

Literature, &c.

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VASCO DE GAMA; AND THE CON-
QUEST OF HINDOSTAN.

WHILE Spain directed her attention to the exploration and subjugation of the West, Portugal, her sister nation and maritime rival, sought dominion and wealth in the East. While the cruel and immoral adventurers of the former nation carried havoc and ruin into the hearts of the islands and countries of the new world, the equally iron-hearted and gold-worshipping navigators of the latter blighted almost as soon as they discovered the *terra incognita* of Asia. The motive which induced the chivalry of Spain and Portugal to forsake the barbed steel, and its theatre of operations, the land, for the sea, was the same—the desire of acquiring wealth, not by the most honorable but in the most rapid way. Portugal, if it does not occupy so prominent a position in the annals of discovery as Spain, can still claim a propriety in the path of exploration. It was from the fame of her discoveries in the east that all Europe became imbued with a passion for marine adventure, and consequently it was from her Spain received the impulse of navigation. Under the energetic and fostering auspices of Prince Henry of Portugal, the idea of circumnavigating the continent of Africa, in order to open a path to India, was pursued with much zeal and success. India was looked upon as the grand source of wealth and commerce; and keeping their eyes steadily fixed upon the probable results of every new discovery, the Portuguese pursued their researches along the African coast until they doubled its southernmost promontory and opened the path to the countries and islands of Eastern Asia.

The grand object of Portuguese exploration—that of rounding the Cape—was said to be attained in 1486 by Bartholomew Diaz, who discovered it, although generally attributed to Covilham and Vasco De Gama. To De Gama, however, belongs the undoubted honour of having applied the knowledge of Covilham to the extension of eastern discovery, and of having led the first fleet to the rich shores of India—an event which, by exciting the cupidity of adventurers and the speculation of geographers, led also to the extension of American discovery. It was the idea of finding a western passage to India which sent Columbus across the Atlantic Ocean, and when he landed upon San Salvador the belief that he had come upon the extreme islands of Asia, caused him to give the name of West India to those islands in the Gulf of Mexico which have no relation to India whatever. It was not until eleven years after the passage of the Cape by Diaz, and when Covilham, a Portuguese resident in Abyssinia, had repeatedly pointed out the practicability of a passage by this route to India, that Emanuel, king of Portugal, determined, to send a fleet thither. Kings have never shown themselves to be very scrupulous in the choice of those upon whom they sought to shower those nominal favours called titles, but when any serious business was to be done they have in a great many instances given indications of judgment and prudence in their choice. It is a well known truth that obscure merit, although despised and treated with indifference, is always placed in its legitimate position when required, and accordingly Vasco De Gama, although no great courtier, but well known for his prudence, courage, and skill in navigation, was chosen commander of the expedition that was to visit India. When we contrast the vessels which are fitted out for modern exploration with those of the fifteenth century, and when we compare the relative skill of the mariners of that period with ours, we wonder at the courage and perseverance of the early discoverers, as well as at the dangers which they must have encountered from the smallness and weakness of their vessels and the paucity of hands to work them. This expedition, which was to proceed upon so long and hazardous a voyage, consisted of three ships, carrying in all about sixty men.

Vasco De Gama set sail on the 8th of July, 1497, five years after Columbus had discovered America, and he steered direct for Cape Verd Isles. From thence he bore directly to St. Helena, in the South Atlantic Ocean, and only comparatively a little to the north of the southern point of Africa, which in two days he reached and doubled, despite of the strong south-east winds which blow there continuously during summer. In addition to the opposition which he met from the weather, De Gama, like every commander of his times, had to contend with the arrant epedemical cowardice of his crews. Gross superstition and instability of courage seem to have been the most predominant elements in the characters of the Spaniards and Portuguese of those times, if we except cupidity; and while their commanders were sometimes constrained to check their cruel avarice, they were as often obliged to expostulate and threaten in order to overcome the most trifling obstacles. By firmness and address De Gama subdued the fears of his men, and induced them to proceed upon the voyage. Steering to the east, along the southern shore of Africa, the expedition arrived at the bay of St. Blaise, and shortly after at the estate of La Cruz, where according to several narrators, the discoveries of Diaz terminated.

