous, by reason of the multitude of snags. [Footnote: Hubert, *Mémoire envoyé au Conseil de la Marine*.]

In 1714 Juchereau de Saint-Denis was sent by La Mothe-Cadillac to explore western Louisiana, and pushed up Red River to a point sixty-eight leagues, as he reckons, above Natchitoches. In the next year, journeying across country towards the Spanish settlements, with a view to trade, he was seized near the Rio Grande and carried to the city of Mexico. The Spaniards, jealous of French designs, now sent priests and soldiers to occupy several points in Texas. Juchereau, however, was well treated, and permitted to marry a Spanish girl with whom he had fallen in love on the way; but when, in the autumn of 1716, he ventured another journey to the Mexican borders, still hoping to be allowed to trade, he and his goods were seized by order of the Mexican viceroy, and, lest worse should befall him, he fled empty handed, under cover of night. [Footnote: Penecaut, *Relation*, chaps, xvii., xviii. Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, I. 13-22. Various documents in Margry, VI. 193-202.]

In March, 1719, Bénard de la Harpe left the feeble little French post at Natchitoches with six soldiers and a sergeant [Footnote: For an interesting contemporary map of the French establishment at Natchitoches, see Thomassy, *Géologie pratique de la Louisiane*.]. His errand was to explore the country, open trade if possible with the Spaniards, and establish another post high up Red River. He and his party soon came upon that vast entanglement of driftwood, or rather of uprooted forests, afterwards known as the Red River raft, which choked the stream and forced them to make their way through the inundated jungle that bordered it. As they pushed or dragged their canoes through the swamp, they saw with disgust and alarm a good number of snakes, coiled about twigs and boughs on the right and left, or sometimes over their heads. These were probably the deadly water-moccason, which in warm weather is accustomed to crawl out of its favorite element and bask itself in the sun, precisely as described by La Harpe. Their nerves were further discomposed by the splashing and plunging of alligators lately awakened from their wintry torpor. Still, they pushed painfully on, till they reached navigable water again, and at the end of the month were, as they thought, a hundred and eight leagues above Natchitoches. In four days more they reached the Nassonites.

These savages belonged to a group of stationary tribes, only one of which, the Caddoes, survives to our day as a separate community. Their enemies the Chickasaws, Osages, Arkansas, and even the distant Illinois, waged such deadly war against

them that, according to La Harpe, the unfortunate Nassonites were in the way of extinction, their numbers having fallen, within ten years, from twenty-five hundred souls to four hundred. [Footnote: Bénard de la Harpe, in Margry, VI. 264.]

La Harpe stopped among them to refresh his men, and build a house of cypress-wood as a beginning of the post he was ordered to establish; then, having heard that a war with Spain had ruined his hopes of trade with New Mexico, he resolved to pursue his explorations.

With him went ten men, white, red, and black, with twenty-two horses bought from the Indians, for his journeyings were henceforth to be by land. The party moved in a northerly and westerly course, by hills, forests, and prairies, passed two branches of the Wichita, and on the 3d of September came to a river which La Harpe calls the southwest branch of the Arkansas, but which, if his observation of latitude is correct, must have been the main stream, not far from the site of Fort Mann. Here he was met by seven Indian chiefs, mounted on excellent horses saddled and bridled after the Spanish manner. They led him to where, along the plateau of the low, treeless hills that bordered the valley, he saw a string of Indian villages, extending for a league and belonging to nine several bands, the names of which can no longer be recognized, and most of which are no doubt extinct. He says that they numbered in all six thousand souls; and their dwellings were high, dome-shaped structures, built of clay mixed with reeds and straw, resting, doubtless, on a frame

of bent poles. [Footnote: Beaurain says that each of these bands spoke a language of its own. They had horses in abundance, descended from Spanish stock. Among them appear to have been the Ouacos, or Huecos, and the Wichitas,—two tribes better known as the Pawnee Picts. See Marcy, *Exploration of Red River.*] With them were also some of the roving Indians of the plains, with their conical teepees of dressed buffalo-skin.

The arrival of the strangers was a great and amazing event for these savages, few of whom had ever seen a white man. On the day after their arrival the whole multitude gathered to receive them and offer them the calumet, with a profusion of songs and speeches. Then warrior after warrior recounted his exploits and boasted of the scalps he had taken. From eight in the morning till two hours after midnight the din of drums, songs, harangues, and dances continued without relenting, with a prospect of twelve hours more; and La Harpe, in desperation, withdrew to rest himself on a buffalo-robe, begging another Frenchman to take his place. His hosts left him in peace for a while; then the chiefs came to find him, painted his face blue, as a tribute of respect, put a cap of eagle-feathers on his head, and laid numerous gifts at his feet. When at last the ceremony ended, some of the performers were so hoarse from incessant singing that they could hardly speak. [Footnote: Compare the account of La Harpe with that of the Chevalier de Beaurain; both are in Margry, VI. There is an abstract in *Journal historique.*]

La Harpe was told by his hosts that the Spanish settlements

could be reached by ascending their river; but to do this was at present impossible. He began his backward journey, fell desperately ill of a fever, and nearly died before reaching Natchitoches.

Having recovered, he made an attempt, two years later, to explore the Arkansas in canoes, from its mouth, but accomplished little besides killing a good number of buffalo, bears, deer, and wild turkeys. He was confirmed, however, in the belief that the Comanches and the Spaniards of New Mexico might be reached by this route.

In the year of La Harpe's first exploration, one Du Tisné went up the Missouri to a point six leagues above Grand River, where stood the village of the Missouris. He wished to go farther, but they would not let him. He then returned to the Illinois, whence he set out on horseback with a few followers across what is now the State of Missouri, till he reached the village of the Osages, which stood on a hill high up the river Osage. At first he was well received; but when they found him disposed to push on to a town of their enemies, the Pawnees, forty leagues distant, they angrily refused to let him go. His firmness and hardihood prevailed, and at last they gave him leave. A ride of a few days over rich prairies brought him to the Pawnees, who, coming as he did from the hated Osages, took him for an enemy and threatened to kill him. Twice they raised the tomahawk over his head; but when the intrepid traveller dared them to strike, they began to treat him as a friend. When, however, he told them that he meant to go fifteen

days' journey farther, to the Padoucas, or Comanches, their deadly enemies, they fiercely forbade him; and after planting a French flag in their village, he returned as he had come, guiding his way by compass, and reaching the Illinois in November, after extreme hardships. [Footnote: *Relation de Bénard de la Harpe. Autre Relation du même. Du Tisé à Bienville.* Margry, VI. 309, 310, 313.]

Early in 1721 two hundred mounted Spaniards, followed by a large body of Comanche warriors, came from New Mexico to attack the French at the Illinois, but were met and routed on the Missouri by tribes of that region. [Footnote: *Bienville au Conseil de Régence, 20 Juillet, 1721.*] In the next year, Bienville was told that they meant to return, punish those who had defeated them, and establish a post on the river Kansas; whereupon he ordered Boisbriant, commandant at the Illinois, to anticipate them by sending troops to build a French fort at or near the same place. But the West India Company had already sent one Bourgmont on a similar errand, the object being to trade with the Spaniards in time of peace, and stop their incursions in time of war. [Footnote: *Instructions au Sieur de Bourgmont, 17 Jan. 1722.* Margry, VI. 389.] It was hoped also that, in the interest of trade, peace might be made between the Comanches and the tribes of the Missouri. [Footnote: The French had at this time gained a knowledge of the tribes of the Missouri as far up as the Arickaras, who were not, it seems, many days' journey below the Yellowstone, and who told them of "prodigiously high mountains,"—evidently the

Rocky Mountains. *Mémoire de la Renaudière*, 1723.]

Bourgmont was a man of some education, and well acquainted with these tribes, among whom he had traded for years. In pursuance of his orders he built a fort, which he named Fort Orléans, and which stood on the Missouri not far above the mouth of Grand River. Having thus accomplished one part of his mission, he addressed himself to the other, and prepared to march for the Comanche villages.

Leaving a sufficient garrison at the fort, he sent his ensign, Saint-Ange, with a party of soldiers and Canadians, in wooden canoes, to the villages of the Kansas higher up the stream, and on the 3d of July set out by land to join him, with a hundred and nine Missouri Indians and sixty-eight Osages in his train. A ride of five days brought him again to the banks of the Missouri, opposite a Kansas town. Saint-Ange had not yet arrived, the angry and turbid current, joined to fevers among his men, having retarded his progress. Meanwhile Bourgmont drew from the Kansas a promise that their warriors should go with him to the Comanches. Saint-Ange at last appeared, and at daybreak of the 24th the tents were struck and the pack-horses loaded. At six o'clock the party drew up in battle array on a hill above the Indian town, and then, with drum beating and flag flying, began their march. "A fine prairie country," writes Bourgmont, "with hills and dales and clumps of trees to right and left." Sometimes the landscape quivered under the sultry sun, and sometimes thunder bellowed over their heads, and rain fell in floods on the steaming

plains.

Renaudière, engineer of the party, one day stood by the side of the path and watched the whole procession as it passed him. The white men were about twenty in all. He counted about three hundred Indian warriors, with as many squaws, some five hundred children, and a prodigious number of dogs, the largest and strongest of which dragged heavy loads. The squaws also served as beasts of burden; and, says the journal, "they will carry as much as a dog will drag." Horses were less abundant among these tribes than they afterwards became, so that their work fell largely upon the women.

