

HISTORY

OF

BRITISH INDIA.

BOOK I.

(1527—1707)

Commencement of the British Intercourse with India; and the Circumstances of its Progress, till the Establishment of the Company on a durable Basis by the Act of the sixth of Queen Anne.

LITTLE more than two centuries have elapsed since a few British merchants humbly solicited from the princes of India permission to traffic in their territories. Book I.

The British dominion now embraces nearly the whole of that vast region which extends from Cape Comorin to the mountains of Tibet, and from the mouths of the Brahmapootra to the sources of the Indus.

To collect, from its numerous and scattered sources, the information necessary to give clear and accurate ideas of this great empire, and of the transactions through which it has been acquired, is the object of the present undertaking. Object of the work. It is proposed:

I. To describe the circumstances in which the intercourse of this nation with India commenced, and the particulars of its early progress, till the era when it could first be regarded as placed on a firm and durable basis:

II. To exhibit as accurate a view as possible of the people with whom our countrymen had thus begun to transact—of their character, history, manners,

BOOK I. religion, arts, literature, and laws; as well as of the physical circumstances of climate, soil, and production, in which they were placed :

III. To deduce to the present times a history of the British transactions in relation to India; by recording the train of events; by unfolding the constitution of the East India Company, that body, half political, half commercial, through whom the business has been ostensibly carried on; by describing the nature, progress, and effects of their commercial operations; by exhibiting the legislative proceedings, the discussions and speculations, to which our intercourse with India has given birth; by analysing the schemes of government which have been adopted for our Indian dominions; and by an attempt to discover the character and tendency of that species of relation to one another in which Great Britain and the Indies are placed.

The subject forms an entire, and highly interesting, portion of the British History; and it is hardly possible that the matter should have been brought together, for the first time, without being instructive, however unskilfully the task may have been performed. If the success of the author corresponded with his wishes, he would throw light upon a state of society highly curious, and hitherto commonly misunderstood; upon the history of society, which in the compass of his work presents itself in almost all its stages and all its shapes; upon the principles of legislation, in which he has so many important experiments to describe; and upon interests of his country, of which his countrymen have hitherto remained very much in ignorance, while prejudice usurped and abused the prerogatives of understanding.

CHAP. I.

From the Commencement of the Efforts to begin a Trade with India, till the Change of the Company from a regulated to a joint-stock Company.

THE Portuguese had formed important establishments in India before the British offered themselves as competitors for the riches of the East.

Portuguese first enjoyed the trade to India by the Cape of Good Hope.

From the time when Vasco de Gama distinguished his nation by discovering the passage round the Cape of Good Hope, and first reached the coast of Hindustan, a whole century had elapsed, during which, without a rival, they had enjoyed and abused the advantages of superior knowledge and art, amid a feeble

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and half-civilized race. They had explored the Indian ocean, as far as Japan ; had discovered its islands, rich with some of the most favourite productions of nature ; had achieved the most brilliant conquests ; and by their commerce poured into Europe, in unexampled profusion, those commodities of the East on which the nations at that time set an extraordinary value.

CHAP. I.

The circumstances of this splendid fortune had violently attracted the attention of Europe. The commerce of India, even when confined to those narrow limits which a carriage by land had prescribed, was supposed to have elevated feeble states into great ones ; and to have constituted an enviable part in the fortune even of the most opulent and powerful ; to have contributed largely to support the Grecian monarchies both in Syria and Egypt ; to have retarded the downfall of Constantinople ; and to have raised the small and obscure republic of Venice to the rank and influence of the most potent kingdoms. The discovery therefore of a new channel for this opulent traffic, and the happy experience of the Portuguese, inflamed the cupidity of all the maritime nations of Europe, and set before them the most tempting prospects.

