

on foot to Quito, where he dictated his report to the Emperor, a masterpiece of understatement and brevity. Meanwhile, far to the south, Almagro's reconnaissance of Chile had been followed up by Pedro de Valdivia, who founded the city of Santiago in 1541. Valdivia's conquest was unusual in two respects. As a result of Francisco Pizarro's death he found himself without a master and became one of the few elected governors in the Indies by the choice of the householders of Santiago, much as Cortés had been 'elected' at Vera Cruz. Finding no gold and no elaborate Indian culture, he succeeded in establishing a modest but soundly based Spanish farming community in one of the loveliest and most fertile valleys in the world.

Manca Inca, in his mountain exile, might well have reflected on the ironical fate which befell the conquerors of his people—little bands of armed marauders seeking one another out and fighting to the death among great mountains, with an empire at their feet awaiting an organising hand. The disorders which confused and delayed the Spanish settlement of Peru were due almost entirely to Spanish quarrels. As far as the Inca government was concerned, the conquest was achieved by 1535. The span of a single generation sufficed for the defeat of all the principal settled societies of the Americas. The dramatic and extraordinarily rapid success of these Spanish campaigns calls for explanation. Some Amerindian societies, at least, were familiar with organised, large-scale war. Some of them—the Aztecs in particular—made a cult of it. They had specialised war-chiefs, clans or Orders of professed warriors, and a well-organised system of territorial levy whereby large numbers of armed men could be assembled under their local chiefs at comparatively short notice. They had systems of runners by means of which messages could be conveyed over long distances by least as rapidly as in contemporary Europe. Their weapons were primitive by European standards, but formidable nevertheless. The Mexican *macuahuitl*, a battle-axe made of a stout staff with obsidian blades, could cut off a horse's head. For throwing missiles they had slings, spear-throwers and in some places long-bows. Their body armour, made of quilted cotton, was light, and effective against arrows, some Spaniards, in the tropical heat, abandoned their own armour, some leather and steel and took to wearing native armour instead. Their tactical conventions were comparatively simple, and their habit of fighting in dense masses in the open made them vulnerable to firearms; but they learned quickly, and sometimes showed considerable

adaptability in making use of cover, in preparing ambushes and stratagems and in selecting positions on rough ground where cavalry could not manoeuvre.

The Spanish preparations for the American campaigns, in a period when warfare both at sea and on land was developing and changing rapidly, had a haphazard and curiously old-fashioned quality, recalling the earlier crusades or the romances of late medieval chivalry. The ships employed were not fighting vessels but small coasters bought or hired for use as transports. This did not matter, since there was no resistance by sea and little on the coasts. The fighting forces were not organised armies in the European sense, but motley groups of adventurers, each arming himself as best he could, or attaching himself to a leader who would provide him with arms. There were men among them, professional or semi-professional soldiers, who had served with the Great Captain; there were also blacksmiths, bakers, silversmiths, carpenters; men who lived by their wits; men of no occupation at all, whose only experience of fighting had been gained in pot-house brawls. Men who had been implicated in civil commotions, such as the revolt of the *comuneros*, sometimes took themselves off in haste to the Indies. So did those who had cause to fear the Inquisition; Jews, *moriscos*, *conversos*, were early among the ranks of the settlers in America. They all came, however, from a harsh country and were accustomed to a hard and frugal life; they made extremely formidable fighting material. The leaders were mostly poor gentlemen, bred to arms as was the custom of the time, but not professional soldiers; a few were cut-throats of undiscoverable origin. Both discipline and tactics were informal, largely improvised; this was just as well, since the *conquistadores* found themselves in novel situations which no drill-book could have foreseen. The arms and equipment were as heterogeneous as the men; they included few weapons which in Europe would have been considered modern, and certainly did not, in themselves, confer an overwhelming superiority upon the Spanish forces. The possession of fire-arms was naturally an important, but probably not a decisive factor. A ship carries its armament wherever it goes, but on land cannon had to be dragged over mountains and through swamps by human strength. The army with which Cortés invaded Mexico had a few cannon, taken out of the ships at Vera Cruz and carried along with the army. They were hauled first by sailors, then by Indian auxiliaries, and finally mounted in boats for the siege of Tenochtitlán. They must have been

small and not very effective pieces, though no doubt their noise and smoke made a great impression. Apart from the cannon, Cortés had thirteen muskets. Horses were more important than fire-arms. The *conquistadores* owed much to the experience gained through centuries of crusading of transporting horses by sea. Bernal Díaz on several occasions attributed victory 'under God, to the horses'; but Cortés had only sixteen horses when he landed, and some of these were soon killed in battle. Most of his men fought on foot with sword, pike and crossbow. They had the advantage of steel over stone, but they were not a well-equipped European army fighting a horde of helpless savages.

