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The preceding volume, which narrates the history of the Louisiana Purchase and the Westward Movement, carries the reader back to the days of New France; the present volume carries him still further back to the days of New Spain. At the close of the seventeenth century North America gave little promise of becoming chiefly an English-speaking continent: at that time New Spain comprised Central America, Mexico, the California country and most of the region between the gulf of Mexico and the line of the Ohio river.

Though the number of Spaniards scattered over this vast area was relatively small, the title of Spain to the soil was already ancient and well established; but the title to the region north of the Gulf of Mexico was already yielding to the actual occupation of English colonists.