Here the the African coast begins its northern inclination, and consequently, when it was passed the Portuguese had entered the Indian Ocean. Vasco De Gama had not proceeded upon this voyage on mere speculation. Pedro De Covilham, a Portuguese nobleman, had undertaken an overland journey to India, at the instance of John of Portugal, in search of the dominions of one Ogane, a prince whose dominions were reputed to be as extensive as they were rich. Covilham penetrated into Arabia Petraea, where he received some valuable information regarding the trade of Calicut, which place he visited, together with Cananor and Goa; he then crossed over to Sofala, anciently Ophir on the Coast of Africa, in order to examine the celebrated gold mines of that country; there he got the first distinct account of the island of the Moon or Madagascar. Satisfied with his discoveries, he intended to return to Portugal, but he was met by two Jews at Cairo, who informed him of the murder of his companion Payva, who had intended to go in quest of the kingdom of Ogane. Upon the receipt of this intelligence Covilham sent his journal, together with a map which had been presented to him by a Moor, to Portugal, and abandoning the idea of returning home, he journeyed to Abyssinia, accompanied by one of the Jews. Here he was most hospitably entertained by the king, who appreciating and taking advantage of his superior knowledge, constrained him, it is said, to take up his permanent residence in Abyssinia. Covilham remained; but whether he was induced to do so by persuasion or constraint does not matter; he married, and attained the highest offices in the state, but still kept up a correspondence with his native country, and it was his representations and advice that he had led to the undertaking of De Gama. In order, therefore, that he might find all the countries which Covilham had visited, Vasco De Gama kept sailing along shore, invariably keeping within sight of land. Wherever he saw symptoms of a settled population, he always sent on shore or went himself, in order that he might become acquainted with the character and productions of the country, and to discover whether it had been previously visited by Covilham. In this tedious and almost uninteresting manner he crawled along shore, until at last, in the beginning of March, 1498, he anchored before the city of Mozambique, situated on the island of that name, which at that time was inhabited by Mahomedan Arabs, who were governed by a prince professing their own faith, and who carried on a great trade with the cities on either shore of the Red Sea and with the Indies.

The idea of deriving advantage from a trade with the strangers, induced the Mozambique Mussulmen, to give them a favourable reception. But as soon as it was discovered that the Portuguese were professing Christians the Moslems sought to destroy them. De Gama was constrained to fly from these treacherous people. And he then steered northward and reached Mombasa. This city was built in a superior style to Mazambique; and carried on a still more extensive trade; but the inhabitants were of the same stock and faith as the Mozambiqueans, whose hospitality was also assumed, to hide their purpose to destroy the adventurers. Obtaining no information, from these crafty Mussulman merchants, the Portuguese squadron proceeded eighteen leagues farther on their voyage, next touching at Melinda, where the influence of commerce seemed to have softened the austere manners of the Mahomedans. The sovereign of Melinda received Gama with every mark of favour, visiting his ships and inviting him on shore. The Portuguese commander was unwilling, however to run the risk of exciting the bigotry of the people, and he therefore declined the invitation. Several of his officers, whom he allowed to visit the king, were treated with every mark of hospitality and respect. Melinda is situated in two and a half degrees of south latitude, between the rivers Qilimanchi and the Great rivers. The soil was generally fertile, and finely interspersed with trees yielding a variety of fruits. Flowers and esculents were also abundant. The town of Melinda gave evidence of a busy, thriving, commercial city. It was built upon a plain, and presented a very pleasant and picturesque appearance. The houses were built of stone, as if the Arab merchants had no intention of returning again to the wandering habits of their people, and they were very richly furnished with manufactured articles indicating the security and encouragement, which were given for the accumulation of wealth, and a high state of advancement in art. The access to the harbour of Melinda was intercepted by rocks, and other subterranean obstructions, so that the adventurers were constrained to cast anchor at some distance from the town, but here Vasco de Gama found many ships from India, the owners of which carried on a brisk trade with the merchants of Melinda in gold, copper, quicksilver, ivory and wax, and who gave them silks, cottons, linen cloth, corn, and other commodities in exchange. To the northward of Melinda there is a large and commodious Bay, which the adventurers designated Bahia Formosa, and which is the ancient Tarshish of Scripture its coast is difficult of access, being dotted with many rocks and shoals, but, formed by the mouth of Great River, were three fertile and populous islands, which were ultimately subjected to the Portuguese sway. While at Melinda Gama was warned by some Christians of that country to be on their guard, and not to trust too much to hospitable appearance. This advice harmonised too well with

De Gama's own opinions and experience for him to neglect it; he therefore kept a strict watch upon all the movements of the Melindians, and left their shores without injury. On the contrary, the king presented to him several rich presents, the most important of which was Melema Camo, an Indian of Guzerat, who was the most experienced navigator of the Indian seas. This Mariner did not evince the least surprise, when he saw the astrolabe with which the European Navigators observed the sun's Meridian latitude, and when questioned upon the subject, he said that the pilots of the Red Sea, used some instruments of a similar construction for the same purpose.

