WITH the prescience of hindsight, posterity sees a kind of boundary between two epochs of western history in the
quartet of years which witnessed Fray García's rise to supreme ecclesiastical and political office in New Spain.
When that illustrious Dominican embarked in 1608 for the New World he could not realize that the Europe he
was leaving was turning into a new world of politics, economics, social organization, and science. Already, in parts
of the Continent, these changes were so far advanced that they rendered impossible the recovery of the lost unity
of Christendom and the medieval tradition that the Archbishop-Viceroy so conspicuously personified. If to him the
"kingdom of God" was an empire composed of principalities acknowledging a supreme prince and bolstered by an
aristocracy enjoying feudal privileges, with the whole structure cemented by an adherence to the one true Faith,
elsewhere in Europe many were beholding the "kingdom of man" emerging from a set of ideas quite different.
Among these other peoples the conviction was growing that human will might determine human destiny, and that
mankind need not regard itself as a helpless pawn of an all-powerful deity. They glimpsed earthly existence as
something more than a painful preparation for eternity, and they were increasingly reluctant to abdicate the mind
completely to the dogmatic prescriptions of a medieval Church. The opposing pressures of the Reformation and
Counter Reformation had cracked the mortar of orthodoxy and, particularly in the north where new political
entities were assuming importance, they had
perceptibly loosened a solidarity inherited from the Middle Ages. The great Schism had split the Continent into
two Europes, Protestant and Catholic, and the breach was widening. Irreparably sundered already were the bonds of
religion and tradition that had promised a unified order, and the process of fragmentation would go on.
In the divided Europe of Fray García's closing years the policies of statesmen were no longer influenced by the
Philosophia Christi, or the achievement of a perfect universal state, which had conditioned the utopianism of the late
Renaissance. While religious affiliations clearly colored the issues of the time, secular concerns were taking
precedence over ecclesiastical, though the Catholic South, reacting to the contemporary ferment, was growing more
inflexible in its adherence to orthodoxy. But emerging national states in the Protestant North were subordinating
spiritual matters to commercial activities, and in public affairs merchant adventurers, trading companies, and the like
were outweighing the organized Church in influence. Shifting and multiplying trade routes were expanding
mercantilism, revolutionizing society, and facilitating the rise of new kinds of imperialism, capitalism, and
colonialism. A class of nouveaux riches was slowly usurping the power of the agrarian aristocracy, and an expanding
bourgeoisie was acquiring a larger measure of political control. Confidence was growing that men could, indeed,
shape destiny.
In the very years that Fray García was rising to fame a seed was germinating which would strengthen the
conviction that mankind could master its fate. The most portentous discovery of the moment was a new approach to
truth destined to transform the western world, and, in time, the entire globe. This was modern science. The
Ptolemaic universe, with the earth its center and pivotal point, was yielding, still imperceptibly perhaps and quite
precariously as Galileo was experiencing, to the Copernican universe with the earth a mere peripheral planet of an
immense solar system. A newer freedom of speculation and experimentalism was undermining the traditional
verbalistic methods of scholasticism, and it would lead to discoveries dwarfing the miracles of medieval lore.
If this fundamental divergence of intellectual methodology was hardly discernible at the outset of the seventeenth
century, within a few decades it was changing the conceptions of many concerning the world, and it was posing a threat to
medieval cosmology and religious orthodoxy. As the methods of analysis and measurement were applied, a new
search was underway for the divine plan of the universe; as this endeavor began to create new values, the timeworn
monopoly of theology and scholasticism as the avenue to truth was shattered and the infallibility of dogmas was
doubted. Already, as the seventeenth century dawned, confirmation of the heliocentric theory of Copernicus (1543) had appeared, Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), intending to reconstitute the Ptolemaic system, b1a$recorded the position of the planets with precision,
Galilei

René Descartes

Even more direct threats to the older methodology would create tension and burden conservative resistance. In the plurality of worlds and populated planets.

As the seventeenth century advanced, startling discoveries in other fields shook orthodox conceptions. William Gilbert (1540-1603) had made systematic observations of the magnetic properties of magnetism; William Harvey (1578-1657) demonstrated the circulation of blood; Robert Boyle (1627-1691) would contribute laws of chemistry and gaseous pressures; and Marcello Malpighi (1628-1694) and others would make important findings through the microscopic analysis of living organisms.