On the sixth day the party was within three leagues of the river Kansas, at a considerable distance above its mouth. Bourgmont had suffered from dysentery on the march, and an access of the malady made it impossible for him to go farther. It is easy to conceive the regret with which he saw himself compelled to return to Fort Orléans. The party retraced their steps, carrying their helpless commander on a litter.

First, however, he sent one Gaillard on a perilous errand. Taking with him two Comanche slaves bought for the purpose from the Kansas, Gaillard was ordered to go to the Comanche villages with the message that Bourgmont had been on his way to make them a friendly visit, and though stopped by illness, hoped soon to try again, with better success.

Early in September, Bourgmont, who had arrived safely at Fort Orléans, received news that the mission of Gaillard had

completely succeeded; on which, though not wholly recovered from his illness, he set out again on his errand of peace, accompanied by his young son, besides Renaudière, a surgeon, and nine soldiers. On reaching the great village of the Kansas he found there five Comanche chiefs and warriors, whom Gaillard had induced to come thither with him. Seven chiefs of the Otoes presently appeared, in accordance with an invitation of Bourgmont; then six chiefs of the Iowas and the head chief of the Missouris. With these and the Kansas chiefs a solemn council was held around a fire before Bourgmont's tent; speeches were made, the pipe of peace was smoked, and presents were distributed.

On the 8th of October the march began, the five Comanches and the chiefs of several other tribes, including the Omahas, joining the cavalcade. Gaillard and another Frenchman named Quesnel were sent in advance to announce their approach to the Comanches, while Bourgmont and his followers moved up the north side of the river Kansas till the eleventh, when they forded it at a point twenty leagues from its mouth, and took a westward and southwestward course, sometimes threading the grassy valleys of little streams, sometimes crossing the dry upland prairie, covered with the short, tufted dull-green herbage since known as "buffalo grass." Wild turkeys clamored along every watercourse; deer were seen on all sides, buffalo were without number, sometimes in grazing droves, and sometimes dotting the endless plain as far as the eye could reach. Ruffian wolves, white and gray, eyed the

travellers askance, keeping a safe distance by day, and howling about the camp all night. Of the antelope and the elk the journal makes no mention. Bourgmont chased a buffalo on horseback and shot him with a pistol,—which is probably the first recorded example of that way of hunting.

The stretches of high, rolling, treeless prairie grew more vast as the travellers advanced. On the 17th, they found an abandoned Comanche camp. On the next day as they stopped to dine, and had just unsaddled their horses, they saw a distant smoke towards the west, on which they set the dry grass on fire as an answering signal. Half an hour later a body of wild horsemen came towards them at full speed, and among them were their two couriers, Gaillard and Quesnel, waving a French flag. The strangers were eighty Comanche warriors, with the grand chief of the tribe at their head. They dashed up to Bourgmont's bivouac and leaped from their horses, when a general shaking of hands ensued, after which white men and red seated themselves on the ground and smoked the pipe of peace. Then all rode together to the Comanche camp, three leagues distant. [Footnote: This meeting took place a little north of the Arkansas, apparently where that river makes a northward bend, near the 22d degree of west longitude. The Comanche villages were several days' journey to the southwest. This tribe is always mentioned in the early French narratives as the Padoucas,—a name by which the Comanches are occasionally known to this day. See Whipple and Turner, *Reports upon Indian Tribes*, in *Explorations and Surveys*

for the Pacific Railroad, (Senate Doc., 1853,1854).]

Bourgmont pitched his tents at a pistol-shot from the Comanche lodges, whence a crowd of warriors presently came to visit him. They spread buffalo-robcs on the ground, placed upon them the French commander, his officers, and his young son; then lifted each, with its honored load, and carried them all, with yells of joy and gratulation, to the lodge of the Great Chief, where there was a feast of ceremony lasting till nightfall.

On the next day Bourgmont displayed to his hosts the marvellous store of gifts he had brought for them—guns, swords, hatchets, kettles, gunpowder, bullets, red cloth, blue cloth, hand-mirrors, knives, shirts, awls, scissors, needles, hawks' bells, vermilion, beads, and other enviable commodities, of the like of which they had never dreamed. Two hundred savages gathered before the French tents, where Bourgmont, with the gifts spread on the ground before him, stood with a French flag in his hand, surrounded by his officers and the Indian chiefs of his party, and harangued the admiring auditors.

He told them that he had come to bring them a message from the King, his master, who was the Great Chief of all the nations of the earth, and whose will it was that the Comanches should live in peace with his other children,—the Missouris, Osages, Kansas, Otoes, Omahas, and Pawnees,—with whom they had long been at war; that the chiefs of these tribes were now present, ready to renounce their old enmities; that the Comanches should henceforth regard them as friends, share with them the blessing

of alliance and trade with the French, and give to these last free passage through their country to trade with the Spaniards of New Mexico. Bourgmont then gave the French flag to the Great Chief, to be kept forever as a pledge of that day's compact. The chief took the flag, and promised in behalf of his people to keep peace inviolate with the Indian children of the King. Then, with unspeakable delight, he and his tribesmen took and divided the gifts.

The next two days were spent in feasts and rejoicings. "Is it true that you are men?" asked the Great Chief. "I have heard wonders of the French, but I never could have believed what I see this day." Then, taking up a handful of earth, "The Spaniards are like this; but you are like the sun." And he offered Bourgmont, in case of need, the aid of his two thousand Comanche warriors. The pleasing manners of his visitors, and their unparalleled generosity, had completely won his heart.

As the object of the expedition was accomplished, or seemed to be so, the party set out on their return. A ride of ten days brought them again to the Missouri; they descended in canoes to Fort Orléans, and sang *Te Deum* in honor of the peace. [Footnote: *Relation du Voyage du Sieur de Bourgmont, Juin-Nov., 1724*, in Margry, VI. 398. Le Page du Pratz, III. 141.]

No farther discovery in this direction was made for the next fifteen years. Though the French had explored the Missouri as far as the site of Fort Clark and the Mandan villages, they were possessed by the idea—due, perhaps, to Indian reports

concerning the great tributary river, the Yellowstone—that in its upper course the main stream bent so far southward as to form a waterway to New Mexico, with which it was the constant desire of the authorities of Louisiana to open trade. A way thither was at last made known by two brothers named Mallet, who with six companions went up the Platte to its South Fork, which they called River of the Padoucas,—a name given it on some maps down to the middle of this century. They followed the South Fork for some distance, and then, turning southward and southwestward, crossed the plains of Colorado. Here the dried dung of the buffalo was their only fuel; and it has continued to feed the camp-fire of the traveller in this treeless region within the memory of many now living. They crossed the upper Arkansas, and apparently the Cimarron, passed Taos, and on the 22d of July reached Santa Fé, where they spent the winter. On the 1st of May, 1740, they began their return journey, three of them crossing the plains to the Pawnee villages, and the rest descending the Arkansas to the Mississippi. [Footnote: *Journal du Voyage des Frères Mallet, présenté à MM. de Bienville et Salmon*. This narrative is meagre and confused, but serves to establish the main points. *Copie du Certificat donné à Santa Fé aux sept [huit] Français par le Général Hurtado, 24 Juillet, 1739. Père Rébald au Père de Beaubois, sans date. Bienville et Salmon au Ministre, 30 Avril, 1741, in Margry, VI. 455-468.*]

The bold exploit of the brothers Mallet attracted great attention at New Orleans, and Bienville resolved to renew it, find

if possible a nearer and better way to Santa Fé, determine the nature and extent of these mysterious western regions, and satisfy a lingering doubt whether they were not contiguous to China and Tartary. [Footnote: *Instructions données par Jean-Baptiste de Bienville à Fabry de la Bruyère, 1 Juin, 1741.* Bienville was behind his time in geographical knowledge. As early as 1724 Bénard de la Harpe knew that in ascending the Missouri or the Arkansas one was moving towards the "Western Sea,"—that is, the Pacific,—and might, perhaps, find some river flowing into it. See *Routes qu'on peut tenir pour se rendre à la Mer de l'Ouest*, in *Journal historique*, 387.] A naval officer, Fabry de la Bruyère, was sent on this errand, with the brothers Mallet and a few soldiers and Canadians. He ascended the Canadian Fork of the Arkansas, named by him the St. André, became entangled in the shallows and quicksands of that difficult river, fell into disputes with his men, and after protracted efforts, returned unsuccessful. [Footnote: *Extrait des Lettres du Sieur Fabry.*]

While French enterprise was unveiling the remote Southwest, two indomitable Canadians were pushing still more noteworthy explorations into more northern regions of the continent.

CHAPTER XVI

1716-1761

SEARCH FOR THE PACIFIC

THE WESTERN SEA.—SCHEMES FOR REACHING IT.—JOURNEY OF CHARLEVOIX.—THE SIOUX MISSION.—VARENNES DE LA VÉRENDRYE.—HIS ENTERPRISE.—HIS DISASTERS.—VISITS THE MANDANS.—HIS SONS.—THEIR SEARCH FOR THE WESTERN SEA.—THEIR ADVENTURES.—THE SNAKE INDIANS.—A GREAT WAR-PARTY.—THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.—A PANIC.—RETURN OF THE BROTHERS.—THEIR WRONGS AND THEIR FATE.

