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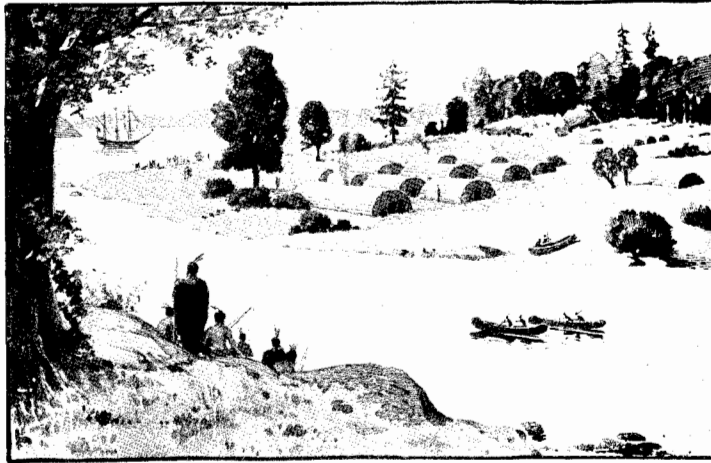
I. INTRODUCTORY.

ALL things must have a beginning, and our city of New York, now so rich and great, began in a very small way indeed. If we had been at the Battery on the eighteenth day of March, away back in 1524, we should probably have seen there a group of savages clad in skins, with bows in their hands, and a quiver full of arrows slung over their shoulders, intently watching a white speck that became larger every moment. Very soon it grew into a birdlike thing that swept on as gracefully as a swan. It was the first white man's sail the Indians had ever seen—that of the *Dolphin*, belonging to his Majesty Francis I., King of France, and sailed by a brave sailor and discoverer, Jean Verrazano of Florence.

The discovery of America by Columbus, thirty-two years before, had aroused the cupidity as well as the curiosity of the seafaring nations of Europe,—the English, Spanish, Dutch, French, and Portuguese,—and they were now sending out ships and sailors to discover, explore, and take possession of the new land. They thought, in their ignorance, that this land was a part of India, and that all the treasures of India were hidden in its savage and unknown interior.

Verrazano was one of these discoverers who had been

sent out by the King of France. If he followed the usual course of such adventurers on discovering a new country, he landed in state, with standard and cross, father confessor and men at arms, and planting the

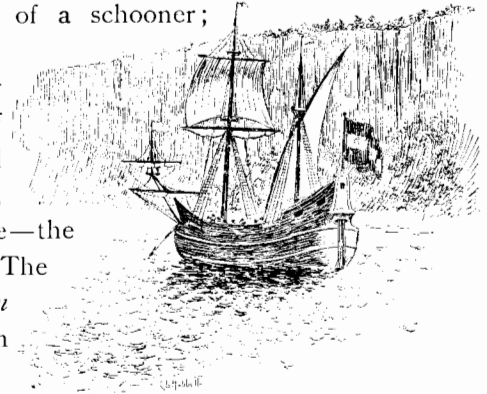


Manhattan Island in the Sixteenth Century.

cross and the royal arms of France, he stood beside the cross with head bared, and repeated a formula by which he took possession of the entire country in the name of his royal master. He then sailed away, making no attempt to settle the new land. Nor was any ever made by Francis, who soon became engaged in war with the Emperor Charles V., King of Spain—a war which ended in the utter defeat of Francis at Pavia, and in his being carried a prisoner to Spain. Any title he might have had to our shores by virtue of his first discovery lapsed because of his failure to settle them.

Nearly a hundred years passed before another vessel

sailed into our bay—at least, so far as we have any record. But at last, on a mellow autumn day in September, 1609, a clumsy, odd-looking craft entered the Narrows and anchored in the mouth of the river. She had a stern much higher than her bows, a high, carved prow, and carried square sails on the two masts of a schooner; she flew a peculiar flag, new to the nations, of three horizontal stripes, orange, white, and blue—the Dutch flag. The name *Half Moon* was painted on her stern.



Before describing her mission it is necessary to say a word or two of the people who had sent her out. The Dutch were descended from those rude tribes, the Belgæ, Batavi, and Frisians, of whom Cæsar speaks. Later the conquering Franks and Saxons introduced a more refined and intellectual stock, which had grown to wealth and power under the successive rule of the wise Charlemagne, the lords and bishops of the feudal ages, and the strong kings of the house of Burgundy. Next these states came under the rule of Charles V., and of his son and successor, Philip II., the latter of whom governed them so harshly that seven provinces, a few years before our story opens, revolted and formed a republic.