As the spiritual, intellectual, and social solidarities of Europe melted in the heat of revolutionary changes, the conservatism of the Catholic South hardened into a reactionary insurrection. Spain, which had become a mighty empire under the sixteenth century Hapsburgs, assumed the role of champion of orthodoxy, and its rulers took an uncompromising stand on the side of traditionalism. This resolute attitude dominated the Council of Trent and set the tone of the Counter Reformation, thus defeating the hope of reconciliation with the Protestant North. The enormous extent of the Spanish empire, scattered over the Old and New Worlds like a sprawling league of nations, seemed to point clearly to a universal hegemony under Hispanic auspices as the divine plan. The large populations threatened by heresy in Europe and awaiting the illumination of Christian doctrine in America were clearly a trust which Providence had bestowed exclusively on the peoples of the Spanish Peninsula. Christianity must be restored to its pristine state on the one hand and, on the other, diffused in its purest form. There could be no temporizing with heterodoxy at home or abroad and hence free inquiry, which had enjoyed relative immunity during the early sixteenth century in Spain, was soon halted. The desperate fear of heretical infection was unhappily withdrawing doctrine after doctrine in both natural and moral philosophy from the possibility of rational proof and relegating them to the sphere of unquestioned dogma. Under Spanish influence Catholic Europe was becoming stranded in the shallows of authoritarianism and ecclesiastical learning, while other parts of the Continent were slowly moving into the freer currents of experimentalism sweeping onward into modern science and technology.

In this situation ideas, whether secular or religious, were carefully screened in Spain and excluded, as far as possible, from the New World so as to protect the incompletely Christianized natives from contamination. Thus reason fell under the sway of rigid authority and conclusions reached through rational processes were

predetermined; the initiative of thinkers was confined to formal details in the treatment of a thesis rather than to any revaluation of the thesis itself. Truth was accessible only through verbalistic methods of scholasticism, and knowledge acquired through the senses was unreliable and potentially dangerous. Under Spanish influence Catholic Europe was becoming stranded in the shallows of authoritarianism and ecclesiastical learning, while other parts of the Continent were moving into the freer currents of experimentalism sweeping onward into modern science and technology.

In the New World realms the preservation of traditional thought was facilitated by a remoteness from Europe's turmoil and by a more solidified feudal pattern of society in which a small white minority dominated large populations of submissive Indians for whom ignorance increasingly appeared to be a blessing. However, for the intelligentsia of the Spanish Indies, the insulation from the changing world and the revolutionary ideas of Europe was much less hermetic than often asserted, and various American-born intellectuals during the course of the seventeenth century displayed a surprising familiarity with contemporary thought. But clearly the climate of opinion in those distant possessions was hardly propitious for overt dissenters from the traditional orthodoxy and scholasticism to which the motherland was
passionately committed. Intellectual activity centered almost exclusively in the universities and seminaries of the colonial cities where a decadent neo-scholasticism prevailed and where thinkers of an experimental turn of mind were notably absent. Since this purely verbalistic rationalism dominated Hispanic intellectualism during the so-called Baroque period, and especially in the American realms, a brief description is appropriate.

Scholasticism was, of course, essentially ecclesiastical in origin and, as philosophy grew out of theology, the methods of the latter carried over into secular learning. The basic premise of scholasticism was that God was the source of all truth and that, in His wisdom, this truth, or portions of it, was divinely revealed to chosen individuals as the human agencies of transmission. Their writings were revelation and hence the final authority of all learning. As the product of God's inspiration, the writings of the Church Fathers were the highest court of appeal, and they were held to contain within themselves the refutation of any and every argument advanced by human reason. This concept of knowledge obviously 

26 stressed memory rather than rational powers, since the pages of these books afforded an answer to every question. Consequently, intellectual brilliance was manifested by dialectics and by a deftness in quoting authorities. Doctrinal matters were established by disputation and logic, and conclusions were reached by verbal rationalization—not by experimental demonstration perceived through the senses as in modern science. Intellectual activity, then, put stress on arguments based on memorized material from accepted sources. Thus, the supreme equipment for superior knowledge was a photographic memory and a dialectical skill in exploiting it. An impressive example of this kind of mental legerdemain is offered by a record of a prodigious feat performed publicly at the University of Mexico.