In the disastrous last years of Louis XIV, the court gave little thought to the New World; but under the regency of the Duke of Orléans interest in American affairs revived. Plans for reaching the Mer de l'Ouest, or Pacific Ocean, were laid before the Regent in 1716. It was urged that the best hope was in sending an expedition across the continent, seeing that every

attempt to find a westward passage by Hudson Bay had failed. As starting-points and bases of supply for the expedition, it was proposed to establish three posts, one on the north shore of Lake Superior, at the mouth of the river Kaministiguia, another at Lac des Cristineaux, now called Lake of the Woods, and the third at Lake Winnipeg,—the last being what in American phrase is called the "jumping-off place," or the point where the expedition was to leave behind the last trace of civilization. These posts were to cost the Crown nothing; since by a device common in such cases, those who built and maintained them were to be paid by a monopoly of the fur-trade in the adjacent countries. It was admitted, however, that the subsequent exploration must be at the charge of the government, and would require fifty good men, at 300 francs a year each, besides equipment and supplies. All things considered, it was reckoned that an overland way to the Pacific might be found for about 50,000 francs, or 10,000 dollars. [Footnote: *Mémoire fait et arrêté par le Conseil de Marine, 3 Fév. 1717; Mémoire du Roy, 26 Juin, 1717.*]

The Regent approved the scheme so far as to order the preliminary step to be taken by establishing the three posts, and in this same year, Lieutenant La Noue, of the colony troops, began the work by building a stockade at the mouth of the Kaministiguia. Little more was done in furtherance of the exploration till three years later, when the celebrated Jesuit, Charlevoix, was ordered by the Duke of Orléans to repair to America and gain all possible information concerning the

Western Sea and the way to it. [Footnote: *Charlevoix au Comte de Morville, 1 Avril, 1723.*]

In the next year he went to the Upper Lakes, and questioned missionaries, officers, *voyageurs*, and Indians. The results were not satisfactory. The missionaries and the officers had nothing to tell; the voyagers and Indians knew no more than they, but invented confused and contradictory falsehoods to hide their ignorance. Charlevoix made note of everything, and reported to the Comte de Toulouse that the Pacific probably formed the western boundary of the country of the Sioux, and that some Indians told him that they had been to its shores and found white men there different from the French.

Believing that these stories were not without foundation, Charlevoix reported two plans as likely to lead to the coveted discovery. One was to ascend the Missouri, "the source of which is certainly not far from the sea, as all the Indians I have met have unanimously assured me;" and the other was to establish a mission among the Sioux, from whom after thoroughly learning their language, the missionaries could, as he thinks, gain all the desired information. [Footnote: The valuable journal of Charlevoix's western travels, written in the form of letters, was published in connection with his *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*. After his visit to the Lakes, he went to New Orleans, intending to return in the spring and continue his inquiries for the Western Sea; but being unable to do this, he went back to France at the end of 1722. The official report of his mission is contained in a

letter to the Comte de Toulouse, 20 Jan. 1723.]

The Regent approved the plan of the mission; but the hostile disposition of the Sioux and the Outagamies prevented its execution for several years. In 1727 the scheme was revived, and the colonial minister at Versailles ordered the Governor of Canada to send two missionaries to the Sioux. But the mission required money, and the King would not give it. Hence the usual expedient was adopted. A company was formed, and invested with a monopoly of the Sioux fur-trade, on condition of building a fort, mission-house, and chapel, and keeping an armed force to guard them. It was specially provided that none but pious and virtuous persons were to be allowed to join the Company, "in order," says the document, "to attract the benediction of God upon them and their business." [Footnote: *Traité de la Compagnie des Sioux*, 6 Juin, 1727.] The prospects of the Company were thought good, and the Governor himself was one of the shareholders. While the mission was given the most conspicuous place in the enterprise, its objects were rather secular than spiritual,—to attach the Sioux to the French interest by the double ties of religion and trade, and utilize their supposed knowledge to reach the Pacific. [Footnote: On this scheme, *Vaudreuil et Bégon au Ministre*, 4 Oct. 1723; *Longueuil et Bégon au Ministre*, 31 Oct. 1725; *Beauharnois et Dupuy au Ministre*, 25 Sept. 1727.]

Father Guignas was made the head of the mission, and Boucher de la Perrière the military chief. The party left

Montreal in June, and journeying to the Mississippi by way of Michillimackinac, Green Bay, Fox River, and the Wisconsin, went up the great river to Lake Pepin, where the adventurous Nicolas Perrot had built two trading-posts more than forty years before. Even if his timeworn tenements were still standing, La Perrière had no thought of occupying them. On the north, or rather west, side of the lake his men found a point of land that seemed fit for their purpose, disembarked, cut down trees, and made a square stockade enclosing the necessary buildings. It was near the end of October before they were all well housed. A large band of Sioux presently appeared, and set up their teepees hard by. When the birthday of the Governor came, the party celebrated it with a display of fireworks and vociferous shouts of *Vive le Roi, Vive Charles de Beauharnois*, while the Indians yelped in fright and amazement at the pyrotechnics, or stood pressing their hands upon their mouths in silent amazement. The French called their fort Fort Beauharnois, and invited the aid of Saint Michael the Archangel by naming the mission in his honor. All went well till April, when the water rose with the spring floods and filled fort, chapel, and houses to the depth of nearly three feet, ejecting the whole party, and forcing them to encamp on higher ground till the deluge subsided. [Footnote: *Guignas à Beauharnois, 28 Mai, 1728.*]

Worse enemies than the floods soon found them out. These were the irrepressible Outagamies, who rose against the intruding French and incited the Sioux to join them. There

was no profit for the Company, and no safety for its agents. The stockholders became discouraged, and would not support the enterprise. The fort was abandoned, till in 1731 a new arrangement was made, followed by another attempt. [Footnote: *Beauharnois et Hocquart au Ministre, 25 Oct. 1729; Idem, 12 Oct. 1731.*] For a time a prosperous trade was carried on; but, as commonly happened in such cases, the adventurers seem to have thought more of utilizing their monopoly than of fulfilling the terms on which they had received it. The wild Sioux of the plains, instead of being converted and turned into Frenchmen, proved such dangerous neighbors that in 1737 Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, who then commanded the post, found himself forced to abandon it. [Footnote: *Relation du Sieur de Saint-Pierre, 14 Oct. 1737.*] The enterprise had failed in both its aims. The Western Sea was still a mystery, and the Sioux were not friends, but enemies. Legardeur de Saint-Pierre recommended that they should be destroyed, benevolent advice easy to give, and impossible to execute. [Footnote: "Cet officier [Saint-Pierre] a ajouté qu'il seroit avantageux de detruire cette nation." *Mémoire de Beauharnois, 1738.*]

René Gaultier de Varennes, lieutenant in the regiment of Carignan, married at Three Rivers, in 1667, the daughter of Pierre Boucher, governor of that place; the age of the bride, Demoiselle Marie Boucher, being twelve years, six months, and eighteen days. Varennes succeeded his father-in-law as governor of Three Rivers, with a salary of twelve hundred francs, to which

he added the profits of a farm of forty acres; and on these modest resources, reinforced by an illicit trade in furs, he made shift to sustain the dignity of his office. His wife became the mother of numerous offspring, among whom was Pierre, born in 1685,—an active and hardy youth, who, like the rest of the poor but vigorous Canadian *noblesse*, seemed born for the forest and the fur-trade. When, however, the War of the Spanish Succession broke out, the young man crossed the sea, obtained the commission of lieutenant, and was nearly killed at the battle of Malplaquet, where he was shot through the body, received six sabre-cuts, and was left for dead on the field. He recovered, and returned to Canada, when, finding his services slighted, he again took to the woods. He had assumed the designation of La Vérendrye, and thenceforth his full name was Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Vérendrye. [Footnote: M. Benjamin Sulte has traced out the family history of the Varennes in the parish registers of Three Rivers and other trustworthy sources. See *Revue Canadienne*, X. 781, 849, 935.]

In 1728, he was in command of a small post on Lake Nipegon, north of Lake Superior. Here an Indian chief from the River Kaministiquia told him of a certain great lake which discharged itself by a river flowing westward. The Indian further declared that he had descended this river till he reached water that ebbed and flowed, and terrified by the strange phenomenon, had turned back, though not till he had heard of a great salt lake, bordered with many villages. Other Indians confirmed and improved the

story. "These people," said La Vérendrye to the Jesuit Degonnor, "are great liars, but now and then they tell the truth." [Footnote: *Relation du Père Degonnor, Jésuite, Missionnaire des Sioux, adressée à M. le Marquis de Beauharnois.*] It seemed to him likely that their stories of a western river flowing to a western sea were not totally groundless, and that the true way to the Pacific was not, as had been supposed, through the country of the Sioux, but farther northward, through that of the Cristineaux and Assinniboins, or, in other words, through the region now called Manitoba. In this view he was sustained by his friend Degonnor, who had just returned from the ill-starred Sioux mission.

