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THE SPANISH MISSIONS

The missions were the ~~sublime~~ interesting fruitage of those Spanish centuries. While Anglo-American races were crowding the Indians back the Spanish Government and her leaders were erecting these mission settlements, seeking to lead their Indians to civilized and useful life. At these settlements stately churches were built and these were achieved in a wilderness with Indians taught to do the work. Sculpture, painting, engineering and architectural arts found in the cathedrals of Europe were characteristic of these mission churches. Materials were often transported long distances. At best, their trails and transportation facilties were crude. Even in this present age of highly organized construction facilities such buildings would be notable achievements.

That the Indians did not readily give up their care-free life and the religion of their fathers for the labor and cloistered life of these mission settlements does not lessen the nobility of these Spanish civilizing efforts.

Many are unable to reconcile the benign mission policies with the stories of blood and carnage so familiar in Spanish-American history. The period of the conquests was the first half century following the discovery of America, 1492-1542. The mission building period in the present United States was two centuries later. Spanish New World Government and policies traveled far in those two centuries.

In that first half century of conquest Spanish rule was extended over the West Indies, Mexico, Central America, and South America except Portuguese Brazil. Spanish ships had circumnavigated the globe and they had explored and mapped the long coast lines of the Americas. Those amazing land expeditions had explored the continents; on this northern continent they had explored to the Carolinas, Tennessee and Kansas. The English did not found Jamestown until 1607 and that little colony failed. The Pilgrims came to ~~New England~~ Plymouth in 1620. The English ventures were coastal settlements only.

The Spanish conquests were war and all war is brutal. Spanish kings, queen and governing powers commanded humanity. Even in this day governments command, and racketeers do somewhat as they please. Spanish rulers condemned and prohibited the slavery of the Indians yet Indians went to their death in droves because of enforced slavery. Human slavery was not new; it had existed among all races from time immemorial. Slavery was abolished in the Spanish-American States before it was in the United States.

When America was discovered Europe was in the depths of the Dark Ages. Religion was a superstitution. The oppressions of the inquisition were prevalent over Europe. Printing had been invented but was held under strict censorship. Reading and freedom of understanding hardly existed. Few could even write. Luther's Reformation was just beginning when Cortés was conquering Mexico; one hundred years later when the Puritans and the Pilgrims were settling New England that struggle for personal liberty and intellectual understanding was still in its infancy.

This was the state of the world when Spain was conquering America and