An active spirit of commerce had already begun to display itself in England. The nation had happily obtained its full share of the improvement which had dawned in Europe ; and the tranquil and economical reign of Elizabeth had been favourable both to the accumulation of capital, and to those projects of private emolument on which the spirit of commerce depends. A brisk trade, and of considerable extent, had been carried on during the greater part of the sixteenth century with the Netherlands, at that time the most improved and commercial part of Europe. The merchants of Bristol had opened a traffic with the Canary Islands ; those of Plymouth with the coasts of Guinea and Brazil : the English now fished on the banks of Newfoundland ; and explored the sea of Spitzbergen, for the sovereign of the waters : they engrossed, by an exclusive privilege, the commerce of Russia : they took an active part in the trade of the Mediterranean : the company of merchant-adventurers pushed so vigorously the traffic with Germany and the central parts of Europe, as highly to excite the jealousy of the Hanse Towns : and the protestant inhabitants of the Netherlands and France, flying from the persecutions of their own oppressive and bigoted governments, augmented the commercial resources of England by the capital and skill of a large importation of the most ingenious and industrious people in Europe.*

Commercial
and nautical
spirit of the
English.

* Anderson's History of Commerce in the reign of Elizabeth, passim. See also Hakluyt's Voyages, ii. 3, 96. Ibid. iii. 690. Guicciardini's Description of the Netherlands. Sir William Temple. Camden, 408.

BOOK I.

1527.

In these circumstances the lustre of the Portuguese transactions in the East peculiarly attracted the admiration of the English. Already a most adventurous spirit of navigation was roused in the nation. The English were the first who had imitated the example of the Spaniards in visiting the New World. In 1497, Cabot, with a small squadron, explored the coast of America from Labrador to Virginia, and discovered the islands of Newfoundland and St. John.* An English merchant, named Robert Thorne, who had been stationed for many years at Seville in Spain, and had acquired particular knowledge of the intercourse which the Portuguese had opened with the East, presented a project to Henry VIII. about the year 1527, the accomplishment of which he imagined would place his country in a situation no less enviable than that of the Portuguese. As that nation had obtained a passage to India by a course to the south-east, and pretended a right, which they defended by force, to its exclusive occupation, he supposed that his countrymen might reach the same part of the globe by sailing to the north-west, and thus obtain a passage at once expeditious and undisputed. † What effect this representation produced on the mind of Henry is not accurately known. But two voyages in the course of his reign were undertaken for the discovery of a north-west passage, one about this period, ‡ and another ten years later. §

Project to discover a north-west passage to India.

To discover a north-east passage.

Nothing can more clearly prove to us the ardour with which the English coveted a share in the riches supposed to be drawn by the Portuguese from the East, than the persevering efforts which they made to discover a channel from which the Portuguese would have no pretence to exclude them. Two attempts in the reign of Henry to obtain a passage by the north-west had failed: their exploring fancy anticipated a happier issue from a voyage to the north-east. A small squadron, accordingly, under the direction of Sir Hugh Willoughby, was fitted out in the reign of Edward VI.; and, sailing along the coast of Norway, doubled the North Cape, || where it was encountered by a storm. The ship of Sir Hugh was driven to an obscure spot in Russian Lapland, where he and his crew perished miserably by the climate. The other principal vessel found shelter in the harbour of Archangel, and was the first foreign ship by which it was entered. So well did Chancellour, the captain of the vessel, improve this incident, that he opened a commercial intercourse with the natives,

* Hakluyt, iii. 4. Rymer's *Fœdera*, xii. 595. Anderson's *History of Commerce*, published in Macpherson's *Annals*, ii. 11. Robertson's *History of America*, iv. 138.

† Hakluyt, iii. 129. Harris's *Collection of Voyages*, i. 874.

‡ Hakluyt, ut supra.

§ Ibid. 131.

|| Hakluyt, i. 226, &c.

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visited the monarch in his capital, stipulated important privileges for his countrymen; and laid the foundation of a trade which was immediately prosecuted to no inconsiderable extent. This voyage but little damped the hopes of obtaining a north-east passage to the riches of India. Some vigorous attempts were made by the company in whose hands the commerce with Russia was placed;* the last of them in 1580, when two ships were sent out to explore the passage through the straits of Waygatz: after struggling with many perils and difficulties from the ice and the cold, one of the vessels returned unsuccessful; the other was never heard of more.

CHAP. I.
 1567.

