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Charles Rathbone Low

Excerpt

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# HISTORY OF THE INDIAN NAVY.

## CHAPTER I.

1600—1622.

Introduction—Early Voyages of the East India Company's Ships—The Company's first *Firman* from the Great Mogul—Formation of a Local Marine at Surat—Captain Best's Victory over the Portuguese Fleet in Swally Roads, and consequent extension of the Company's Trading Privileges—Captain Downton's Defeat of the Portuguese Fleet—Action between the Company's Ships and the Portuguese Carrack—First Appearance of the Company in the Persian Gulf—Some Account of Ormuz—Capture of Ormuz by the Company's Ships and Expulsion of the Portuguese from the Persian Gulf.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been said to the contrary by some English writers, who appear to delight in detracting from their country's merits, there can be no doubt in the minds of those who study the history of our annexations in India, that a more pacific race of Proconsuls than our Governor-Generals, with the exception, perhaps, of Warren Hastings and Lord Ellenborough, never administered the destinies of an empire; but though at the memorable farewell banquets, always given by the Court of Directors to their representatives, on the eve of their departure for the East, "peace, retrenchment, and progress" formed the burthen of the valedictory address of the guest of the evening, yet events were always too strong for them, and, setting out with an honest intention to study the welfare of the many millions committed to their care, they found themselves embroiled in wars, none of their own seeking, and forced to effect annexations from which they were conscientiously averse. And it was so from the beginning. Had the East India Company, in the early years of their existence at Surat, where, as a corporation of traders, they lived from year to year on sufferance, the humble dependents of the Great Mogul and his Governor—had they, in those far off days, not been subjected to "the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely," they would never have developed into the gigantic

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political corporation which overshadowed the East and made the name of Briton as respected throughout the length and breadth of the Asiatic continent as ever was that of the Roman legionary in the proudest days of Rome's ascendancy in Europe.

From the time of their first setting foot in India, and establishing a factory under the firman of the Emperor Jehangire, given in December, 1612, in acknowledgment of the gallantry of Captain Best, the commander of the 'Dragon,' they lived in a constant state of alarm, which acted as the best provocative to the military proclivities that only lie dormant in the breasts of all Englishmen. The clamours of a ferocious populace, endeavouring to beat down the gates of their factory, first induced them to engage the services of a small establishment of "peons;" then the necessity they were under of protecting their trading craft from the aggressions of pirates, with which those seas swarmed, compelled them to build, equip, and man a small fleet of "grabs" and "galivats," the germ of the Indian Navy, whose seamen were landed, when necessary, to defend the factory against the hostile assaults of fanatical mobs or the attacks of Sevajee's wild Mahrattas; later on, convinced of the necessity of having an insular emporium for their trade, whence they could carry on their peaceful avocations without being subjected to the oppression of native rulers, the President and Council of Surat accepted the offer of the King's government, and acquired the island and port of Bombay; and lastly, now being a territorial power, they required soldiers to garrison the fortress, and, as they acquired other possessions on the Coromandel Coast and in Bengal, continued their enlistments until the "Company of Merchants trading to the East Indies" developed into a political organization with enormous standing armies, which overcame all military rivals, European and Native, and, finally, overran the entire peninsula from Peshawur to Cape Comorin, and even carried the British flag to the Hindoo Koosh on the one side, and to the confines of Ava on the other.

Surat, the earliest of the British settlements in India, was also the first home of the Bombay Marine, which, in process of time, developed into the Indian Navy; and this being so, it will be necessary that we should briefly recapitulate the events that led to the formation of this, the first of the factories of that famous Company, which was destined to rival the military achievements of the most powerful empires of ancient and modern times, but, nevertheless, after defying the sword of Sikh, Mahomedan, and Mahratta, succumbed to the stroke of a pen of a Minister of State. Passing strange as is the story of the rise and progress of the greatest of corporations, nothing in its marvellous career is more astonishing than the manner

of its disappearance. Burke, speaking in the latter part of the last century, said:—"The commission of the Company began in commerce, and ended in Empire;" but had this eloquent censor of its first Governor-General lived to the year 1858, he would have regarded as an avenging Nemesis the fate that ended "the commission" of the great Company, not "in empire," but in its annulment by that still mightier power, the will of the British nation as expressed by the majority of the House of Commons.

