

CHAPTER X.

EARLY FRENCH QUESTS OF OVERLAND ROUTES AND OF TRADE WITH NEW MEXICO.

Since about the beginning of the eighteenth century it had been the desire of the French, and one of the special objects of the Company of the Indies to bring the Mississippi valley into commercial relations with both the Indians of the Far West and the Spaniards of northern Mexico. Indeed, French parties under ~~the~~ the Chevalier of St. Denis, acting ~~minimally~~ for that ~~minimally~~ ~~and~~ company, succeeded in crossing the Texas frontier as early as 1715 and 1717, and in reaching the Presidio and Mission of San Juan Bautista (on the west of the Rio Grande, below Eagle Pass), bringing with them in the latter year a considerable quantity of merchandise. But the Spanish policy was adverse to their proposed traffic and their expeditions failed of their principal object.

The efforts of the French to open trade between the Mississippi valley and New Mexico, were equally unsuccessful, and prior to 1739 did not even result in the discovery of the much-sought-for route to Santa Fe. As early as 1702, twenty French Canadians left the village of the Tamaracs in the Illinois country, with the avowed purpose of finding the way to New Mexico, trading for piastres, and seeing the mines of which the Indians had told them.* In April, 1705. Among two

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canoe-loads of voyageurs arriving at Mobile from the Illinois November 16, 1705, there was a man ^{named Laurain,} who had been in the Missouri river country. He gave confused information of the course he had travelled, of the nations that inhabited it, and of the establishments of the Spaniards on the frontiers of New Mexico. On the 10th of April, 1706, there came to Mobile, in a party of fifty who had come down from the upper Mississippi, two French Canadians who during two years (not necessarily the two years immediately preceding their coming to Mobile) had wandered from one Indian nation to another in the country drained by the Missouri, and who, after having been near some Spanish mines, had stopped at an Indian village (Quartelejo?) from which had gone out, only just before, casqued and cuirassed Spaniards who had come thither to trade for buffalo hides wherewith to make harness for mules. Whether Laurain or these two Canadians were of the twenty who left the Tamaroas village for New Mexico in 1702, we do not know. There is apparently no evidence that any of that twenty reached Santa Fe, ~~mississ.~~ unless, perchance, the "French guide" who, Escalante says, accompanied Villasur's expedition from Santa Fe eastward, may have been one of them who had reached the New Mexican capital and, for nearly two decades, remained there.

Whether any of the party from Tamaroas village succeeded in reaching Santa Fe or not, Canadians, in small bands, were on the Missouri at least as early as 1703-'05,* and probably before 1700, trading with

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*De Bourgmont, as stated elsewhere herein, began his residence in the Missouri Indian village, presumably as a trader, in 1703. Le Sueur visited and traded with both the Missouries and the Kansas in 1705. At the end of the summer of 1704, there were, from the establishment at Wabash alone, and who had formerly been there under the orders of M Sieur de Juchereau (deceased the previous autumn), in the Mississippi and Missouri valleys, 110 Canadians, scattered in bands of seven or eight; and Governor Bienville wrote, September 6, 1704, that it would be best to have these come down the river. The chief sources of data on movements of the Canadians west of the Mississippi in the earlier part of the eighteenth century are the documents and extracts collected by Margry in his Origines Francaises.

the Indians, trapping, ~~and~~ hunting and

exploring, and in 1708 had ascended it to a distance of three or four hundred leagues. Until after the first third of the eighteenth century, it was believed by many that a good route to New Mexico would be found by following up the Missouri river to its then unknown source. Unsuccessful efforts had been made by the French ^{on several more} ~~on several more~~ southerly lines, to...pierce

Leaving the South fork of the Platte on the 15th of June at the mouth of Lodgapolé creek, in what is now the northeastern corner of Colorado, they struck to the south, through the eastern border-region of the same state. Crossing almost daily one or more of the numerous sources of the Kansas river, and the season being that of the June freshets, it is little wonder that they dubbed the Arickaree fork "the River of Anxieties", and lost seven horses loaded with merchandise in the Main or South fork of the Republican, which they called "the River of Death".