Before this hope was regarded as desperate, the project of obtaining a passage by the north-west was resumed with ardour. No fewer than six voyages were made in the course of a few years. Two barks of twenty-five tons each, and a pinnace of ten, sailed under Martin Frobisher in the year 1567, and entered Hudson's bay, which at first they imagined was the inlet about to conduct them to the golden shore. The same navigator was encouraged to make a second attempt in the same direction in 1576. As he brought home in these voyages some minerals which were supposed to be impregnated with gold, the attention of government was excited; and two years afterwards Frobisher was sent out with fifteen of the Queen's ships, carrying miners for the supposed ore, and 120 persons as the rudiments of a colony: having spent his provisions, and lost one of his ships, but not found the expected passage, nor left his settlers, he returned with 300 tons of the supposed treasure, which proved to be only a glittering sand. † The nation persevered in its hopes and enterprises. A few years afterwards Captain John Davis sailed as far as 66° 40' north, and discovered the straits distinguished by his name. In a second voyage, undertaken in 1586, he explored in vain the inlet which he had thus discovered. After a few years he was enabled to proceed in a third expedition, which had no better success than the preceding two. ‡

After so many efforts to discover a new passage to India, the English resolved to be no longer deterred by the pretensions of the Portuguese. A voyage to China by the Cape of Good Hope was undertaken in 1582. Four ships proceeded to the coast of Brazil, fought with some Spanish men of war, and were obliged to return for want of provisions.§ Another expedition, consisting of three ships.

Voyages
 vainly at-
 tempted by
 the Cape of
 Good Hope.

* Anderson's History of Commerce in Macpherson, ii. 166.

† Hakluyt. Anderson, ut supra, ii. 145, 158, 159.

‡ Hakluyt. Anderson, ut supra, ii. 175, 180, 185.

§ Anderson, ut supra, ii. 171.

Book I. was fitted out in 1596, the commander of which was furnished with Queen Elizabeth's letters to the Emperor of China. This voyage proved eminently unfortunate. The ships were driven upon the coast of Spanish America, where only four men were preserved alive from the effects of storms, famine, and disease.*

Drake reaches
 India by sail-
 ing round
 Cape Horn.

Amid these unsuccessful endeavours two voyages were accomplished, which animated the hopes of the nation, and pointed out the way to more fortunate enterprises. Francis Drake, the son of a clergyman in Kent, who at a tender age had been put an apprentice to the master of a slender bark trading to the coast of Holland and France, had early evinced that passionate ardour in his profession which is the usual forerunner of signal success.† He gained the affections of his master, who left him his bark at his death; at the age of eighteen he was purser of a ship which sailed to the bay of Biscay; at twenty he made a voyage to the coast of Guinea; in 1565 he ventured all he possessed in a voyage to the West Indies, which had no success; and in 1567 he served under his kinsman Sir John Hawkins, in his unprosperous expedition to the bay of Mexico. In these different services, his nautical skill, his courage and sagacity, had been conspicuously displayed. In 1570 his reputation enabled him to proceed to the West Indies with two vessels under his command. So bent was he on executing some great design, that he renewed his visit the next year, for the sole purpose of obtaining information. He had no sooner returned than he planned an expedition against the Spaniards, executed it with two ships and seventy-three men, sacked the town of Nombre de Dios, and returned with great treasure. It is said that, in this voyage, he saw from the top of a high tree, i. e. fancied he saw, across the American isthmus, the Southern Ocean, and became inflamed with the desire of sailing to it in a ship of England.

For this expedition he prepared on a great scale: obtaining the commission of the Queen; and five vessels, one of 100 tons, another of eighty, one of fifty, another of thirty, and a pinnace of fifteen; manned with 164 select sailors. The historians of his voyage are anxious to display the taste and magnificence, as well as judgment, of his preparations; expert musicians, rich furniture, utensils of the most curious workmanship, all the vessels of his table silver, and many of those of his cook-room.

The expedition sailed from Plymouth on the 13th of December, 1577. Having passed the Straits of Magellan, and ravaged the western coast of Spanish

* Purchas, b. iii. sect. 2. Anderson, ii. 210.

† Hakluyt, iii. 440. Harris's Collection of Voyages, i. 14. Camden's Annals, 301, &c.

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America, Drake feared the encounter of a Spanish fleet should he attempt to return in the same direction, and formed the bold design of crossing the Pacific Ocean to India, and regaining England by the Cape of Good Hope.

CHAP. I.
 1577.