Philip sought to subdue them, and a long and bitter war followed, which had been closed six months before the *Half Moon* sailed, by a truce of twelve years signed by both parties. You can read all about it in Mr. Motley's interesting work, "The Rise of the Dutch Republic."

The Dutch government was republican in form, but far more complex than is our own system. The genius of the country was almost wholly commercial, but it was a nation of great merchants, not shopkeepers; its trade extended over the known earth; it had on the seas at this time three thousand ships and one hundred thousand sailors, and enjoyed a trade of sixteen millions of pounds per annum—far more than England's, which was but six millions. Its East India Company, founded to secure the trade of India and the East, was the richest and greatest trading company then on the globe. It had a rival in the English East India Company, which had been chartered nine years before, and which, though not then so strong, was destined in a few years to supplant it. Both companies were very anxious to find a short passage to India. Such a passage was believed to extend around the northern shores of Europe and Asia. The Dutch company had fitted out the *Half Moon* to discover it, but had, strangely enough, given her in charge of an Englishman, a famous navigator of those times, named Henry Hudson.

Hudson, as you will find, was not here for settlement, but as a discoverer, an adventurer. He ascended the Hudson nearly to Albany, stopped to trade at various points with the Indians, returned, and sailed out of the Narrows again, leaving his own name to our noble river,

the Hudson. Two years later, in 1611, the great Dutch navigator Adriaen Block sailed through Long Island Sound, discovering the shores of Connecticut and visiting Manhattan Island, which had been thus named from the tribe of Indians living on it. Block published a very graphic account of his voyage; but the haughty East India Company, having failed to find a passage to India through the new continent, took no further interest in it.

There were some shrewd merchants in Amsterdam, however, not shareholders in the East India Company, who saw what a rich trade in furs and other merchandise might be built up with the new country, and they formed a trading company, which was chartered by the States-General, the executive or working branch of the Dutch government. They built a fort and trading house on Manhattan Island, and another on an island in the Hudson near the present site of Albany.

Their charter was limited to three years, counting from January 1, 1615, and although they enjoyed a profitable trade, they made no permanent settlement. This charter is noteworthy from the fact that in it the country was first called New Netherland.

But in Amsterdam a company was assuming form that was destined to effect both settlement and conquest. It was of slow growth, because many people objected to granting it a charter conferring such enormous powers as its promoters asked for; but at last, on June 3, 1621, the very year the truce with Spain ended, the States-General chartered it under the name of the West India Company.

Perhaps no body of merchants was ever invested with such enormous powers and privileges as this company possessed. It was a private company, and yet in many respects a sovereign state. It could contract alliances, declare war, make peace, administer justice, appoint or dismiss governors, judges, and servants, build forts, ships, cities—in fact, do anything necessary to promote trade and secure stability. To these powers was added a monopoly of the trade for the Atlantic coasts of Africa and America. Its leaders promised not only to carry on trade, but to attack Spain in her American colonies and to capture her ships on the high seas, and for this reason were given such extensive powers. It had a capital of twelve million florins (nearly five million dollars of our money), and its affairs were managed by five chambers, or boards, distributed among the different cities of Holland, the chamber of Amsterdam being the most important. The States-General further gave it a grant of the whole magnificent territory discovered by Hudson, on condition that it “should advance the peopling of it.”

The company erected this grant into a province and committed its affairs to the chamber of Amsterdam, while the other chambers were to devote their attention to prosecuting the war against Spain; and very successful they were, too, capturing Bahia in 1624, the “great silver fleet,” conveying treasure from the South American mines, in 1628, and the rich city of Pernambuco in 1630. All Netherlands rang with their exploits.

Meantime, reminded by jealous rivals, the Amsterdam chamber did not forget the savage island and the

“fruitful and unsettled parts” in the West, that its charter obliged it to settle, but made an attempt at settlement by sending out thirty Walloons to New Netherland, directing that eight should remain and found a trading post at Manhattan, while the remaining twenty-two should go up the Hudson to Fort Nassau, near Albany, and make a settlement there. This was in 1624, and these Walloons, residents of the frontier between France and Flanders, and distinguished for their valor and military spirit, were the first settlers of our great city. Next year, however, the company set about its task in earnest, advertising for “adventurers” to the New World, and offering free passage, employment, and other inducements, insomuch that, toward the close of the year, three large ships and a “yacht” sailed for Manhattan, carrying forty-five men, women, and children, with household goods, farming tools, and one hundred and three head of cattle. At the same time the company began framing a government for the new colony, and appointed Cornelis May as director (1623); he was succeeded by William Verhulst (1624), and he in turn by Peter Minuit, who was intrusted with greater authority than had been given to his predecessors.