The expedition was now crossing the great country of the Comanches, and ~~was now in a few days passing through~~ was approaching the much smaller one of the Jicarilla Apaches. Anciently, before the advent thither of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and other northern tribes, the upper Arkansas and South Platte valleys, in fact all of present Colorado east of the Rocky mountains, and western Kansas as well, was a portion of the vast Comanche empire. Anciently also, the wooded country on and surrounding the head-waters of the Canadian river, though often invaded by the Comanches, was the special home of the Jicarilla Apaches, and was known as "the forests of the Xicarillas"; and though the Indians of the latter nation were considered "gentiles" by the Spaniards, owing to some success of the latter's priests among them in the seventeenth century, while the Comanches were called heathen, the Jicarillas were, nevertheless, in a situation that compelled them to cultivate relations, not only with the Spaniards on the one hand, but also with the Comanches on the other. As they could not long please either without displeasing the other, they were apt to be in hot water alternately with each. In 1700, they had ~~been~~ been disloyal to the Spaniards by harboring Spanish refugees; and to teach these and other gentiles the lesson thought needed on this score "one Miguel Gutierrez was sentenced to be shot and his head stuck on a pole", ~~maps~~ ~~maps~~ ~~maps~~ In 1724, the village of Jicarilla, their ancient stronghold, 37 leagues northeast of Taos, was sacked and utterly destroyed by the Comanches, who forced the Jicarillas "to give up half their women and children, burned the ~~maps~~ place, and killed all but 69 men, two women and three boys", (Bancroft) of those who were then in the village. By this and subsequent Comanche

aggression, the Jicarillas seem to have been banished, for the rest of the century, from their old home-lands in what, roughly speaking, became later "the Maxwell Grant" and Colfax county, New Mexico, and to have fled west of the Sierra, taking refuge in the cañons and mountains between Taos and Picuris, where, according to the Spanish MS report of Don José Cortez, as translated in Volume III of the Pacific Railway Surveys, many of the ~~middle~~ tribe were still living in 1799. A Jesuit mission, founded for the Jicarillas in 1733 on Rio Trampas, about five leagues north of Taos, and abandoned in 1744, ^{was} ~~was~~ extant at the time of the Mallet expedition, ^{though the expedition passed to the west of it}

On the Arkansas river, July 5th, 1739, the Mallet party fell in with a village of the Comanches, to which they gave a small present, receiving some venison in return. Conceiving that this village had unfriendly designs, they encamped a league from it. On the 6th, when the French were about to leave the Arkansas, there came to them from the Comanche village an Arickaree slave, with the message that the Comanches had a mind to wipe them out. The Frenchmen sent him back with word that

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his masters had only to come and that they would wait for them. But the Comanches made no movement, and the Arickaree, having returned to the Frenchmen and informed them that he had formerly been a slave in New Mexico and knew the road thither, they persuaded him to accompany them as guide, representing that they might be able to procure him his liberty. On this day, the 6th of July, they doubled their usual day's journey, travelling ten leagues, to ^{as far} get away as possible from the Comanches.

Their route from the Arkansas was southwestward, perhaps not differing greatly from the wagon-route which ~~today~~ leads up between Rule creek and the Purgatory, and around the head of Smith's, or Pealed Pine, canon, to Emory gap or Trinchera ~~gap~~ pass.* Camping, on the 12th, at

Footnote *Near Trinchera pass and through Emory gap, now passes the Colorado Southern Railway.