With one ship, the only part of the fleet which remained, he steered along the coast of America to the latitude of 38° north, and then entered upon that immense navigation, in which Magellan, the only circumnavigator who preceded him, had suffered so much. No memorable occurrence attended the voyage. Of the islands which have been discovered in the Pacific Ocean none were observed till he approached the Asiatic coast. Fixing his attention on the Moluccas, of which the fame had been circulated in Europe by the rich spices thence imported by the Portuguese, he passed, with little observation, the more eastern part of the numerous islands which stud the Indian seas, and held his course for Tidore. From intelligence, received on the passage, he waved his intention of landing on that island, and steered for Ternate, the sovereign of which he understood to be at enmity with the Portuguese.

The intercourse which he there commenced forms a remarkable epoch in the history of the British in India, as it was the beginning of those commercial transactions which have led to such important results. The King, having received assurances that his new visitants came with no other intention than that of trading with his country, gave them a very favourable reception. This monarch possessed considerable power; since the English navigators were informed that he ruled over seventy islands, besides Ternate, the most valuable of all the Moluccas; and in the visits which they paid to his court they were eye-witnesses that he could display no contemptible share of magnificence. They exchanged presents with him, received him on board, and traded with his subjects; laid in a cargo of valuable spices, and acquainted themselves with the nature and facilities of a commerce which was so much the object of admiration in Europe.

Not satisfied with the information or the commodities which they received on one island, they visited several, being always amazed at their prodigious fertility, and in general delighted with the manners of the inhabitants. Among other places they landed in the great island of Java, famous afterwards as the seat of the Dutch government in India. They held some friendly intercourse with the natives, and departed with a tolerable knowledge both of the character of the people, and the productions of the country.

They now spread their sails for that navigation between Europe and India, to which the Portuguese claimed an exclusive right, and by which they monopolized the traffic with India. Those discoverers had craftily disseminated in

BOOK I. } Europe terrific accounts of dangers and horrors attending the navigation round the Cape of Good Hope. As the voyage of the English proved remarkably prosperous, they were surprised and delighted with the safety and ease which seemed to them to distinguish this envied passage, and conceived a still more lofty opinion of the advantages enjoyed by the nation that engrossed it. After leaving Java, the first land which they touched was the Cape of Good Hope. They landed once more at Sierra Leone, on the African coast, where they received such supplies as sufficed for the remainder of the voyage. They arrived at Plymouth on Monday the 26th of September, 1580, after a voyage of two years, ten months, and a few days, exhibiting to the wondering eyes of the spectators the first ship in England, and the second in the world, which had circumnavigated the globe. The news quickly spread over the whole kingdom, which resounded with the applauses of the man who had performed so daring and singular an enterprise. Whoever wished to be distinguished as the patron of merit hastened to confer some mark of his admiration on Captain Drake. The songs, epigrams, poems, and other pieces, which were composed in celebration of his exploits, amounted to several collections.* The Queen, after some delay, necessary to save appearances with the Spanish court, which loudly complained of the depredations of Drake, though as reprisals perhaps they were not undeserved, paid a visit in person to the wonderful ship at Deptford; accepted of an entertainment on board, and conferred the honour of knighthood on its captain; observing, at the same time, that his actions did him more honour than his title.†

1580.

We may form some conception of the ardour which at that time prevailed in England for maritime exploits, by the number of men of rank and fortune, who chose to forego the indulgences of wealth, and to embark their persons and properties in laborious, painful, and dangerous expeditions. Among them we find such names as those of the Earls of Cumberland and Essex, of Sir Richard Greenville, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Humphry Gilbert, Sir Robert Dudley, who prepared squadrons at their own expense, and sailed to various parts of the

* Harris is not satisfied with the merit of these productions, which reached not, in his opinion, the worth of the occasion; and seems to be rather indignant that no modern poet has rivalled the glory of Homer, "by displaying in verse the labours of Sir Francis Drake:" i. 20.

† Her Majesty appears to have been exquisitely gracious. The crowd which thronged after her was so great that the bridge, which had been constructed between the vessel and the shore, broke down with the weight, and precipitated 200 persons into the water. As they were all extricated from their perilous situation without injury, the Queen remarked that so extraordinary an escape could be owing only to the Fortune of Sir Francis Drake. Harris, i. 20.

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world. No undertaking of this description was attended with more important circumstances than that of Thomas Cavendish.

CHAP. I.
 1586.
 Also Cavendish.