La Vérendrye, fired with the zeal of discovery, offered to search for the Western Sea if the King would give him one hundred men and supply canoes, arms, and provisions. [Footnote: *Relation de Degonnor: Beauharnois au Ministre, 1 Oct. 1731.*] But, as was usual in such cases, the King would give nothing; and though the Governor, Beauharnois, did all in his power to promote the enterprise, the burden and the risk were left to the adventurer himself. La Vérendrye was authorized to find a way to the Pacific at his own expense, in consideration of a monopoly of the fur-trade in the regions north and west of Lake Superior. This vast and remote country was held by tribes who were doubtful friends of the French, and perpetual enemies of each other. The risks of the trade were as great as its possible profits, and to reap these, vast outlays must first be made: forts must be built, manned, provisioned,

and stocked with goods brought through two thousand miles of difficult and perilous wilderness. There were other dangers, more insidious, and perhaps greater. The exclusive privileges granted to La Vérendrye would inevitably rouse the intensest jealousy of the Canadian merchants, and they would spare no effort to ruin him. Intrigue and calumny would be busy in his absence. If, as was likely, his patron, Beauharnois, should be recalled, the new governor might be turned against him, his privileges might be suddenly revoked, the forts he had built passed over to his rivals, and all his outlays turned to their profit, as had happened to La Salle on the recall of his patron, Frontenac. On the other hand, the country was full of the choicest furs, which the Indians had hitherto carried to the English at Hudson Bay, but which the proposed trading-posts would secure to the French. La Vérendrye's enemies pretended that he thought of nothing but beaver-skins, and slighted the discovery which he had bound himself to undertake; but his conduct proves that he was true to his engagements, and that ambition to gain honorable distinction in the service of the King had a large place among the motives that impelled him.

As his own resources were of the smallest, he took a number of associates on conditions most unfavorable to himself. Among them they raised money enough to begin the enterprise, and on the 8th of June, 1731, La Vérendrye and three of his sons, together with his nephew, La Jemeraye, the Jesuit Messenger, and a party of Canadians, set out from Montreal. It was late in

August before they reached the great portage of Lake Superior, which led across the height of land separating the waters of that lake from those flowing to Lake Winnipeg. The way was long and difficult. The men, who had perhaps been tampered with, mutinied, and refused to go farther. [Footnote: *Mémoire du Sieur de la Vérendrye du Sujet des Etablissements pour parvenir a la Découverte de la Mer de l'Ouest*, in Margry, VI. 585.] Some of them, with much ado, consented at last to proceed, and, under the lead of La Jemeraye, made their way by an intricate and broken chain of lakes and streams to Rainy Lake, where they built a fort and called it Fort St. Pierre. La Vérendrye was forced to winter with the rest of the party at the river Kaministiguia, not far from the great portage. Here months were lost, during which a crew of useless mutineers had to be fed and paid; and it was not till the next June that he could get them again into motion towards Lake Winnipeg.

This ominous beginning was followed by a train of disasters. His associates abandoned him; the merchants on whom he depended for supplies would not send them, and he found himself, in his own words "destitute of everything." His nephew, La Jemeraye, died. The Jesuit Auneau, bent on returning to Michillimackinac, set out with La Vérendrye's eldest son and a party of twenty Canadians. A few days later, they were all found on an island in the Lake of the Woods, murdered and mangled by the Sioux. [Footnote: *Beauharnois au Ministre*, 14 Oct. 1736; *Relation du Massacre au Lac des Bois, en Juin, 1736*; *Journal*

de la Vérendrye, joint à la lettre de M. de Beauharnois du — Oct. 1737.] The Assinniboins and Cristineaux, mortal foes of that fierce people, offered to join the French and avenge the butchery; but a war with the Sioux would have ruined La Vérendrye's plans of discovery, and exposed to torture and death the French traders in their country. Therefore he restrained himself and declined the proffered aid, at the risk of incurring the contempt of those who offered it.

Beauharnois twice appealed to the court to give La Vérendrye some little aid, urging that he was at the end of his resources, and that a grant of 30,000 francs, or 6,000 dollars, would enable him to find a way to the Pacific. All help was refused, but La Vérendrye was told that he might let out his forts to other traders, and so raise means to pursue the discovery.

In 1740 he went for the third time to Montreal, where, instead of aid, he found a lawsuit. "In spite," he says, "of the derangement of my affairs, the envy and jealousy of various persons impelled them to write letters to the court insinuating that I thought of nothing but making my fortune. If more than forty thousand livres of debt which I have on my shoulders are an advantage, then I can flatter myself that I am very rich. In all my misfortunes, I have the consolation of seeing that M. de Beauharnois enters into my views, recognizes the uprightness of my intentions, and does me justice in spite of opposition." [Footnote: *Mémoire du Sieur de la Vérendrye au sujet des Etablissements pour parvenir à la Découverte de la Mer de l'Quest.*]

Meanwhile, under all his difficulties, he had explored a vast region hitherto unknown, diverted a great and lucrative fur-trade from the English at Hudson Bay, and secured possession of it by six fortified posts,—Fort St. Pierre, on Rainy Lake; Fort St. Charles, on the Lake of the Woods; Fort Maurepas, at the mouth of the river Winnipeg; Fort Bourbon, on the eastern side of Lake Winnipeg; Fort La Reine, on the Assinniboin; Fort Dauphin, on Lake Manitoba. Besides these he built another post, called Fort Rouge, on the site of the city of Winnipeg; and, some time after, another, at the mouth of the River Poskoïac, or Saskatchewan, neither of which, however, was long occupied. These various forts were only stockade works flanked with block-houses; but the difficulty of building and maintaining them in this remote wilderness was incalculable. [Footnote: *Mémoire en abrégé de la Carte qui représente les Etablissements faits par le Sieur de la Vérendrye et ses Enfants* (Margry, VI. 616); *Carte des Nouvelles Découvertes dans l'Ouest du Canada dressée sur les Mémoires de Mr. de la Vérandrie et donnée au Dépôt de la Marine par M. de la Galissonnière*, 1750; Bellin, *Remarques sur la Carte de l'Amérique*, 1755; Bougainville, *Mémoire sur l'Etat de la Nouvelle France*, 1757. Most of La Vérendrye's forts were standing during the Seven Years' War, and were known collectively as *Postes de la Mer de l'Ouest*.]

He had inquired on all sides for the Pacific. The Assinniboins could tell him nothing. Nor could any information be expected from them, since their relatives and mortal enemies, the Sioux,

barred their way to the West. The Cristineaux were equally ignorant; but they supplied the place of knowledge by invention, and drew maps, some of which seem to have been made with no other intention than that of amusing themselves by imposing on the inquirer. They also declared that some of their number had gone down a river called White River, or River of the West, where they found a plant that shed drops like blood, and saw serpents of prodigious size. They said further that on the lower part of this river were walled towns, where dwelt white men who had knives, hatchets, and cloth, but no firearms. [Footnote: *Journal de la Vérendrye joint à la Lettre de M. de Beauharnois du — Oct. 1737.*]

Both Assinniboin and Cristineaux declared that there was a distant tribe on the Missouri, called Mantannes (Mandans), who knew the way to the Western Sea, and would guide him to it. Lured by this assurance, and feeling that he had sufficiently secured his position to enable him to begin his Western exploration, La Vérendrye left Fort La Reine in October, 1738, with twenty men, and pushed up the River Assinniboin till its rapids and shallows threatened his bark canoes with destruction. Then, with a band of Assinniboin Indians who had joined him, he struck across the prairie for the Mandans, his Indian companions hunting buffalo on the way. They approached the first Mandan village on the afternoon of the 3d of December, displaying a French flag and firing three volleys as a salute. The whole population poured out to see the marvellous visitors, who were

conducted through the staring crowd to the lodge of the principal chief,—a capacious structure so thronged with the naked and greasy savages that the Frenchmen were half smothered. What was worse, they lost the bag that held all their presents for the Mandans, which was snatched away in the confusion, and hidden in one of the *caches*, called cellars by La Vérendrye, of which the place was full. The chief seemed much discomposd at this mishap, and explained it by saying that there were many rascals in the village. The loss was serious, since without the presents nothing could be done. Nor was this all; for in the morning La Vérendrye missed his interpreter, and was told that he had fallen in love with an Assinniboin girl and gone off in pursuit of her. The French were now without any means of communicating with the Mandans, from whom, however, before the disappearance of the interpreter, they had already received a variety of questionable information, chiefly touching white men cased in iron who were said to live on the river below at the distance of a whole summer's journey. As they were impervious to arrows,—so the story ran,—it was necessary to shoot their horses, after which, being too heavy to run, they were easily caught. This was probably suggested by the armor of the Spaniards, who had more than once made incursions as far as the lower Missouri; but the narrators drew on their imagination for various additional particulars.

The Mandans seem to have much declined in numbers during the century that followed this visit of La Vérendrye. He says that

they had six villages on or near the Missouri, of which the one seen by him was the smallest, though he thinks that it contained a hundred and thirty houses. [Footnote: *Journal de la Vérendrye*, 1738, 1739. This journal, which is ill-written and sometimes obscure, is printed in Brymner, *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1889.] As each of these large structures held a number of families, the population must have been considerable. Yet when Prince Maximilian visited the Mandans in 1833, he found only two villages, containing jointly two hundred and forty warriors and a total population of about a thousand souls. Without having seen the statements of La Vérendrye, he speaks of the population as greatly reduced by wars and the small-pox,—a disease which a few years later nearly exterminated the tribe. [Footnote: Le Prince Maximilien de Wied-Neuwied, *Voyage dans l'Intérieur de l'Amérique du Nord*, II. 371, 372 (Paris, 1843). When Captains Lewis and Clark visited the Mandans in 1804, they found them in two villages, with about three hundred and fifty warriors. They report that, about forty years before, they lived in nine villages, the ruins of which the explorers saw about eighty miles below the two villages then occupied by the tribe. The Mandans had moved up the river in consequence of the persecutions of the Sioux and the small-pox, which had made great havoc among them. *Expedition of Lewis and Clark*, I. 129 (ed. Philadelphia, 1814). These nine villages seem to have been above Cannon-ball River, a tributary of the Missouri.]