From Melinda Vasco De Gama turned the prow of his vessels towards the north east, and sailing among the islands of the Indian ocean, during twenty three days, he arrived at Calicut, on the Malabar coast, which was then the grand mercantile or commercial emporium of India. This proud and wealthy city was then free from the domination of the European stranger, and was governed by a native prince who bore the title of Zamorin. The messengers of the voyager landed, and found means to introduce themselves to the ministers of this ruler, and so successful were their first negotiations, that they were immediately allowed to enter the port, and the Zamorin consented that Vasco should be presented to him and received with all the honours usually shown to ambassadors of powerful monarchs. The want of reciprocal good faith however, marred all the attempts at friendly intercourse between the voyagers and the Indians. The Portuguese were suspicious of the Mahomedans; and they therefore advised their commander not to trust himself on shore.

In a council which was held previous to his landing, his brother Paul importuned him to remain on ship board; but Vasco still maintaining his resolution of going on shore, and ordered that his brother should take command of the fleet during his absence. He disregarded danger, supposing that he might be able to form a commercial alliance with the Zamorin, and thus conduce to the glory and exaltation of his country. To prove however that he was not dead to the danger which his officers declared menaced him. He ordered that in case of his death Paul should immediately depart and inform the king that India was discovered, and also that Vasco de Gama had died in his endeavours to aggrandize his country.

Next morning after his arrival in the harbor of Calicut, the mariner, accompanied by twelve resolute men, as a body guard, landed and proceeded to the palace of the Zamorin. The residence of the prince was situated some miles in the interior, so that, after having been received with great pomp at their landing, the strangers had to pass through the city on their way to the country residence of the monarch. As they passed along they were greeted by a wondering multitude of people from all the trading nations of Asia, whose admiration of the pale faced strangers was, no doubt heightened by their singular costume, so unlike anything Indian. Upon his arrival at the country residence of the Zamorin, De Gama was so well received that he entertained the most sanguine hopes of being able to negotiate a treaty of commerce between his native country and this splendid and richest of Asiatic Cities, but the intrigues of the Mahomedans, had followed him from Mombasa and Mozambique to Calicut, so that when he found himself upon the point of forming an alliance advantageous to his country, the representations of the Arab traders induced the Zamorin to believe that the Portuguese were mere pirates, who had found their way into the Indian seas for no other purpose, than to promote commotion and turmoil, in order that they might pillage and destroy. These insinuations, supported by the apparent poverty of the adventurers, produced the desired effect. The magnificent presents which De Gama offered to the ministers of the Zamorin were so contemptible in their estimation; that they indignantly rejected them; and this cause of estrangement being followed by others; De Gama began to fear that he would either be detained a prisoner, or put to death along with his twelve companions.

At length De Gama received private information, that under the pretence of a reconciliation, it was intended to bring his fleet into a position convenient for its destruction. Vasco found means to convey this intelligence to his brother, who conducted measures so firmly, and at the same time prudently, that he frustrated the designs of the conspirators. The firmness and address of Vasco, on the other hand, enabled him to secure the respect of the prince, and to convince him that he was indeed the Representative of some great commercial nation; with which an alliance would be to the Zamorin's advantage; and while the Prince was in this belief, he obtained leave to return to his ships.

As soon as De Gama was free he bore away from Calicut, to the Angedive Islands, a little to the north, whence having repaired his ships; he steered directly for Europe. In passing Melinda, which is separated on the west coast coast of Africa, and only a little to the south of the equator. De Gama took on board an ambassador from the king of that country, the only one who had manifested anything like sincere friendship for the Portuguese. In March 1499 the navigator doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived at Lisbon on the September following, having been absent two years. Emanuel received Da Gama with great pomp and rejoicing, lavishing titles upon

him, and causing his return to be celebrated with great festivities.