Having learned by heart the voluminous writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar, Father Francisco Naranjo, conducted himself so brilliantly in a contest for a professorship in 1635 that he was induced to give a repeat performance before a "plenary session of learned Doctors, the students of the different faculties, the prebendaries of the Cathedral, and other ecclesiastics and members of different Orders as well as a large number of distinguished laymen, both military and civilian." Selecting at random four out of one hundred and fifty-four difficult questions drawn from a theological work, "He began by addressing a dissertation to the audience en four controversia) points of theology which had fallen to him by lot, linking them up one to another with much grace, lucidity, distinction, and learning. He then proceeded to the second part of the test, dictating to four lay brothers, one after the other, four separate theses on the four points of theology, one passage at a time to each clerk, doing so without hesitation or mistake, as if he were dictating a single continuous thesis." His ability to cite readily any appropriate passage from the vast work of St. Thomas Aquinas made possible this extraordinary feat "which seems beyond the powers of the human brain," and to his audience it demonstrated the highest form of cerebration that a mortal mind could achieve.

This neo-scholasticism, of which Father Naranjo gave such a prodigious exhibition, especially re-emphasized certain other peculiarities of the earlier scholasticism. In secular philosophy the writings of Aristotle were almost as infallible as the Holy Writ, and for

27 more than three centuries the works of that ancient Greek reigned supreme in European thought, though the Schoolmen, as the exponents of scholasticism were called, failed to heed, especially in colonial Spanish America, their master's teachings with respect to the need of experimentation in seeking truth. Applying the same procedure to his writings as to theology, the Schoolmen accepted Aristotle as superior to all other pagan masters and the last word in varied fields of knowledge. Chief among the tools of the scholastics, and virtually regarded as the exclusive method of argumentation, was the syllogism, and the conclusions obtained by this device were regarded as truth. The syllogism consisted of a major premise, a minor premise, and the conclusion deduced from them. An example will illustrate:

Major premise: No finite being is exempt from error. Minor premise: All men are finite beings.
Conclusion: Therefore, no man is exempt from error.

Such rigid exercises in logic could lead to absurdities and, in time, inspired crude parodies. But scholasticism as a whole was not as sterile as this oversimplified discussion may suggest, though it lent itself to the excessive abuse evident in the striving for cleverness which beset the Baroque intellectualism of colonial Spanish America. It could and did sharpen the wits to the subtleties of expression, it gave rigorous training in logic, and it afforded valuable experience in deductive reasoning, though again in practice the end sought was too often a dazzling verbal dexterity. Its legacy, perhaps, is a predilection for florid rounduity and high-flown rhetoric, still discernible in much public oratory
of modern Hispanic America, and in the general disposition, at least until recently, to cultivate philosophy and metaphysics in preference to natural and physical sciences.

In contrast to the more northerly parts of Europe the Hispanic people reacted to humanism by trying to reintegrate a medieval religiosity and science, but the end result was largely a blend of the two intellectual movements. A neo-scholasticism became the methodology of a neo-orthodoxy without diminishing the dilemma of Christendom. Medieval thinkers, for whom science was ancillary to theology, had endeavored to understand how the order of human existence illustrated divine goodness; they sought to determine the objectives, purposes, or final causes toward which things seemed to be striving, but they made little effort to analyze physical conditions of existence, and a quantitative approach to the causes of behavior in matter appeared quite irrelevant. The vain quest of the ultimate undertaken by medieval science yielded to the more mundane and feasible aims of humanism, and the effort to reinstate that intellectual orthodoxy only restored considerable futility. The resulting frustration caused an unconscious substitution of the intellectual devices of scholasticism as ends in themselves and a forsaking of the ultimate objectives. The effect was a tendency to shift from content to form, from ideas to details, to give new sanctions to dogmas, to avoid issues, and to substitute subtlety of language for subtlety of thought; it served to repress rather than liberate the human spirit, and to divert by spectacles, by overstatement, and by excessive ornamentation. Such, in essence, was the spirit of the so-called "Baroque Age" as manifested in the Hispanic world.