La Vérendrye represents the six villages as surrounded with

ditches and stockades, flanked by a sort of bastion,—defences which, he says, had nothing savage in their construction. In later times the fortifications were of a much ruder kind, though Maximilian represents them as having pointed salients to serve as bastions. La Vérendrye mentions some peculiar customs of the Mandans which answer exactly to those described by more recent observers.

He had intended to winter with the tribe; but the loss of the presents and the interpreter made it useless to stay, and leaving two men in the village to learn the language, he began his return to Fort La Reine. "I was very ill," he writes, "but hoped to get better on the way. The reverse was the case, for it was the depth of winter. It would be impossible to suffer more than I did. It seemed that nothing but death could release us from such miseries." He reached Fort La Reine on the 11th of February, 1739.

His iron constitution seems to have been severely shaken; but he had sons worthy of their father. The two men left among the Mandans appeared at Fort La Reine in September. They reported that they had been well treated, and that their hosts had parted from them with regret. They also declared that at the end of spring several Indian tribes, all well supplied with horses, had come, as was their yearly custom, to the Mandan villages to barter embroidered buffalo hides and other skins for corn and beans; that they had encamped, to the number of two hundred lodges, on the farther side of the Missouri, and that among them

was a band said to have come from a distant country towards the sunset, where there were white men who lived in houses built of bricks and stones.

The two Frenchmen crossed over to the camp of these Western strangers, among whom they found a chief who spoke, or professed to speak, the language of the mysterious white men, which to the two Frenchmen was unintelligible. Fortunately, he also spoke the language of the Mandans, of which the Frenchmen had learned a little during their stay, and hence were able to gather that the white men in question had beards, and that they prayed to the Master of Life in great houses, built for the purpose, holding books, the leaves of which were like husks of Indian corn, singing together and repeating *Jésus, Marie*. The chief gave many other particulars, which seemed to show that he had been in contact with Spaniards,—probably those of California; for he described their houses as standing near the great lake, of which the water rises and falls and is not fit to drink. He invited the two Frenchmen to go with him to this strange country, saying that it could be reached before winter, though a wide circuit must be made, to avoid a fierce and dangerous tribe called Snake Indians (*Gens du Serpent*). [Footnote: *Journal du Sieur de la Vérendrye*, 1740, in Archives de la Marine.]

On hearing this story, La Vérendrye sent his eldest son, Pierre, to pursue the discovery with two men, ordering him to hire guides among the Mandans and make his way to the Western Sea. But no guides were to be found, and in the next summer the young

man returned from his bootless errand. [Footnote: *Mémoire du Sieur de la Vérendrye, joint à sa lettre du 31 Oct. 1744*]

Undaunted by this failure, Pierre set out again in the next spring, 1742, with his younger brother, the Chevalier de la Vérendrye. Accompanied only by two Canadians, they left Port La Reine on the 29th of April, and following, no doubt, the route of the Assinniboin and Mouse River, reached the chief village of the Mandans in about three weeks.

Here they found themselves the welcome guests of this singularly interesting tribe, ruined by the small-pox nearly half a century ago, but preserved to memory by the skilful pencil of the artist Charles Bodmer, and the brush of the painter George Catlin, both of whom saw them at a time when they were little changed in habits and manners since the visit of the brothers La Vérendrye. [Footnote: Prince Maximilian spent the winter of 1832-33 near the Mandan villages. His artist, with the instinct of genius, seized the characteristics of the wild life before him, and rendered them with admirable vigor and truth. Catlin spent a considerable time among the Mandans soon after the visit of Prince Maximilian, and had unusual opportunities of studying them. He was an indifferent painter, a shallow observer, and a garrulous and windy writer; yet his enthusiastic industry is beyond praise, and his pictures are invaluable as faithful reflections of aspects of Indian life which are gone forever.]

[Footnote: Beauharnois calls the Mandans *Blancs Barbus*, and says that they have been hitherto unknown. *Beauharnois au*

Ministre, 14 Août, 1739. The name Mantannes, or Mandans, is that given them by the Assinniboins.]

Thus, though the report of the two brothers is too concise and brief, we know what they saw when they entered the central area, or public square, of the village. Around stood the Mandan lodges, looking like round flattened hillocks of earth, forty or fifty feet wide. On examination they proved to be framed of strong posts and poles, covered with a thick matting of intertwined willow-branches, over which was laid a bed of well-compacted clay or earth two or three feet thick. This heavy roof was supported by strong interior posts. [Footnote: The Minnetarees and other tribes of the Missouri built their lodges in a similar way.] The open place which the dwellings enclosed served for games, dances, and the ghastly religious or magical ceremonies practised by the tribe. Among the other structures was the sacred "medicine lodge" distinguished by three or four tall poles planted before it, each surmounted by an effigy looking much like a scarecrow, and meant as an offering to the spirits.

If the two travellers had been less sparing of words, they would doubtless have told us that as they entered the village square the flattened earthen domes that surrounded it were thronged with squaws and children,—for this was always the case on occasions of public interest,—and that they were forced to undergo a merciless series of feasts in the lodges of the chiefs. Here, seated by the sunken hearth in the middle, under the large hole in the roof that served both for window and chimney, they could

study at their ease the domestic economy of their entertainers. Each lodge held a *gens*, or family connection, whose beds of raw buffalo hide, stretched on poles, were ranged around the circumference of the building, while by each stood a post on which hung shields, lances, bows, quivers, medicine-bags, and masks formed of the skin of a buffalo's head, with the horns attached, to be used in the magic buffalo dance.

Every day had its sports to relieve the monotony of savage existence, the game of the stick and the rolling ring, the archery practice of boys, horse-racing on the neighboring prairie, and incessant games of chance; while every evening, in contrast to these gayeties, the long, dismal wail of women rose from the adjacent cemetery, where the dead of the village, sewn fast in buffalo hides, lay on scaffolds above the reach of wolves.

The Mandans did not know the way to the Pacific, but they told the brothers that they expected a speedy visit from a tribe or band called Horse Indians, who could guide them thither. It is impossible to identify this people with any certainty. [Footnote: The Cheyennes have a tradition that they were the first tribe of this region to have horses. This may perhaps justify a conjecture that the northern division of this brave and warlike people were the Horse Indians of La Vérendrye; though an Indian tradition, unless backed by well-established facts, can never be accepted as substantial evidence.] The two travellers waited for them in vain till after midsummer, and then, as the season was too far advanced for longer delay, they hired two Mandans to conduct

them to their customary haunts.

They set out on horseback, their scanty baggage and their stock of presents being no doubt carried by pack-animals. Their general course was west-southwest, with the Black Hills at a distance on their left, and the upper Missouri on their right. The country was a rolling prairie, well covered for the most part with grass, and watered by small alkaline streams creeping towards the Missouri with an opaque, whitish current. Except along the watercourses, there was little or no wood. "I noticed," says the Chevalier de la Vérendrye, "earths of different colors, blue, green, red, or black, white as chalk, or yellowish like ochre." This was probably in the "bad lands" of the Little Missouri, where these colored earths form a conspicuous feature in the bare and barren bluffs, carved into fantastic shapes by the storms. [Footnote: A similar phenomenon occurs farther west on the face of the perpendicular bluffs that, in one place, border the valley of the river Rosebud.]

For twenty days the travellers saw no human being, so scanty was the population of these plains. Game, however, was abundant. Deer sprang from the tall, reedy grass of the river bottoms; buffalo tramped by in ponderous columns, or dotted the swells of the distant prairie with their grazing thousands; antelope approached, with the curiosity of their species, to gaze at the passing horsemen, then fled like the wind; and as they neared the broken uplands towards the Yellowstone, they saw troops of elk and flocks of mountain-sheep. Sometimes, for miles together,

the dry plain was studded thick with the earthen mounds that marked the burrows of the curious marmots, called prairie-dogs, from their squeaking bark. Wolves, white and gray, howled about the camp at night, and their cousin, the coyote, seated in the dusk of evening upright on the grass, with nose turned to the sky, saluted them with a complication of yelpings, as if a score of petulant voices were pouring together from the throat of one small beast.

On the 11th of August, after a march of about three weeks, the brothers reached a hill, or group of hills, apparently west of the Little Missouri, and perhaps a part of the Powder River Range. It was here that they hoped to find the Horse Indians, but nobody was to be seen. Arming themselves with patience, they built a hut, made fires to attract by the smoke any Indians roaming near, and went every day to the tops of the hills to reconnoitre. At length, on the 14th of September, they descried a spire of smoke on the distant prairie.

One of their Mandan guides had left them and gone back to his village. The other, with one of the Frenchmen, went towards the smoke, and found a camp of Indians, whom the journal calls Les Beaux Hommes, and who were probably Crows, or Apsaroka, a tribe remarkable for stature and symmetry, who long claimed that region as their own. They treated the visitors well, and sent for the other Frenchmen to come to their lodges, where they were received with great rejoicing. The remaining Mandan, however, became frightened,—for the Beaux Hommes were enemies of

his tribe,—and he soon followed his companion on his solitary march homeward.

