Part One

DISCOVERY AND CONQUEST TO INDEPENDENCE

CHAPTER I

THE LAND

THE NEW WORLD or Western Hemisphere comprises two continents, which curve round more than one-third of the globe, stretching in the main from north to south.[1] The greater part of the northern continent is occupied by two great powers. One of them, the Canadian Federation, a monarchy in constitutional form, covers the northern part of the continent: the other, a republic, the United States, occupies the middle part.

But on crossing the southern frontier of the United States into the Spanish-speaking Republic of Mexico one steps into a totally different world, which is only in part of European complexion. Speech, ancestry, physical appearance, law, customs, diet, government, family life: all these are different. For to the south and south-east of the United States stretch the twenty republics, mainly Iberian in origin, which constitute Latin America. These lands cover an area which is about twice the size of Europe or three times the size of the United States. Their population is probably about one hundred millions. They stretch through almost ninety degrees of latitude or nearly one-fourth part of the circuit of the globe. Thus Latin America, extending through every habitable latitude from the north temperate zone through the tropics to Antarctic seas, possesses every climate and every variety of soil, and accordingly yields, or can be made to yield, all the vegetable and animal products of the whole world. Moreover, most of the republics also severally contain territory of every habitable altitude, so that a man can change his climate from torrid to temperate and thence to frigid simply by walking uphill; and equatorial lands can produce within the range of a few miles all the products of every zone. Most of the republics also furnish an abundance and variety

[1] It should be noted, however, that South America does not lie due south of North America, but far to the east. The longitude of Valparaiso, on the Pacific coast, is east of the longitude of New York on the Atlantic; and Brazil is the nearest American country to the Old World.

of mineral products. To these striking natural features there corresponds a not less striking history. The whole of Hispanic history not only has the imposing secular movement of an epic tale, but also constantly arrests attention by a recurrent element of surprise, of unexpectedness, of sudden crisis or impulse. And this element prevails no less in the New World. The doings of Spaniards and Portuguese beyond the Atlantic—activities which move upon an unaccustomed stage with a bizarre background of indigenous culture or barbarism—resemble nothing done elsewhere. The early phase is like an imaginative romance: much of the later phase too often resembles a lurid melodrama.

Before tracing the history of these lands, it should be briefly told what they are to-day and where their territories lie. Three of them are island countries of the Caribbean Sea. The Republic of Cuba, first of the three, is the largest of the Antilles: the two little Republics of Santo Domingo and Haiti divide between them the next largest: the rich tropical fertility of these West Indian isles has been a proverb for centuries. On the mainland to the west of these islands the vast territory of Mexico and the five republics which constitute the region known as Central America may be regarded as a single region forming a sub-continent, a narrowed continuation of North America sweeping down from the temperate zone into the tropics and looking out to east and west upon Europe and upon Asia across both oceans, Atlantic and Pacific. Through this region a broad and lofty mountain-mass curves from north-west to south-east, so that the products of every climate can flourish at different heights in the same latitude; the torrid coastal strips, typically tropical in character, bordering the shores of both oceans; the beautiful, wholesome and productive country of long upland valleys and level spaces between the mountains; and finally, towering above these, the chilly inhospitable region of the great heights. The long sweep of the country south-eastward through the tropics also provides a wide range of character, from the cattle-rearing plains of northern Mexico to the coffee and banana plantations of Costa Rica.

The small recently created Republic of Panamá completes this northern system of Latin-American countries. Thus, before coming

to South America, we count ten republics, three in the Antilles, seven on the mainland.

The other ten republics lie within the continent of South America. That continent, notwithstanding diversity in local detail, possesses certain outstanding features which have determined its history—the immense chain of the Andes; the colossal water-system of the three rivers, Orinoco, Amazon, La Plata; the vast forest of the Amazonian valley measuring 2000 miles from east to west and extending southwards through the basin of the River Paraguay; the wide-stretching plains of the Pampa; and the great Brazilian plateau.