This voyage of Vasco de Gama may, with confidence, be termed the precursor of a system of spoliation and flagrant injustice, which disgraces the history of every European nation, which has sent its ships to the East. Emanuel no sooner heard of the wealth of Asiatic cities, than he desired to appropriate it to his own uses; and as he knew that it was necessary to consummate his designs, he fitted out a fleet of thirteen sail, and despatched them to India, under the command of Pedro Alvarez Cabral. There had been a outcry raised against the expenses required to equip the three small vessels of De Gama, cause the profits of his voyage were as blarney as the issue of the voyage, but no sooner did he bring home the news of his success, than the nobility embarked with avidity in the expedition of Cabral, anticipating a rich return in the spoils of the conquest which they should subjugate. The Arab merchants had no doubt reasoned hypothetically when they called the Portuguese Pirates, they had done so upon no other grounds than their own suppositions. Subsequent events however verified the fact, and wrote it into the heart of sacked and plundered India. Alvarez carried with him a number of Franciscan monks, to teach the nations of the Christianity; and as if in utter mockery of the mandate of the Saviour, he had 1200 men to support the priests in the propagation of the precepts of the Prince of Peace. In order to avoid the storms of the Cape of Hope, Cabral steered boldly to the west and thus fortuitously discovered Brazil. Although meeting with severe storms, losing a portion of his armament, he pursued his voyage, and arriving at Calicut was received with much deference by the king of that region, who, in order to dispel the impression, which his equivocal conduct to De Gama, might have produced upon the minds of his countrymen, gave to Cabral right of settlement in his territory, and ordered him to appoint a trading factor or agent for his nation. This amicable feeling did long exist however, for the Portuguese, to acquire the wealth of the Indians, scrupled to use the most unjust means to it, and having begun to treat the people of Calicut more as conquerors than as first traders they were set upon and slain a number of fifty. Cabral visited Cochinchina, Cananore, lading his vessels with rich cargoes, and bearing home ambassadors from the chiefs of these comparatively new states.

Every subsequent voyage tended to increase the avaricious propensities of the Portuguese, and accordingly rendered the fitting fleets for India a work of easy attainment. In 1502, therefore, they fitted out a fleet of twenty sail and Vasco De Gama was ordered to take the command of it. Almost all of De Gama's acts, when he arrived on the coast of Africa, was one of essential cruelty. He set upon the King Quilao, and compelled him to become tributary to the King of Portugal, forcing him to promise to pay thousand crowns of gold annually. Leaving Quilao, and steering across the Indian Ocean he came upon a group of islands, which he called Admiral Isles. Upon his arrival at the Malabar, or western coast of Hindostan, with his increased force, the Sovereigns of Cananore and Cochinchina hastened to congratulate him, and the Christians of St Thomas sought his protection, which he granted, leaving part of his squadron to act with or for them. Remembering his own usage at Calicut, in hearing of the massacre of the Portuguese left by Cabral, Vasco approached them not in a very friendly aspect, and the King, who knew what he might expect, sent a fleet to oppose him. The Portuguese gained an easy victory, capturing two vessels which contained immense riches. In addition to a vast quantity of gold and silver there was on board one of these ships a large image which weighed sixty pounds, and whose eyes were emeralds of great size, and whose breast was a ruby as large as a child's head. Laden with the spoils of this purely piratical excursion, De Gama returned home, landed at Lisbon without a single accident. Here the plaudits of his countrymen and the praises of his king awaited him. Cheered by every demonstration of popular joy at his landing, and to swell his triumph, he conveyed a right sense of the value of his services to Portugal, the tribute of the King of India was borne before him in a silver basin. De Gama is no more heard of in the history of voyaging he retired to enjoy in ease the fruits of his toils and the honours conferred upon him by his king.

Elated by success, and strengthened by appetite for gold by their repeated acquisitions, the Portuguese gradually extended their geographical discoveries even to the island of Japan. Fleet after fleet was sent out, in sanction of the government, to the East, the only compensation of those who were sent out was the plunder which they gained from the Indians. Their voyages, that of Vasco De Gama, became more and more voyages of conquest, until they at last appeared in their worst and most rapacious tyranny. By their warlike and avaricious conduct the Portuguese became masters of Arabia, the peninsula of Hindostan and Malacca, together with the Moluccas, Ceylon, and islands of Sunda. But the voluptuousness which their ill acquired wealth produced rendered them incapable of supporting themselves in the position of masters of