The brothers remained twenty-one days in the camp of the Beaux Hommes, much perplexed for want of an interpreter. The tribes of the plains have in common a system of signs by which they communicate with each other, and it is likely that the brothers had learned it from the Sioux or Assinniboins, with whom they had been in familiar intercourse. By this or some other means they made their hosts understand that they wished to find the Horse Indians; and the Beaux Hommes, being soothed by presents, offered some of their young men as guides. They set out on the 9th of October, following a south-southwest course. [Footnote: *Journal du Voyage fait par le Chevalier de la Vérendrye en 1742*. The copy before me is from the original in the Depot des Cartes de la Marine. A duplicate, in the Archives des Affaires Etrangères, is printed by Margry. It gives the above date as November 9th instead of October 9th. The context shows the latter to be correct.]

In two days they met a band of Indians, called by them the Little Foxes, and on the 15th and 17th two villages of another unrecognizable horde, named Pioya. From La Vérendrye's time to our own, this name "villages" has always been given to the encampments of the wandering people of the plains. All these nomadic communities joined them, and they moved together southward, till they reached at last the lodges of the long-sought Horse Indians. They found them in the extremity of distress

and terror. Their camp resounded with howls and wailings; and not without cause, for the Snakes, or Shoshones,—a formidable people living farther westward,—had lately destroyed most of their tribe. The Snakes were the terror of that country. The brothers were told that the year before they had destroyed seventeen villages, killing the warriors and old women, and carrying off the young women and children as slaves.

None of the Horse Indians had ever seen the Pacific; but they knew a people called Gens de l'Arc, or Bow Indians, who, as they said, had traded not far from it. To the Bow Indians, therefore, the brothers resolved to go, and by dint of gifts and promises they persuaded their hosts to show them the way. After marching southwestward for several days, they saw the distant prairie covered with the pointed buffalo-skin lodges of a great Indian camp. It was that of the Bow Indians, who may have been one of the bands of the western Sioux,—the predominant race in this region. Few or none of them could ever have seen a white man, and we may imagine their amazement at the arrival of the strangers, who, followed by staring crowds, were conducted to the lodge of the chief. "Thus far," says La Vérendrye, "we had been well received in all the villages we had passed; but this was nothing compared with the courteous manners of the great chief of the Bow Indians, who, unlike the others, was not self-interested in the least, and who took excellent care of everything belonging to us."

The first inquiry of the travellers was for the Pacific; but

neither the chief nor his tribesmen knew anything of it, except what they had heard from Snake prisoners taken in war. The Frenchmen were surprised at the extent of the camp, which consisted of many separate bands. The chief explained that they had been summoned from far and near for a grand war-party against that common foe of all,—the Snakes. [Footnote: The enmity between the Sioux and the Snakes lasted to our own time. When the writer lived among the western Sioux, one of their chiefs organized a war-party against the Snakes, and numerous bands came to join the expedition from a distance in some cases of three hundred miles. Quarrels broke out among them, and the scheme was ruined.] In fact, the camp resounded with war-songs and war-dances. "Come with us," said their host; "we are going towards the mountains, where you can see the great water that you are looking for."

At length the camp broke up. The squaws took down the lodges, and the march began over prairies dreary and brown with the withering touch of autumn. The spectacle was such as men still young have seen in these Western lands, but which no man will see again. The vast plain swarmed with the moving multitude. The tribes of the Missouri and the Yellowstone had by this time abundance of horses, the best of which were used for war and hunting, and the others as beasts of burden. These last were equipped in a peculiar manner. Several of the long poles used to frame the teepees, or lodges, were secured by one end to each side of a rude saddle, while the other end trailed

on the ground. Crossbars lashed to the poles just behind the horse kept them three or four feet apart, and formed a firm support, on which was laid, compactly folded, the buffalo-skin covering of the lodge. On this, again, sat a mother with her young family, sometimes stowed for safety in a large open willow basket, with the occasional addition of some domestic pet,—such as a tame raven, a puppy, or even a small bear cub. Other horses were laden in the same manner with wooden bowls, stone hammers, and other utensils, along with stores of dried buffalo-meat packed in cases of rawhide whitened and painted. Many of the innumerable dogs—whose manners and appearance strongly suggested their relatives the wolves, to whom, however, they bore a mortal grudge—were equipped in a similar way, with shorter poles and lighter loads. Bands of naked boys, noisy and restless, roamed the prairie, practising their bows and arrows on any small animal they might find. Gay young squaws—adorned on each cheek with a spot of ochre or red clay, and arrayed in tunics of fringed buckskin embroidered with porcupine quills—were mounted on ponies, astride like men; while lean and tattered hags—the drudges of the tribe, unkempt and hideous—scolded the lagging horses, or screeched at the disorderly dogs, with voices not unlike the yell of the great horned owl. Most of the warriors were on horseback, armed with round, white shields of bull-hide, feathered lances, war-clubs, bows, and quivers filled with stone-headed arrows; while a few of the elders, wrapped in robes of buffalo-hide, stalked along in groups with a stately air, chatting,

laughing, and exchanging unseemly jokes. [Footnote: The above descriptive particulars are drawn from repeated observation of similar scenes at a time when the primitive condition of these tribes was essentially unchanged, though with the difference that the concourse of savages counted by hundreds, and not by thousands.]

"We continued our march," says La Vérendrye, "sometimes south-southwest, and now and then northwest; our numbers constantly increasing by villages of different tribes which joined us." The variations of their course were probably due to the difficulties of the country, which grew more rugged as they advanced, with broken hills, tracts of dingy green sage-bushes, and bright, swift streams, edged with cottonwood and willow, hurrying northward to join the Yellowstone. At length, on the 1st of January, 1743, they saw what was probably the Bighorn Range of the Rocky Mountains, a hundred and twenty miles east of the Yellowstone Park.

A council of all the allied bands was now called, and the Frenchmen were asked to take part in it. The questions discussed were how to dispose of the women and children, and how to attack the enemy. Having settled their plans, the chiefs begged their white friends not to abandon them; and the younger of the two, the Chevalier, consented to join the warriors, and aid them with advice, though not with arms.

The tribes of the Western plains rarely go on war-parties in winter, and this great expedition must have been the result of

unusual exasperation. The object was to surprise the Snakes in the security of their winter camp, and strike a deadly blow, which would have been impossible in summer.

On the 8th of January the whole body stopped to encamp, choosing, no doubt, after the invariable winter custom of Western Indians, a place sheltered from wind, and supplied with water and fuel. Here the squaws and children were to remain, while most of the warriors advanced against the enemy. By pegging the lower edge of the lodge-skin to the ground, and piling a ridge of stones and earth upon it to keep out the air, fastening with wooden skewers the flap of hide that covered the entrance, and keeping a constant fire, they could pass a winter endurable to Indians, though smoke, filth, vermin, bad air, the crowd, and the total absence of privacy, would make it a purgatory to any civilized white man.

The Chevalier left his brother to watch over the baggage of the party, which was stored in the lodge of the great chief, while he himself, with his two Canadians, joined the advancing warriors. They were on horseback, marching with a certain order, and sending watchmen to reconnoitre the country from the tops of the hills. [Footnote: At least this was done by a band of Sioux with whom the writer once traversed a part of the country ranged by these same Snakes, who had lately destroyed an entire Sioux village.]

Their movements were so slow that it was twelve days before they reached the foot of the mountains, which, says La

Vérendrye, "are for the most part well wooded, and seem very high." [Footnote: The Bighorn Range, below the snow line, is in the main well timbered with pine, fir, oak, and juniper.] He longed to climb their great snow-encumbered peaks, fancying that he might then see the Pacific, and never dreaming that more than eight hundred miles of mountains and forests still lay between him and his goal.

Through the whole of the present century the villages of the Snakes were at a considerable distance west of the Bighorn Range, and some of them were even on the upper waters of the Pacific slope. It is likely that they were so in 1743, in which case the war-party would not only have reached the Bighorn Mountains, but have pushed farther on to within sight of the great Wind River Range. Be this as it may, their scouts reached the chief winter camp of the Snakes, and found it abandoned, with lodges still standing, and many household possessions left behind. The enemy had discovered their approach, and fled. Instead of encouraging the allies, this news filled them with terror, for they feared that the Snake warriors might make a circuit to the rear, and fall upon the camp where they had left their women and children. The great chief spent all his eloquence in vain, nobody would listen to him; and with characteristic fickleness they gave over the enterprise, and retreated in a panic. "Our advance was made in good order; but not so our retreat," says the Chevalier's journal. "Everybody fled his own way. Our horses, though good, were very tired, and got little to eat." The

Chevalier was one day riding with his friend, the great chief, when, looking behind him, he missed his two French attendants. Hastening back in alarm, he found them far in the rear, quietly feeding their horses under the shelter of a clump of trees. He had scarcely joined them when he saw a party of fifteen hostile Indians stealthily creeping forward, covered by their bull-hide shields. He and his men let them approach, and then gave them a few shots; on which they immediately ran off, firearms being to them an astounding novelty.