The dominating element is the great backbone, the Cordillera of the Andes, which stretches from the islands of Tierra del Fuego, washed by Antarctic storms, for 4000 miles along the Pacific coast to the northern peninsulas of the Spanish Main and thence throws out a great eastward curve south of the Caribbean Sea. This continuous mountain wall, clinging closely to the Pacific, determines the whole character of the continent: it feeds with rains and snows the multitudinous upper waters of the Orinoco, the Amazon and the western tributaries of the River Plate. On the other hand the western Cordillera opposes to the Pacific, in the southern tropics, a bare dry wall of rock and yellow sand: the rainless desert stretches, a ribbon-like strip, for 1000 miles between the mountains and the sea, producing, by its very barrenness, food for fertility in other lands in the form of guano and nitrate. Far to the south, in the "roaring forties", these conditions are reversed: here moisture-laden winds blow from the Pacific, feeding the dense forests of southern Chile. In these same southern latitudes, to the east of the Andes, the terraced plains of Patagonia, thinly nourished by slight rainfall, feed on their vast extent many millions of sheep. Between these zones of climatic extremes, in the thirties of south latitude, more normal conditions prevail: on one side of the Andes are the rich valleys of central Chile, on the other side the wide plains of the Argentine Pampa, formerly given over to the gaucho (the Argentine cowboy) and to innumerable herds of cattle, now one of the great granaries of the world.

South America, alone of the southern continents, thrusts itself

far through the cool regions of the temperate zone. Sydney, Capetown, Buenos Aires and Montevideo lie approximately in the same latitude, about 34° or 35° south. But some of the best parts of Chile and of Argentina stretch far to the south of this latitude.

Yet much the greater part of South America lies within the tropics: it is the most tropical of the continents, and it may seem strange that the first European settlers beyond the seas made their homes—permanent and prosperous homes—in the tropics. This is partly due to the prevalence of the north-east trade winds, partly to the search for a way to the Spice Islands, partly to the accidents of discovery and the finding of mineral wealth. But the lasting prosperity of those tropical homes during three centuries untouched by hygiene is due to the fact that the coasts and uplands of tropical America are in great part habitable in comfort and health by white men. The traveller who has sailed along the east or west coast of tropical Africa finds a contrast on crossing the Atlantic. Along the Brazilian coast he finds a succession of busy ports inhabited largely by Europeans living the normal life of Europe: the sea winds bring coolness and health, and almost everywhere the worker in the ports may make his home upon neighbouring hills. On the west coast tropical conditions south of the Equator are even more striking. Here a soft south wind blows continually from cooler airs, and the Antarctic current flowing northwards refreshes all the coast. At Lima, twelve degrees from the Equator, one may wear European dress at midsummer, and, descending a few miles to the shore, may plunge into a sea almost too cold. Moreover, in these regions the Andine valleys offer every climate, and a short journey from the coast leads one to uplands resembling southern Europe. The broad plateau of Bolivia, though tropical in situation, is a temperate land, lying as it does at a height varying from 9000 to 12,000 ft. or even more. This plateau narrows northwards through Peru and finally contracts into the Ecuadorian 'avenue of volcanoes'. Here, in the central torrid zone, a double line of towering peaks shoot their fires far above plains and slopes of perpetual snow. Thence the Cordillera opens out northwards into the broad triple range of Colombia which encloses wide river valleys of rich fertility and upland savannahs which enjoy perpetual spring.

The great rivers of South America supply natural paths to the vast interior. Upon the Amazon system, Manaos, one of the great ports of Brazil, is 900 miles from the sea: Iquitos, 2300 miles from salt water, is accessible to the smaller class of ocean steamers. Upon the Paraná, 1000 miles from the ocean, stands the port of Asunción, capital of Paraguay, accessible to ocean ships of shallow draught and to large river steamers: stern-wheel steamers can ascend the Paraguay River 1000 miles farther to the remote Brazilian port of Cuyabá. The navigation of both these river systems, the Amazon and the Paraná, is limited or rather interrupted by the Brazilian plateau, 'one of the great uplands of the world, occupying as it does an area of close on a million square miles'[1] at a height varying from 2000 to 3000 ft.

From the north-east shoulder of the Brazilian coast this varied plateau, seamed by many clefts, stretches southward and south-westward in a vast semicircular sweep, dividing the two river-systems. The Paraná and its affluents plunge from the brink of this table-land towards south and west in stupendous waterfalls. The southern tributaries of the Amazon pierce their way northward down into the Amazonian valley along defiles, cataracts and rapids sometimes extending scores of miles. The Amazonian affluents are mostly navigable to the foot of these cascades: above the cascades there are reaches of navigable water leading up-stream towards the south. This Brazilian plateau further justifies the description of America as a habitable continent, providing as it does in tropical and sub-tropical latitudes an extensive temperate region suitable for white settlement.

The situation and character of the republics named in this summary will appear in the following chapters.