the foot of the Raton range (probably at the west end of the Mesa de Maya), which they called "the first mountain", the 14th found them on the upper waters of the Canadian, which they called "riviere Rouge", a translation of the name, "Rio Colorado", by which, and its Indian equivalents, the upper Canadian has for two or three centuries been known to the Spaniards and western aborigines. Twenty-one leagues from there they found Taos and the mission of Picuris. Word of their coming having been sent ahead, the commandant of ~~Picuris~~ Taos sent out to them mutton and fine wheat bread, and when they were within a league of Picuris, the commandant and the padre came out to meet them, and the hardy adventurers were welcomed with the ringing of bells. On July 24th, they reached Santa Fe, where they were hospitably received. The object of their coming being inquired by the governor, Paul Mallot replied that their purpose was to introduce commerce, in view of the close union that there was between the crowns of France and of Spain. Though such trade was of the greatest importance to their isolated and comfortless commonwealth, and was greatly desired by the local authorities and people of New Mexico, and though the Frenchmen were treated with every consideration by these, it was found necessary to wait at Santa Fe nine months, for a communication to be sent to and a reply had from the viceroy, there being but one caravan a year, each way, between Santa Fe and the City of Mexico. The viceroy's reply was to try to engage the Frenchmen to remain in the country, and there was believed to be a plan of employing them to discover a country three months' travel to the westward, where, according to Indian tradition, there were men who wore silk clothing and lived in large cities by the sea coast. But the Frenchmen, except one who had married in New Mexico, preferred to return; which seven of them did, after receiving a friendly letter to the authorities of New France, in which it was hinted that if they came again with goods, they should be furnished with a passport from the governor, so that their merchandise should not be subject to confiscation.

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The names of this party, as given in the certificate furnished to the Mallet brothers by General Juan Paez Hurtado, Lieutenant-Governor of New Mexico, on the day preceding that of their departure from Santa Fe, and which specially states that the Frenchmen who had arrived in the party were eight in number, are: Pierre and Paul Mallet, brothers, Philippe Robitaille, Louis Morin, Michel Beslot, Joseph Bellecourt and Manuel Gallien, creoles of Canada, and Jean David of Europe. Gallien's true baptismal name was, of course Emmanuel; the otherwise French-written document lapsing here, with "Manuel" into "Emmanuel". In a letter which Padre Sant-Iago de Rehald, Vicar and Ecclesiastical Judge of New Mexico, sent by the returning Mallet brothers to Père de Beaubois, of New Orleans, requesting the latter to obtain and send him a lot of goods listed in his accompanying invoice, the number of persons in the Mallet party ~~was nine~~ was said to be nine. This was apparently an inadvertency; for in connection with the statement, the names of the supposed nine are given, and they count up only eight, which are as follows: "Pierre and Paul brothers, La Rose, Philippe, Bellecourt, Petit-Jean, Gallien and Moreau". In this list we see the colloquial forms of the names of the Mallet company. Pierre and Paul Mallet and Philippe Robitaille were commonly called by their first or baptismal names; Joseph Bellecourt and Manuel Gallien, by their second or surnames; Michel Beslot was called, after a common French fashion, by the sobriquet, "La Rose", by which sobriquet he is also constantly designated in Sieur de Fabry's letters of 1742, given in Margry's Origines, except the first letter, where he is called by his full proper name, ⁱⁿ ~~spelled~~ ^{there differently spelled (though in final identically pronounced),} ~~however,~~ "Joseph Beleau"; Louis Morin was familiarly known by the variant-sobriquet, "Moreau", used not only by Rehald, but also by the Mallet brothers, in their journal; ~~and~~ and Jean David (properly Jean David d'Alais, from the mining town in France whence he came) was — apparently from smallness of stature — dubbed with the sobriquet of "Petit-Jean", or Little-John.

A Spanish copy of the formal and official certificate given by Lieutenant-Governor Hurtado to the returning Frenchmen, must have been kept at the New Mexican capital; yet the erroneous number, "nine", inconsistently ^{by Padre Rehald} ascribed to them ^{seems to have crept into} ~~and~~ ^{H. H.} and remained uncorrected in the Archives of Santa Fe, which, as cited by Bancroft, mention the arrival of "nine" Frenchmen. Other Spanish documents state that two of them became residents of the country. "Of the two who remained," says Bancroft, "one, Jean d'Alay, married and became a good citizen (and barber) of ~~Santa~~ ^{San} F⁶; the other, ~~Marie~~ ^{Marie} Louis Marie, became involved in troubles, and was shot in the plaza in Mendoza's time". In the same connection, Bancroft notes that "the French criminal sentenced to death, 'sacado el corazon por las espaldas', is mentioned by the governor in a letter of 1743". He also cites evidence which shows that these Frenchmen, or some of them, were temporarily settled ~~in~~

One of the
models of
execution: ~~Death~~ "The
last jolted out through the back".
Spanish

near Albuquerque or Isleta, at a place called, after their own country, "Canada", but later otherwise named.