The three Frenchmen now tried to rejoin the great chief and his band, but the task was not easy. The prairie, bare of snow and hard as flint, showed no trace of foot or hoof; and it was by rare good fortune that they succeeded, on the second day, not in overtaking the chief, but in reaching the camp where the women and children had been left. They found them all in safety; the Snakes had not attacked them, and the panic of the warriors was needless. It was the 9th of February. They were scarcely housed when a blizzard set in, and on the night of the 10th the plains were buried in snow. The great chief had not appeared. With such of his warriors as he could persuade to follow him, he had made a wide circuit to find the trail of the lost Frenchmen, but, to his great distress, had completely failed. It was not till five days after the arrival of the Chevalier and his men that the chief reached the camp, "more dead than alive," in the words of the journal. All his hardships were forgotten when he found his white friends safe, for he had given them up for lost. "His sorrow turned to joy,

and he could not give us attention and caresses enough."

The camp broke up, and the allied bands dispersed. The great chief and his followers moved slowly through the snowdrifts towards the east-southeast, accompanied by the Frenchmen. Thus they kept on till the 1st of March, when the two brothers, learning that they were approaching the winter village of a people called Gens de la Petite Cerise, or Choke-Cherry Indians, sent one of their men, with a guide, to visit them. The man returned in ten days, bringing a message from the Choke-Cherry Indians, inviting the Frenchmen to their lodges.

The great chief of the Bow Indians, who seems to have regarded his young friends with mingled affection, respect, and wonder, was grieved at the thought of losing them, but took comfort when they promised to visit him again, provided that he would make his abode near a certain river which they pointed out. To this he readily agreed, and then, with mutual regret, they parted. [Footnote: The only two tribes of this region who were a match for the Snakes were the Sioux and the Blackfeet. it is clear that the Bow Indians could not have been Blackfeet, as in that case, after the war-party broke up, they would have moved northward towards their own country, instead of east-southeast into the country of their enemies. Hence I incline to think the Bow Indians a band of Sioux, or Dakota,—a people then, as since, predominant in that country.] [Footnote: The banks of the Missouri, in the part which La Vérendrye would have reached in following an east-southeast course, were occupied by numerous

bands or sub-tribes of Sioux, such as the Minneconjou, Yankton, Oncompapa, Brulé, and others, friends and relatives of the Bow Indians, supposing these to have been Sioux.]

The Frenchmen repaired to the village of the Choke-Cherry Indians, who, like the Bow Indians, were probably a band of Sioux. [Footnote: The Sioux, Cheyennes, and other prairie tribes use the small astringent wild cherry for food. The squaws pound it, stones and all, and then dry it for winter use.] Hard by their lodges, which stood near the Missouri, the brothers buried a plate of lead graven with the royal arms, and raised a pile of stones in honor of the Governor of Canada. They remained at this place till April; then, mounting their horses again, followed the Missouri upward to the village of the Mandans, which they reached on the 18th of May. After spending a week here, they joined a party of Assinniboins, journeyed with them towards Fort La Reine, and reached it on the 2d of July,—to the great relief of their father, who was waiting in suspense, having heard nothing of them for more than a year.

Sixty-two years later, when the vast western regions then called Louisiana had just been ceded to the United States, Captains Lewis and Clark left the Mandan villages with thirty-two men, traced the Missouri to the mountains, penetrated the wastes beyond, and made their way to the Pacific. The first stages of that remarkable exploration were anticipated by the brothers La Vérendrye. They did not find the Pacific, but they discovered the Rocky Mountains, or at least the part of them to which

the name properly belongs; for the southern continuation of the great range had long been known to the Spaniards. Their bold adventure was achieved, not at the charge of a government, but at their own cost and that of their father,—not with a band of well-equipped men, but with only two followers.

The fur-trading privilege which was to have been their compensation had proved their ruin. They were still pursued without ceasing by the jealousy of rival traders and the ire of disappointed partners. "Here in Canada more than anywhere else," the Chevalier wrote, some years after his return, "envy is the passion *à la mode*, and there is no escaping it." [Footnote: *Le Chevalier de la Vérendrye au Ministre*, 30 Sept. 1750.] It was the story of La Salle repeated. Beauharnois, however, still stood by them, encouraged and defended them, and wrote in their favor to the colonial minister. [Footnote: *La Vérendrye père au Ministre*, 1 Nov. 1746, in Margry VI. 611.] It was doubtless through his efforts that the elder La Vérendrye was at last promoted to a captaincy in the colony troops. Beauharnois was succeeded in the government by the sagacious and able Galissonière, and he too befriended the explorers. "It seems to me," he wrote to the minister, "that what you have been told touching the Sieur de la Vérendrye, to the effect that he has been more busy with his own interests than in making discoveries, is totally false, and, moreover, that any officers employed in such work will always be compelled to give some of their attention to trade, so long as the King allows them no other means of subsistence. These

discoveries are very costly, and more fatiguing and dangerous than open war." [Footnote: *La Galissonière au Ministre, 23 Oct. 1747.*] Two years later, the elder La Vérendrye received the cross of the Order of St. Louis,—an honor much prized in Canada, but which he did not long enjoy; for he died at Montreal in the following December, when on the point of again setting out for the West.

His intrepid sons survived, and they were not idle. One of them, the Chevalier, had before discovered the river Saskatchewan, and ascended it as far as the forks. [Footnote: *Mémoire en abrégé des Établissements et Découvertes faits par le Sieur de la Vérendrye et ses Enfants.*] His intention was to follow it to the mountains, build a fort there, and thence push westward in another search for the Pacific; but a disastrous event ruined all his hopes. La Galissonière returned to France, and the Marquis de la Jonquière succeeded him, with the notorious François Bigot as intendant. Both were greedy of money,—the one to hoard, and the other to dissipate it. Clearly there was money to be got from the fur-trade of Manitoba, for La Vérendrye had made every preparation and incurred every expense. It seemed that nothing remained but to reap where he had sown. His commission to find the Pacific, with the privileges connected with it, was refused to his sons, and conferred on a stranger. La Jonquière wrote to the minister: "I have charged M. de Saint-Pierre with this business. He knows these countries better than any officer in all the colony." [Footnote: *La Jonquière au Ministre, 27 Fev. 1750.*]

On the contrary, he had never seen them. It is difficult not to believe that La Jonquière, Bigot, and Saint-Pierre were partners in a speculation of which all three were to share the profits.

The elder La Vérendrye, not long before his death, had sent a large quantity of goods to his trading-forts. The brothers begged leave to return thither and save their property from destruction. They declared themselves happy to serve under the orders of Saint-Pierre, and asked for the use of only a single fort of all those which their father had built at his own cost. The answer was a flat refusal. In short, they were shamefully robbed. The Chevalier writes: "M. le Marquis de la Jonquière, being pushed hard, and as I thought even touched, by my representations, told me at last that M. de Saint-Pierre wanted nothing to do with me or my brothers." "I am a ruined man," he continues. "I am more than two thousand livres in debt, and am still only a second ensign. My elder brother's grade is no better than mine. My younger brother is only a cadet. This is the fruit of all that my father, my brothers, and I have done. My other brother, whom the Sioux murdered some years ago, was not the most unfortunate among us. We must lose all that has cost us so much, unless M. de Saint-Pierre should take juster views, and prevail on the Marquis de la Jonquière to share them. To be thus shut out from the West is to be most cruelly robbed of a sort of inheritance which we had all the pains of acquiring, and of which others will get all the profit." [Footnote: *Le Chevalier de la Vérendrye au Ministre*, 30 Sept. 1750.]

His elder brother writes in a similar strain: "We spent our youth and our property in building up establishments so advantageous to Canada; and after all, we were doomed to see a stranger gather the fruit we had taken such pains to plant." And he complains that their goods left in the trading-posts were wasted, their provisions consumed, and the men in their pay used to do the work of others. [Footnote: *Mémoire des Services de Pierre Gautier de la Vérendrye l'ainé, présenté à Mg'r. Rouille, ministre et secrétaire d'Etat.*]

They got no redress. Saint-Pierre, backed by the Governor and the Intendant, remained master of the position. The brothers sold a small piece of land, their last remaining property, to appease their most pressing creditors. [Footnote: Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, in spite of his treatment of the La Vérendrye brothers, had merit as an officer. It was he who received Washington at Fort Le Buf in 1754. He was killed in 1755, at the battle of Lake George. See *Montcalm and Wolfe*, I. 303.]

Saint-Pierre set out for Manitoba on the 5th of June, 1750. Though he had lived more or less in the woods for thirty-six years, and though La Jonquière had told the minister that he knew the countries to which he was bound better than anybody else, it is clear from his own journal that he was now visiting them for the first time. They did not please him. "I was told," he says, "that the way would grow harder and more dangerous as we advanced, and I found, in fact, that one must risk life and property every moment." Finding himself and his men likely to

starve, he sent some of them, under an ensign named Niverville, to the Saskatchewan. They could not reach it, and nearly perished on the way. "I myself was no more fortunate," says Saint-Pierre. "Food was so scarce that I sent some of my people into the woods among the Indians,—which did not save me from a fast so rigorous that it deranged my health and put it out of my power to do anything towards accomplishing my mission. Even if I had had strength enough, the war that broke out among the Indians would have made it impossible to proceed."

Niverville, after a winter of misery, tried to fulfil an order which he had received from his commander. When the Indians guided the two brothers La Vérendrye to the Rocky Mountains, the course they took tended so far southward that the Chevalier greatly feared it might lead to Spanish settlements; and he gave it as his opinion that the next attempt to find the Pacific should be made farther towards the north. Saint-Pierre had agreed with him, and had directed Niverville to build a fort on the Saskatchewan, three hundred leagues above its mouth. Therefore, at the end of May, 1751, Niverville sent ten men in two canoes on this errand, and they ascended the Saskatchewan to what Saint-Pierre calls the "Rock Mountain." Here they built a small stockade fort and called it Fort La Jonquière. Niverville was to have followed them; but he fell ill, and lay helpless at the mouth of the river in such a condition that he could not even write to his commander.