There is some mystery about the origin of the terco "Baroque," but it is generally agreed that it derives from a nonsense word by which humanists of the Renaissance derided medieval scholasticism. In mockery of that early disputatiousness "Baroco" became a synonym of confused and unclear thinking; later it assumed the meaning of "decadent" and "in bad taste." Not until the nineteenth century did the terco acquire a more dignified usage as a historical and technical designation applied successively to the arts and later to a chronological period. Few living in the "Baroque Age" had ever heard the word, and probably no one applied it to his own time. It is, in fact, an unsolicited gift of posterity needing labels to comprehend the stages of evolution through which pass the activities of mankind.

In the long course of western history an alternation of conflicting moods and divergent attitudes toward existence appears, each one extending for varying lengths of time from centuries and generations to decades, or even shorter spans, and to these periods names are subsequently bestowed. In retrospect perceptible oscillations appear in social, moral, and creative life between attitudes of intellectual restraint and emotional freedom, or between conformity or nonconformity to self-imposed restrictions. Greek and Roman antiquity, the Renaissance, and the so-called Neo-Classic eighteenth century were eras noted for a tendency to abide by classic rules; the Middle Ages, the Baroque period, usually associated with the seventeenth century, and the Romanticism of the nineteenth century seem times of more uninhibited feeling. This classification oversimplifies, of course, since opposing tendencies operate at all times to produce tension and conflict. Indeed, some epochs are distinguished more by paradox than consistency, and perhaps none so much as the Baroque Age. Hence arise difficulties of comprehension and definition.

The chronological limits of the Baroque period are roughly set from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, reaching a peak around the middle of the seventeenth. Its intensity was relatively brief in some parts of Europe, and elsewhere it was of much longer duration. Closely linked with the Counter Reformation it proved more durable in the south of the Continent. The Baroque is described as "a continuous polemic on the Catholic way of life with a mixture of the ideals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance." It is not surprising, therefore, that it lasted longest and its manifestations were most extreme in the Hispanic world. "The Baroque is Spain's true form and fulfillment," it has been said, and indeed the passionate, individualistic genius of the Spaniard, reacting to historical circumstances, points to its truth.

That bizarre age witnessed the mystical exaltation of Santa Teresa de Ávila and of St. John of the Cross expressed in classic prose and verse and a sordid materialism set forth in the abundant picaresque literature of the time. The excessive license in public morals was paralleled by the asceticism of seared consciences, and the intellectual straight jacket of neo-scholasticism accent the unfettered sway of emotion. Through medieval religiosity chaotic feelings vented themselves in a fierce fanaticism which spawned an arid dogmatism, an uncompromising intolerance, an implacable persecution, and a degrading superstition. Through a degenerate chivalry, a tawdry relic of the Middle Ages, an explosive fervor fathered a morbid punctilio in personal relations and a specious code of honor which prolifically begot vengeful feuds and murderous duels. Baroque passion stimulated an urge to action, an obsession to
wield power, and, from the deep recesses of the unconscious, it conjured up an extraordinary vitality and a forward thrust of energy which found no adequate outlet or satisfying release. Unlike the Promethean spark of the Renaissance, it was a vitality which denied life and expended itself in trivia. Having briefly experienced the emancipation of a fecund humanism, the distraught spirit now fell prey to a deep despondency on finding its medieval chains restored. Like Segismund in Calderón’s famous play Life’s a Dream, it pondered on whether the Renaissance vision of life, so fleetingly beheld, was but a dream. Thwarted impulses engendered a restlessness which sought relief from frustration by applying to the accepted verities of orthodox existence an ornamental patina worked in startling combinations of detail, in intricate patterns, in multicolored designs, and in complex arrangements. But these activities failed to case tensions completely, and they allowed slight sense of fulfillment. Instead, they seemed to induce a vague desengaño, a brooding disillusionment which, in turn, provoked moods of pessimism and fatalism and a resurgence of the stoicism so profoundly embedded in the Hispanic psyche. There was a withdrawal within oneself, a closing of the frontiers to newer ideas, much as Spain was closing its geographical frontiers to the rest of Europe and retreating into tradition. And intimately associated with this essential negativism was a morbid concern with death and decay. In “a world of extreme contrasts, of arrogant magnificence and hopeless misery, of carnal indulgence and ecstatic asceticism,” life was not real but a drama, a tragedy enacted upon a stage, a spectacle to be watched.