The "Louis Marie" of Bancroft's citation, is evidently Hurtado's much named and otherwise much more unfortunate "Louis Morin"; in other words, the "Moreau" of the Mallets. The ^{abstract of the} latter's journal—~~extant~~—says in the original French, "le nommé Moreau s'estant marié dans le pays"; so if "Moreau" was not "Marie", he was at least "marié", which comes pretty near it. All this aside;—poor fellow! We can but pity him.

Bancroft's "Jean d'Alay" is of course Jean David d'Alais, who as we shall presently see, left Santa Fe with the six other returning Frenchmen and reached the Illinois country with two of them; but he seems to have returned soon again to Santa Fe, and to have married, settled, and gone into business there.

"On the 1st of May, 1740," say the Mallet brothers, as translated from the ^{abstract} ~~Extract~~ of their journal, "the discoverers, to the number of seven, the one named Moreau having married in the country, left Santa Fe, with the plan of seeking the Mississippi and of repairing to New Orleans by a route different from that which they had taken" on their westward journey.

Their return eastward, was by a more southerly route, by way of the Pueblo of Pecos and from the upper branches of the river of that name, across to the Canadian river, on which after following it for three days, they separated, three of them (Bellecourt, Gallien and Jean David) wishing to regain the route by the Pawnee villages, returning thence to the Illinois, which later advices from the latter country to New Orleans showed that they successfully accomplished; and the other four (the Mallet brothers, with Robitaille and Beslot) continuing down the Canadian river, the lower 42-league stretch of which—after they had abandoned their 18 horses—they descended in two small elm-bark canoes made with the only two knives still possessed by the party. They reached the junction of the Canadian and Arkansas rivers—which they called "the Fork" and "the source of the river of the Arkansas"—on the 24th of June, 1740. They found living in a cabin below the Fork, some Canadians who were hunting and salting meat. ~~Indians~~ They stopped and hunted with these, having still retained guns and ammunition; and ultimately loaded a canoe with salt meat, with which they made their way down the Arkansas to its mouth, where they reached the Post of the Arkansas. At this post they seem to have remained through the winter, and, in the following spring, to have resumed their voyage, going down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where they arrived in March.

The great southern branch of the Arkansas, having thus been explored for practically its whole length by these hardy Canadians, eighty years before it was descended by Major Long, may well have been named the

Canadian, though a short lower portion of it had been known since ~~1719~~^{de}, Bénard ^{de} La Harpe and associates having visited it in that year, from the Post of ^{the Narrows} ~~Medaquis~~ on Red river.

Besides so greatly anticipating the party of Major Long in exploring the Canadian river, and making a discovery which the great Baron von Humboldt and our own American geographers overlooked for so many years after we had acquired Louisiana, —namely, that the Red river of ~~western~~ ^{northeastern} New Mexico was not the same as the Red river of Louisiana, but was a branch of the Arkansas, — the Mallet brothers had accomplished, with little adoo, and with the simple, though in real wilderness journeys highly practical, pack-train, ~~the outfit originally used by~~

~~the~~ that which the great Company of the Indies, with its ~~exped~~^{ended} ~~exped~~ invaluable royal prerogatives, ~~had~~ its ample capital and its cumbrous political and commercial organization, had long found itself unable to do. They had discovered a practical commercial route from the Mississippi valley to the capital of New Mexico.

From this time on, by French, some Spanish, and latterly an increasing number of Anglo-American inhabitants of the Mississippi valley, occasional and sporadic efforts were made to cultivate trade with New Mexico and with the Indians of its eastern frontier; until, in 1821, on the downfall of Spanish dominion in Mexico, the Becknell and Glenn-Fowler caravans introduced a traffic that proved permanent, that built up flourishing communities on the lower Missouri, and that created ~~the~~ ^{more noted} great historic thoroughfare, than which there is none ~~more~~ among far-western wilderness highways of white men, The Santa Fe Trail.

End of Chapter X.