Saint-Pierre set out in person from Fort La Reine for Fort La

Jonquière, over ice and snow, for it was late in November. Two Frenchmen from Niverville met him on the way, and reported that the Assinniboins had slaughtered an entire band of friendly Indians on whom Saint-Pierre had relied to guide him. On hearing this he gave up the enterprise, and returned to Fort La Reine. Here the Indians told him idle stories about white men and a fort in some remote place towards the west; but, he observes, "nobody could reach it without encountering an infinity of tribes more savage than it is possible to imagine."

He spent most of the winter at Fort La Reine. Here, towards the end of February, 1752, he had with him only five men, having sent out the rest in search of food. Suddenly, as he sat in his chamber, he saw the fort full of armed Assinniboins, extremely noisy and insolent. He tried in vain to quiet them, and they presently broke into the guard-house and seized the arms. A massacre would have followed, had not Saint-Pierre, who was far from wanting courage, resorted to an expedient which has more than once proved effective on such occasions. He knocked out the heads of two barrels of gunpowder, snatched a firebrand, and told the yelping crowd that he would blow up them and himself together. At this they all rushed in fright out of the gate, while Saint-Pierre ran after them, and bolted it fast. There was great anxiety for the hunters, but they all came back in the evening, without having met the enemy. The men, however, were so terrified by the adventure that Saint-Pierre was compelled to abandon the fort, after recommending it to the care of another

band of Assinniboin, who had professed great friendship. Four days after he was gone they burned it to the ground.

He soon came to the conclusion that farther discovery was impossible, because the English of Hudson Bay had stirred up the Western tribes to oppose it. Therefore he set out for the settlements, and, reaching Quebec in the autumn of 1753, placed the journal of his futile enterprise in the hands of Duquesne, the new governor. [Footnote: *Journal sommaire du Voyage de Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, chargé de la Découverte de la Mer de l'Ouest* (British Museum).]

Canada was approaching her last agony. In the death-struggle of the Seven Years' War there was no time for schemes of Western discovery. The brothers La Vérendrye sank into poverty and neglect. A little before the war broke out, we find the eldest at the obscure Acadian post of Beauséjour, where he wrote to the colonial minister a statement of his services, which appears to have received no attention. After the fall of Canada, the Chevalier de la Vérendrye, he whose eyes first beheld the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains, perished in the wreck of the ship "Auguste," on the coast of Cape Breton, in November, 1761.

[Footnote: The above narrative rests mainly on contemporary documents, official in character, of which the originals are preserved in the archives of the French Government. These papers have recently been printed by M. Pierre Margry, late custodian of the Archives of the Marine and Colonies at Paris, in the sixth volume of his *Découvertes et Établissements*

des Français dans l'Amérique Septentrionale,—a documentary collection of great value, published at the expense of the American Government. It was M. Margry who first drew attention to the achievements of the family of La Vérendrye, by an article in the *Moniteur* in 1852. I owe to his kindness the opportunity of using the above-mentioned documents in advance of publication. I obtained copies from duplicate originals of some of the principal among them from the Dépôt des Cartes de la Marine, in 1872. These answer closely, with rare and trivial variations, to the same documents as printed from other sources by M. Margry. Some additional papers preserved in the Archives of the Marine and Colonies have also been used.]

[Footnote: My friends, Hon. William C. Endicott, then Secretary of War, and Captain John G. Bourke, Third Cavalry, U. S. A., kindly placed in my hands a valuable collection of Government maps and surveys of the country between the Missouri and the Rocky Mountains visited by the brothers La Vérendrye; and I have received from Captain Bourke, and also from Mr. E. A. Snow, formerly of the Third Cavalry, much information concerning the same region, repeatedly traversed by them in peace and war.]

CHAPTER XVII

1700-1750

THE CHAIN OF POSTS

OPPOSING CLAIMS.—ATTITUDE OF THE RIVAL NATIONS.—AMERICA A FRENCH CONTINENT—ENGLAND A USURPER.—FRENCH DEMANDS.—MAGNANIMOUS PROPOSALS.—WARLIKE PREPARATION.—NIAGARA.—OSWEGO.—CROWN POINT.—THE PASSES OF THE WEST SECURED.

We have seen that the contest between France and England in America divided itself, after the Peace of Utrecht, into three parts,—the Acadian contest; the contest for northern New England; and last, though greatest, the contest for the West. Nothing is more striking than the difference, or rather contrast, in the conduct and methods of the rival claimants to this wild but magnificent domain. Each was strong in its own qualities, and utterly wanting in the qualities that marked its opponent.

On maps of British America in the earlier part of the

eighteenth century, one sees the eastern shore, from Maine to Georgia, garnished with ten or twelve colored patches, very different in shape and size, and defined, more or less distinctly, by dividing lines which, in some cases, are prolonged westward till they touch the Mississippi, or even cross it and stretch indefinitely towards the Pacific. These patches are the British provinces, and the westward prolongation of their boundary lines represents their several claims to vast interior tracts, founded on ancient grants, but not made good by occupation, or vindicated by any exertion of power.

These English communities took little thought of the region beyond the Alleghanies. Each lived a life of its own, shut within its own limits, not dreaming of a future collective greatness to which the possession of the West would be a necessary condition. No conscious community of aims and interests held them together, nor was there any authority capable of uniting their forces and turning them to a common object. Some of the servants of the Crown had urged the necessity of joining them all under a strong central government, as the only means of making them loyal subjects and arresting the encroachments of France; but the scheme was plainly impracticable. Each province remained in jealous isolation, busied with its own work, growing in strength, in the capacity of self-rule and the spirit of independence, and stubbornly resisting all exercise of authority from without. If the English-speaking populations flowed westward, it was in obedience to natural laws, for the King

did not aid the movement, the royal governors had no authority to do so, and the colonial assemblies were too much engrossed with immediate local interests. The power of these colonies was that of a rising flood slowly invading and conquering, by the unconscious force of its own growing volume, unless means be found to hold it back by dams and embankments within appointed limits.

In the French colonies all was different. Here the representatives of the Crown were men bred in an atmosphere of broad ambition and masterful and far-reaching enterprise. Achievement was demanded of them. They recognized the greatness of the prize, studied the strong and weak points of their rivals, and with a cautious forecast and a daring energy set themselves to the task of defeating them.

If the English colonies were comparatively strong in numbers, their numbers could not be brought into action; while if the French forces were small, they were vigorously commanded, and always ready at a word. It was union confronting division, energy confronting apathy, military centralization opposed to industrial democracy; and, for a time, the advantage was all on one side.

The demands of the French were sufficiently comprehensive. They repented of their enforced concessions at the Treaty of Utrecht, and in spite of that compact, maintained that, with a few local and trivial exceptions, the whole North American continent, except Mexico, was theirs of right; while their opponents seemed neither to understand the situation, nor see the greatness of the

stakes at issue.

In 1720 Father Bobé, priest of the Congregation of Missions, drew up a paper in which he sets forth the claims of France with much distinctness, beginning with the declaration that "England has usurped from France nearly everything that she possesses in America," and adding that the plenipotentiaries at Utrecht did not know what they were about when they made such concessions to the enemy; that, among other blunders, they gave Port Royal to England when it belonged to France, who should "insist vigorously" on its being given back to her.

He maintains that the voyages of Verrazzano and Ribaut made France owner of the whole continent, from Florida northward; that England was an interloper in planting colonies along the Atlantic coast, and will admit as much if she is honest, since all that country is certainly a part of New France. In this modest assumption of the point at issue, he ignores John Cabot and his son Sebastian, who discovered North America more than twenty-five years before the voyage of Verrazzano, and more than sixty years before that of Ribaut.

When the English, proceeds Father Bobé, have restored Port Royal to us, which they are bound to do, though we ceded it by the treaty, a French governor should be at once set over it, with a commission to command as far as Cape Cod, which would include Boston. We should also fortify ourselves, "in a way to stop the English, who have long tried to seize on French America, of which they know the importance, and of which,"

he observes with much candor, "they would make a better use than the French do...The Atlantic coast, as far as Florida, was usurped from the French, to whom it belonged then, and to whom it belongs now." [Footnote: "De maniere qu'on puisse arreter les Anglois, qui depuis longtems tachent de s'emparer de l'Amerique françoise, dont ils conoissent l'importance et dont ils feroient un meilleur usage que celui qui les françois en font."] England, as he thinks, is bound in honor to give back these countries to their true owner; and it is also the part of wisdom to do so, since by grasping at too much, one often loses all. But France, out of her love of peace, will cede to England the countries along the Atlantic, from the Kennebec in New France to the Jordan [Footnote: On the river Jordan, so named by Vasquez de Ayllon, see *Pioneers of France in the New World*, pp. 11, 39 (revised edition) *note*. It was probably the Broad River of South Carolina.] in Carolina, on condition that England will restore to her all that she gave up by the Treaty of Utrecht. When this is done, France, always generous, will consent to accept as boundary a line drawn from the mouth of the Kennebec, passing thence midway between Schenectady and Lake Champlain and along the ridge of the Alleghanies to the river Jordan, the country between this line and the sea to belong to England, and the rest of the continent to France.

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