Yet this strange agitation, this peculiar disquiet, this frustrating dilemma underlying the Baroque attitude released a prodigious creativity in Spain and ignited a pyrotechnic display of artistic genius. A dazzling constellation of stars of the first magnitude emerged. The masterworks of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Quevedo, Góngora, Gracián, Velázquez, El Greco, and of many more rivaled the finest achievements of the Renaissance itself and made the early seventeenth century an artistic Golden Age. Indeed, the most famous literary work of all, Don Quixote de la Mancha, might not have come into being but for the profound preoccupations of the Baroque age in which it appeared. After the Council of Trent the anti-Platonic moralists censured the optimistic belief of humanists in the perfectibility of man. This utopian idea was contrary to the doctrine of original sin. But the genius of Cervantes fused these conflicting concepts into a synthesis formed by the contrasting figures of the Manchegan hidalgo and Sancho Panza.

Such triumphs of imagination, however, appear in retrospect like mountain peaks scattered about a monotonous plain of dense and tangled verbiage. The clarity of the Humanists surrendered to the Baroque pursuit of the less clear and the opaque, and the aesthetic techniques of culturanismo and conceptismo facilitated the desired obscurity of expression. The first achieved this result by involved syntax, words invented from Greek and Latin roots, and strained figures of speech, while the second, aiming at verbal economy, subordinated meaning to cleverness by ingenious antitheses, paradoxes, and word-play. These contrary currents fused in the Baroque style and shifted importance from content to form. Writing, like the plastic and pictorial arts, tended to become a crowded spectacle rather than a vehicle of thought, and the repressed vitality of the age produced a lush foliage which choked out much of the fruit of true inspiration. Excess energy expended itself chiefly in allegory of obscure symbolism and in an exaggerated verbalism, relieved now and then by savage satire. But the Baroque was a time-spirit with its own aesthetic and ethical canons and only within these, perhaps, can it be fairly judged.

When Fray García journeyed across the Atlantic to become a Prince of the State as well as of the Church he dramatically symbolized the transfer of the Baroque to the New World, and the viceroyalty, over which he presided, offered singularly propitious soil for the growth of the new spirit as the final grand flourish of feudalism. The sixteenth century fusion of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and indigenous elements, particularly in architecture, had prepared the ground for Baroque innovations. If these were manifestations of a “time-spirit,” it is more accurate to assert, perhaps, that they expressed a “time-spirit-place,” for the exotic Baroque plant soon blossomed in the Spanish Indies into an amazing variety of regional species as the Indian and mestizo shoots were grafted upon it. “A full blooded Baroque spread to even the less accessible regions of Latin America,” writes an art critic, “and, with its vast register of variations, developed such regional expressions as the ‘Andean Mestizo’ and the ‘Mexican poblano’ style.” This blending process in a relatively immobile society placed so indelible a stamp on Hispanic America that the Baroque pattern lingered long after the close of the colonial period and
traces of it are visible today.

Numerous factors account for the comparative permanence of this culture and its medieval character. Spain's determination to isolate the American realms from European centers of infection, as already suggested, was aided by the immense distance of the seas and by the inland location of the important aggregations of population. All but the few inhabitants of the coastal towns were immune to the increasing attacks of Protestant pirates. Racial, linguistic, and cultural differences divided the elements of a feudal society in which a tiny European minority ruled as an aristocracy over a large primitive mass of aborigines hardly capable of comprehending the theological issues that had torn the Continent asunder. These oppressed natives retained much of the half-barbarous culture which contrasted sharply with the ultrarefinement that wealth and leisure permitted the governing class. The incomplete task of proselyting among the Indian charges of the crown allegedly justified an enormous staff of clergymen who, in turn, required innumerable churches, seminaries, and convents. Much wealth poured into the coffers of the Church, which exercised as pervasive an influence in the secular affairs of these overseas realms as its parent organization had in the Middle Ages of Europe. Besides economic and political power the riches at its disposal enabled this institution to be the patron of the arts, particularly of architecture in which the Baroque fervor was most clearly manifest. Thus a neomedieval regime liad emerged, and it survived as an anachronism in which, it seemed, theology could prevail over history. The Indian majority had, in fact, lost its historical past, while the mixed elements resulting from racial fusion had not yet made any history. Only the small European minority could have an active role in the historical process, but even the participation of this group was severely restricted by the reactionary policies of the motherland. In a community of such social and cultural immobility, the Baroque vitality could only develop deeper tensions and frustration, particularly when bitter jealousies and rivalries divided the dominant white elements. To win favors in this static society the Creole, or the American-born Spaniard, was obliged to cloak his bitter resentment in a hypocritical adulation of the more privileged class, the