One point demands explanation. The title 'Central America' is not a descriptive geographical term, for that region is not central in the accepted sense of the word, as in 'Central Asia' or 'Central Europe'. 'Central America' is a political designation adopted upon separation from Mexico in 1823 and does not include Panamá, which until 1903 was part of Colombia. On Spanish eighteenth-century maps the Captaincy-General of Guatemala (the

[1] E. W. Shanahan, *South America*, p. 110.

region now known as Central America) rightly appears as part of North America. Despite appearances on the map, there is no passage by land from North America to South America. The two continents are separated by an impassable region of jungle and swamp which forms the real frontier between the Republics of Panamá and Colombia. Even Tschiffely in his famous ride did that bit by sea.

NOTE. This chapter is not meant to be a geographical exposition, but merely an indication of prominent natural features affecting human habitation. The geography of those lands may be studied in E. W. Shanahan's *South America* (London, 1927) and in Stanford's *Compendium of Geography: Central and South America*, 2 vols. 2nd edit. (London, 1909–11). Rippy has a good chapter on 'The Physical Environment'.

CHAPTER II

DISCOVERY

UP to the end of the fifteenth century these lands were unknown to Europe. The story of their discovery opens with a strange adventure. In 1476 a French corsair set fire to a Genoese ship off the Portuguese coast. Among the Genoese who escaped ashore was a young sailor or trader named Christopher Columbus (Christoforo Colombo), a man of scanty education and humble origin, but possessing energy, intelligence and patient self-confidence. This accident led him to settle in Lisbon, where he was caught up into the movement of oceanic discovery which for sixty years past had flowed from Portugal, the country best situated for such a movement and freed for external effort by the conclusion long ago of strife against the Moslem. Year by year the Portuguese were pushing their way along the west coast of Africa to the south. Towards the west they had occupied the distant Azores and had essayed yet more remote Atlantic discoveries. Columbus became convinced that he himself could succeed in leading an expedition to lands beyond the western ocean. In 1483, having petitioned King John II of Portugal in vain for ships, he departed to pursue his quest in Spain.

After eight years of solicitation and repeated disappointments, Columbus at last obtained from Queen Isabel of Castile the grant of all his demands: the office of Viceroy for himself and his heirs in all lands discovered and won by him, with the title of Admiral and large prerogatives and emoluments. Columbus had two objects in view: he hoped by sailing westward to reach civilized and opulent countries of eastern Asia, but he also expected to discover unknown lands. Colonization—the provision of homes oversea for emigrant Spanish families—was not the intention. The objects were to win the profitable trade with rich civilized countries in spices and other oriental commodities and to acquire lands where the discoverer might reign as Viceroy over newly won vassals of the Castilian

Crown and neophytes of the Catholic Church. In modern terms, the objects were commercial, missionary and imperial. But obviously these matters could not be clearly defined until the issue should be known.

On 26 August 1492 three small vessels, manned by about 120 Spaniards, set sail from the port of Palos, in south-west Spain, on a voyage which was to turn the first page of modern history. The little fleet touched at the Canary Isles, and sailed thence westward on 6 September.

For thirty-three days—five weeks of hope and suspense—no land appeared. But at dawn of Friday, 12 October, they anchored off the coast of an unknown island, one of the Bahamas. Columbus rowed ashore; and there displaying the royal banner, while the naked and beardless islanders gathered round, he claimed for Ferdinand and Isabel, the sovereigns of Spain, possession of that land, an island of marvellous woods, climate and foliage. 12 October 1492, the birthday of Latin America, is annually commemorated in every capital of Spanish speech by the Fiesta de la Raza, the festival of the Hispanic race.

Sailing southwards from the Bahamas, Columbus coasted for 300 miles along the northern shore of Cuba, seeking for 'a king and great cities'. He found only naked dwellers in huts: but, persuading himself that these were Asiatic shores, he called the people 'Indians', a name which has stuck; and the transatlantic dependencies of the Spanish crown were thenceforth known as *Las Indias*, 'The Indies'. Sailing thence eastward, he discovered the beautiful and fertile island of Haiti, which he named La (Isla) Española—a name corrupted on English lips into 'Hispaniola'. He found the docile inhabitants friendly, and collected specimens of gold. Having lost his flagship, he left thirty-nine men in a rude fort when he sailed for home in January 1493, bringing news of 'the great victory which Our Lord has given me...not only for Spain; all Christians shall find here refreshment and gain'.

In order to obviate possible Portuguese claims, the Spanish sovereigns now obtained Papal authority for western conquest, with the proviso that the inhabitants should be brought to the Catholic faith. To remove ambiguities in the Papal Bulls—for