

was a people that had formerly lived in the neighborhood of a distant sea, and called on that account by the Algonquins the "Tribe of the Men of the Sea." It was told furthermore that this "Tribe of the Sea" held intercourse with people living still farther west who reached them by crossing a vast extent of water in large canoes made of wood, and not of bark, and who because of their lack of beards, their shaved heads, costumes, etc., seemed to resemble greatly the Tartars or the Chinese.¹ With the aid of a little imagination and with no lack of willingness — one is always inclined to believe what one desires! — it was easy to discern this vast extent of water, the sea that separates America from Asia, the north Pacific; and in the voyagers, the Chinese or Japanese. It was the opinion of Champlain, of the missionaries, and of the better informed colonists, that in pushing westward it would be comparatively easy to find a shorter road to China by crossing America, than that usually followed in rounding the cape of Good Hope. Ever since the time of James Cartier this idea had haunted the minds of men and they deceived themselves as to the real width of the American continent. They believed that it would be sufficient to penetrate two or three hundred leagues inland, in order to find, if not the Pacific ocean, at least a bay or some great river, leading there.

Nicolet, during his long sojourn at Lake Nipissing, must have heard the same tales, as the Nipissiriniens went every year, it appears, to trade with a tribe removed from them by a five or six weeks' journey; and this tribe was supposed to trade with people living still farther who came by water in large wooden canoes.² His curiosity must have been as much excited as Champlain's and we may suppose that they had spoken together of the problem to be solved — the discovery of a direct route to China, — and no one appeared more capable than Nicolet of clearing up the matter.

The 1st of July, 1634, two fleets of canoes left Quebec and

¹The first mentioned tribe were the Winnebagoes and the second the Sioux. — Ed.

²Benjamin Sulte (after F. Sagard, 1625), *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Littérature*, 1876. — H. J.