European-born Spaniard, and, in an unsatisfying dilettantism, he often frittered away his talents on pageant-like ceremonies, ceremonious functions, and versified panegyrics designed to flatter its vanity. These false and artificial exercises readily carried the Baroque emphasis on form to its most extreme manifestations. Thus it is that the brief career and varied experience of Fray Garcia in the viceroyalty of New Spain epitomize the Baroque age in the distant realms of Spanish America. Embodying the absolute power of a combined Church and State, this Peninsular Spaniard came in medieval pomp and splendor to rule a kingdom as Archbishop-Viceroy. From the moment of his arrival at Vera Cruz to his entombment in the Cathedral of Mexico City he was the object of the theatrical adulation of his subjects in every form of colorful pageantry and exaggerated ceremony. The passion for drama in public spectacles almost reached a delirium in the macabre magnificence of the, funeral obsequies. And the morbid recital of the progressive disintegration of the ailing ecclesiastical potentate, and the meticulous description of the autopsy performed on his cadaver written by a celebrated author of the time, all testify to the pathological concern with death and decay that preoccupied the Baroque mind. Similarly typical of this spirit is the juxtaposition of Fray Garcia's excessive alms-giving and his sensual excitement in the sanguinary spectacle of the bull ring; of his great piety in religious practices and his keen delight in secular music and the pleasures of the palate; of his devotion to his ecclesiastical duties and his insatiable ambition for secular power; and of his position at the pinnacle of his world and his restless vague yearning for still loftier heights. Likewise suggestive of Baroque feeling is the strange coincidence of accidental injury and death and of ominous natural phenomena occurring at proud moments of glory which seemed to confirm its superstition, fatalism, and negativism. In all these aspects of the Archbishop-Viceroy's career the shadow rather than the substance prevails, and form, with its infinite profusion of detail, appears to obliterate the underlying reality. Such were the elements of the spiritual and intellectual climate of the New World centers of Hispanic civilization even long after the seventeenth century had vanished into the mists of the past. Those years in which Fray Garcia was sealing the triumph of the Counter Reformation in Mexico and setting the tone of its

Baroque age were, as earlier noted, of increasing political complexity in a changing Europe. It was a moment of uneasy lull in the stormy decades of war and disorder that had wrecked the Continent in the sixteenth century and would soon resume in the holocaust of the Thirty Years' War and the subsequent clashes of rising nationalism. Hardly comprehending the revolutionary alterations already in movement, the chancellories of Europe were haunted by a sense of impending doom. From Spain the Netherlands had finally wrung a truce in 1609 which recognized the success of Holland's struggle for independence and enabled the Dutch to seize a commanding place in European affairs. This little
nation was even beginning to threaten the Caribbean approaches to the Spanish empire in America. In England the wily Queen Elizabeth had recently died, and the first of the Stuart dynasty was pursuing a policy of appeasement with the weakening monarchy of Spain. Across the Channel in France the assassination of the absolutist Henry IV in 1610 frustrated his "Grand Design" for a federal unification of Europe to replace the vanished medieval unity. A feudal reaction weakened centralizing tendencies until Richelieu and Mazarin would organize the "modern state absolute," destined to elevate France to a great continental power. The loose aggregation of principalities composing the Holy Roman Empire of the Hapsburgs had virtually shrunk to the Germanies, and these weak entities were grouped in a series of alliances called the Protestant Union and the Catholic League. The devastation of the Thirty Years' War would soon insure the liquidation of the medieval concept of imperial organization to which Spain obstinately clung. In Italy the Pope, Paul V, stimulated by Cardinal Bellarmine's theory of papal sovereignty, was vigorously asserting the temporal authority of the Papacy against violations of ecclesiastical jurisdiction committed by the Italian republics. Far to the north, in the Baltic region, the ascendency of Sweden under Gustavus Adolphus was about to get underway, and deep in Eastern Europe, and almost unnoticed, Russia was beginning to emerge from its "time of troubles." In 1613 a grand-nephew of Ivan the Terrible ascended the throne as the first Romanov.1