The opposition, of course, was not united; the invaders were usually able to form alliances and encourage one Indian tribe to take arms against another. The small numbers of the Spanish forces proved in some situations to be an advantage. In a region where there were no carts or beasts of burden and all supplies had to be carried on the backs of porters the large Indian armies could only keep the field for short periods. When they had eaten the food they carried with them they had to return home. The Spaniards could move much more swiftly and live off the country as they went. This was the main reason for the defeat of Manco Inca. It was also the reason why Cortés' army, in the first disastrous flight from Tenochtitlán, was not long pursued, and after a few days' hurried march was able to re-form in friendly territory. The docility of the mass of the Indian population, and the thoroughness with which it was organised for communal labour, was of great service to the Spaniards. Without Indian labour Cortés could not have built his *bergantines*, nor have pulled down the buildings of Tenochtitlán. Without the roads, which the Incas had built with tributary labour, the Spaniards could not have moved, horse and foot, about the high Andes, and might never have reached Cuzco.

Moral factors counted for much. The Spaniards were able to exploit some of the legends and beliefs of their adversaries in such a way as to paralyse opposition, at least temporarily. They themselves never doubted that they were fighting mortal men; but to the Indians, horses and guns could be represented, while they were still new and unfamiliar, as trappings of divinity. In Mexico the conventional formalism of the Aztecs in war, and their preoccupation with capturing prisoners for sacrifice, put them at a disadvantage in fighting tough and desperate men who took no prisoners. Finally, the Spaniards had the advantage

of their truculent missionary faith. The feeling of 'bringing light to those who were in darkness' was general even among the humbler soldiers, and helps to explain their conviction that, however unsanctified their own lives might be, the Saints fought on their side. This is not to suggest an unsophisticated credulity. The stories of the actual appearance of St James in battle were invented by chroniclers, not by *conquistadores*; Bernal Díaz treats these 'miracles' with ironic contempt. Nevertheless, the *conquistadores* prayed to St Peter and St James before their battles, and the feeling of divine support was strong among them. In the Old World this, though a stimulus to aggression, had not been a military advantage, because the enemy, usually Muslim, also possessed an optimistic faith, whose attitudes towards war, victory and death were similarly encouraging. Amerindian religion, by contrast, was profoundly pessimistic, the sad, acquiescent faith of the last great Stone Age culture. The Indian believed that his religion required him to fight and, if need be, to die bravely. The Spaniard believed that his religion enabled him to win.

Some of them did win. The exploits of Pizarro, Cortés and their like attracted the attention of their contemporaries and of historians because of their conspicuous success. In the settled and populous areas where these commanders operated no other outcome was possible. Significantly, the only lasting military defeats suffered by Spaniards were inflicted by wild people living a scattered life in wild country. The Araucanians of southern Chile, the Chichimecas of northern Mexico, the Caribs of the lesser Antilles, having no great temples or capital cities, were less vulnerable, more mobile, more dangerous. Spanish armies, moreover, could be defeated not only by wild men but by the wilderness itself. It should be remembered that by far the greatest part of the Americas at that time was neither populous nor productive. Immense areas were traversed by Spanish explorers who, as *conquistadores*, were failures, in that they found nothing which they considered to be of value. Sixteenth-century knowledge of the vast area which later became the southern and south-western United States was derived mainly from two expeditions, that of Hernando de Soto and that of Francisco Vázquez Coronado. De Soto in 1539 explored from Tampa Bay in Florida north to the Appalachians and west to the Mississippi. Coronado in 1541 set out from New Galicia across the Río Grande and the Pecos into the great prairies west of the Mississippi, and reported immense herds of 'cows' and primitive people parasitic upon