



Pizarro and the Conquest of Peru

By Frederick Ober

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Pyrrhus Press specializes in bringing books long out of date back to life, allowing today's readers access to yesterday's treasures. This is a biography of one of Spain's most notorious explorers and conquistadores, Francisco Pizarro. Naturally, as one of the best known conquistadors, Francisco Pizarro (1471/6-1541) is also one of the most controversial. Like Christopher Columbus and Hernan Cortés before him, Pizarro was celebrated in Europe for subduing the Inca Empire, a culture that fascinated his contemporaries. At the same time, naturally, indigenous views of the man have been overwhelmingly negative. . If Columbus and Cortés were the pioneers of Spain's new global empire, Pizarro consolidated its immense power and riches, and his successes inspired a further generation to expand Spain's dominions to unheard of dimensions. Furthermore, he participated in the forging of a new culture: like Cortés, he took an indigenous mistress with whom he had two mixed-race children, and yet the woman has none of the lasting fame of Cortés's Doña Marina. With all of this in mind, it is again remarkable that Pizarro remains one of the less well-known and less written about of the explorers of his age. On the other hand, there are certain factors that may account for the conqueror of Peru's relative lack of lasting glory. For one, he was a latecomer in more than one sense. Cortés's reputation was built on being the first to overthrow a great empire, so Pizarro's similar feat, even if it bore even greater fruit in the long run, would always be overshadowed by his predecessor's precedent. But Pizarro also lacked the youthful glamour of Cortés: already a wizened veteran in his 50s by the time he undertook his momentous expedition, he proceeded with the gritty determination of a hardened soldier rather than the audacity and cunning of a young courtier.

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