This gentleman, descended from a family of distinction, and inheriting a large estate in the county of Suffolk, had been early fired with a passion for maritime adventure: in a vessel of his own, he had accompanied Sir Richard Greenville in his unsuccessful voyage to Virginia; and now sold or mortgaged his estate, to equip a squadron with which he might rival the glory of Drake. It consisted of three ships, the largest of 140 tons, one of sixty, and a bark of about forty, supplied with two years' provisions, and manned with 126 officers and sailors, of whom several had served in the celebrated expedition of Drake.

They sailed from Plymouth on the 21st of July, 1586. Their voyage through the Straits of Magellan, and the depredations which they proceeded to commit along the western coast of the American continent, not only in the spirit of avarice, but even of wanton devastation, form no part of our present subject, and may without regret be left to other inquirers. They had reached the coast of California, and nearly 24° of northern latitude; when, having taken a very rich Spanish ship, and completed their schemes of plunder, they commenced their voyage across the Pacific Ocean. They left the coast of America on the 19th of November, and came in sight of Guam, one of the Ladrone islands, on the 3d of January. From this island they were visited by sixty or seventy canoes full of the inhabitants, who brought provisions to exchange for commodities, and so crowded about the ship, that the English, when they had finished their traffic, discharged some of their fire-arms to drive them away.* With the Philippines, to which they next proceeded, they opened a more protracted intercourse. They cast anchor at one of the islands, and lay there for nine days, during which they carried on an active trade with the inhabitants.

The cluster of islands to which the Europeans have given the name of the Philippines was discovered by Magellan. Philip II., shortly after his accession to the Spanish throne, planted there a colony of Spaniards, by an expedition from New Spain; and a curious commerce had from that time been carried on across the Great Pacific between this settlement and the dominions of

* I am sorry to observe that no great respect for human life seems to have been observed in this proceeding: since, directly implying that the guns had been charged with shot, and levelled at the men, the historian of the voyage jocosely remarks, "that 'tis ten to one if any of the savages were killed; for they are so very nimble that they drop immediately into the water, and dive beyond the reach of all danger, upon the least warning in the world." Harris's Collect. of Voyages, i. 27.

Book I. Spain in the new world. To Manilla, the capital of the Philippine colony, the Chinese, who resorted thither in great numbers, brought all the precious commodities of India; and two ships were sent annually from New Spain, which carried to the Philippines the silver of the American mines, and returned with the fine productions of the East. The impatience, however, of the natives under the Spanish yoke, was easily perceived. When they discovered that the new visitors were not Spaniards, but the enemies of that people, they eagerly testified their friendship; and the princes of the island, where Cavendish landed, engaged to assist him with the whole of their forces, if he would return, and make war upon the common adversary.

1588.

This adventurous discoverer extensively explored the intricate navigation of the Indian Archipelago, and observed the circumstances of the new and extraordinary scene with a quick and intelligent eye. He visited the Ladrões; pursued a roving course among the Philippines, which brought most of them within his view; he passed through the Moluccas; sailed along that important chain of islands, which, extending from the Strait of Malacca, bounds the Indian Archipelago to the extremity of Timor; and passing the Strait of Bally, between the two Javas, cast anchor on the south-west side of the great island of that name. He traded here with the natives for provisions, and formed with them a sort of treaty, stipulating a favourable reception whenever his visit should be renewed.

He sailed for the Cape of Good Hope on the 16th of March, careful to treasure up information respecting a voyage which was now the channel of so important an intercourse. He made astronomical observations; he studied the weather, the winds, and the tides; he noted the bearing and position of lands; and omitted nothing which might facilitate a repetition of the voyage to himself or any of his countrymen. He passed the Cape with prosperous navigation about the middle of May, and, having touched at St. Helena to recruit his stores, he landed at Plymouth on the 9th of September, 1588. In the letter which, on the very day of his arrival, he wrote to Lord Hunsdon, then Chamberlain to Queen Elizabeth, he says, "I navigated to the islands of Philippines, hard upon the coast of China, of which country I have brought such intelligence as hath not been heard of in these parts; a country, the stateliness and riches of which I fear to make report of, lest I should not be credited. I sailed along the islands of Moluccas, where, among some of the heathen people, I was well entreated, and where our countrymen may have trade as freely as the Portugals, if they themselves will."