Externally Spain still appeared a powerful and splendid empire despite the successive defeats of the Armada, the deadlocked struggle in France, and the humiliating armistice in the Netherlands. But internally continuous wars, emigration, and withdrawal to monasteries had depleted its manpower and bled the nation white. Materially it was nearly bankrupt. Its weak, vacillating, and bigoted monarch, Philip III, lacked the stern resolution of his father and willingly he delegated his rule to the first of a series of irresponsible favorites who would speed the Spanish people to ruin. The martial qualities of the Spaniards no longer sufficed to maintain an imperial hegemony over a Europe visibly moving from medievalism to a new political and social order. Inflexibly arrayed on the side of religious orthodoxy and tradition, Spain's leaders failed to muster the still tremendous resources of the empire even to bolster the reactionary policies to which they were irrevocably committed. As Brooks Adams later wrote: "[The Spaniards] never emerged from the imaginative period, they never developed the economic type, and in consequence they never centralized as the English centralized. Even as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century this peculiarity had been observed, for the Duke of Sully remarked that with Spain the legs and arms are strong and powerful, but the heart is infinitely weak."11

Even as Fray García seemed to personify the unassailable might of the neomedieval Spanish system to the inhabitants of New Spain and to give assurance of the secure isolation of that realm, a great era of European expansion was already threatening Hispanic holdings in the Western Hemisphere. Holland, France and England were openly flaunting the Spanish theory of *mare clausum* which claimed for itself the exclusive possession of all western lands washed by the Atlantic. These rivals were boldly asserting the conflicting right of ownership based on effective occupation. By seizing islands of the West Indies and footholds in Guiana and Brazil the Dutch were threatening to make the Caribbean a Dutch sea. On the north mainland Dutchers settled in the Hudson Valley, and in 1614 founded New Amsterdam, the later day New York. In time they pushed southward to imprint their personality on the countryside of later Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, they were effectively relieving the Portugúese of their richest possessions in the East Indies. Still farther north on the American mainland Samuel de Champlain, who had allegedly visited Vera Cruz at the turn of the century, was reconnoitering the St. Lawrence Valley region and

strengthening the foundations of New France in the following decades. And no less active were the English who, just before Fray García's arrival in Mexico, had planted a feeble colony at Jamestown, and others soon followed in New England. Of more immediate danger to Spanish supremacy were the footholds gained by the English in Bermuda and in the Caribbean area. The neomedieval society of New Spain was but dimly aware of these perils, which, as the seventeenth century advanced, would grow more serious and deepen the vague anxiety and disquiet that haunted the inhabitants of the realm. Such, briefly, were the circumstances that the pomp and pageantry of Fray García's few years and those following sought to conceal from the subjects of the Spanish crown. Resolutely fixing its gaze on the past, the Hispanic world contrived an illusory stability in a changing universe. For the moment it seemed to succeed, for those were "the sultry years of precarious power"x in Europe offering a short interval of equilibrium before accumulating forces precipitated the downward course of peoples dedicated to preserving the old. As inevitable defeat slowly overtook its dream of a neomedieval unity the Court at Madrid blinded itself to reality in the refugent...
splendor of the Baroque art and letters created by the amazingly fecund genius of the nation. And even longer, if less brilliantly, Mexico City and other viceregal capitals of the New World would preserve the illusion possessing the motherland, thanks to the latter's protection, to the precariously maintained isolation, and to the rich silver mines that fed their economy. In the intricacy and profusion of a Baroque pattern the frustrated dynamism of Old and New Spain alike found its most enduring expression in life and thought.