

prosperity. Agriculture was to come in due course, but for long it could be barely self-supporting. Meantime the sole exports from the unexplored Indian country were its peltries. There are no more exciting or pathetic stories of adventure than those of the exploring missionaries of the French occupation. La Salle, after a hundred years, re-discovered the Mississippi. Joliet and Marquette had traced the chain of the Great Lakes, and Father Hennepin had been the first European to hear the roar of Niagara. La Salle confidently believed that the Mississippi would lead him to the Californian Gulf, whence he could sail to China, which shows how little these daring pioneers knew of the adventures they courted. There were two conflicting influences ever at work, and it is hard to say which of the two inspired the more indomitable resolution. The Church had asserted its supremacy over the State both at Quebec and Montreal. The priests had Louis XIV., Madame de Maintenon, and the zealous rivalry of contending orders behind them. Like modern French missionaries in China, they went to America—or at least the rank and file—with a single-minded longing for the conversion of the heathen. It is true they were content with faint signs of Christianity; but for themselves they were vowed to self-sacrifice, and rather ambitious than otherwise of the crown of martyrdom. Not a few expired in cruel tortures, chanting with their last breath the litanies of their Church, and praying like their Saviour for the forgiveness of their tormentors. Yet it must be remembered that all those Catholic missions were supported by the profits of the fur trade.

The convents and their generals, with the governors of the State, were active promoters of fur companies. On the other hand were the secular adventurers, pure and simple, of whom La Salle was the least selfish and the most ambitious. Perhaps we may compare him to Cecil Rhodes, for he chiefly valued wealth as the stepping-stone to power or fame. But the missionaries and statesmanlike heroes alike paved the way for the trafficking explorers, as bold as themselves, who trode emulously in their footsteps. The governors, who looked to the furs to fill their coffers, and who were in a manner responsible for the lives of those adventurous men, began to establish fortified posts on the lakes for their protection and for the due regulation of the trafficking. The commandants had a difficult and dangerous task. For when the whites and the half-breeds met the savage Indians, bringing canoe-loads of peltries from distant regions, among the first articles of barter were spirits powder, and knives. The carousal beginning in good-fellowship was apt to end in bloodshed, and so there were endless vendettas beyond the frontier, which were forever renewing the eternal strife.

The trade was virtually a close monopoly. The licences were to be obtained from the governor, and they were granted on his own terms, either for hard cash or from political considerations. At first they were given only to traders who personally conducted the expeditions, afterwards they came to be sold to the middlemen, who retailed them at an enhanced price. But the result was that all the manhood and spirit of the colony either hired themselves to the capitalists or went adventuring on their own account. Agriculture