On the 8th of July, 1497, Vasco Da Gama sailed from Belem on a voyage, the successful result of which was destined to open a new world of commerce and conquest to the maritime nations of Europe. The Cape, first doubled by Bartholomew Diaz, was passed on the 20th of November, and, on Christmas Day, he first saw the land which he called *Tierra de Natal* in honour of the day. The shores of India were sighted on the 17th of May, 1498, and, a few days later, he cast anchor in Calicut, the capital of the Zamorin. Further expeditions followed in rapid succession, under Cabral and other admirals, and the Portuguese, led by Almeida and Albuquerque, established themselves not only at Goa in 1510, but in the island of Ormuz, or Hormúz, in the Persian Gulf, though the latter great Viceroy suffered defeat in his attack on Aden. After the death of Albuquerque, the Portuguese power began visibly to decline in the East, and though his countrymen defeated the Guzerat fleet at Choul, in 1527, and levied contributions upon Tannah and Bassein, which they sacked and burned, they were forced to stand a siege at Diu, where, led by Antonio de Silveira, they displayed the most conspicuous valour and resolution. Until the middle of the sixteenth century, Indian productions reached England through the hands of the Venetians, who carried on an extensive and lucrative trade with Hindostan, viâ Egypt and the Red Sea, thus anticipating the route by which trade now pours into Europe. A commercial expedition, viâ Russia and the Caspian Sea, to Bokhara, was undertaken in 1558, by Mr. A. Jenkinson, but the venture failed commercially, and Jenkinson reported "that the merchants are so poor, and bring so few wares, that there is no hope of any trade worth following."\* During the sixteenth century attempts were made by the Cabots, Frobisher, Davis, and others, to reach India by the North-West passage, and Sir Hugh Willoughby attempted the North-East passage by Norway. In December, 1577, Drake set out on his celebrated voyage to the Pacific by the Straits of Magellan, during which he visited the Moluccas and Java, and, laden with the plunder of the Spanish possessions in South America, returned to Plymouth by the Cape of Good Hope

\* Mr. W. D. Cooley's "History of Maritime and Inland Discovery."

route, after an absence of two years and ten months. Inflamed by his great success, Raleigh, Gilbert, and other Englishmen, fitted out expeditions at their own expense; and Thomas Cavendish explored the Indian Ocean, and, having visited the Ladrones and Philippine groups, returned by the Cape, and cast anchor at Plymouth on the 9th of September, 1588, after an absence of two years and two months. But these were little better than buccaneering ventures, and it was nearly a century after the voyage of Vasco Da Gama that an effort was made to reach the East Indies for purposes of trade.\*

On the 10th of April, 1591, three ships, the 'Penelope,' commanded by George Raymond, the 'Royal Merchant,' by Abraham Kendal, and the 'Edward Bonaventure,' by James Lancaster, sailed from Plymouth for India by the Cape route. The 'Royal Merchant' returned home, with the sick, from Saldanha Bay, the 'Penelope' was supposed to have foundered in a hurricane off Cape Corrientes, and the 'Edward Bonaventure' continued her voyage, and, passing Cape Comorin in May, 1592, carried on privateering in the Bay of Bengal and the neighbouring waters against Portuguese ships with much success. At length the crew mutinied, and, while on the return voyage to England, Captain Lancaster was deserted by the ship in the West Indies, but ultimately made his way to England, where he landed on the 24th of May, 1594, after an absence of three years and six weeks. In the following year a Dutch expedition of four ships, under Houtman, sailed from the Texel, and, after establishing the fact that a direct and lucrative trade with the East was possible, of which the Dutch subsequently took advantage, returned to Amsterdam in August, 1598.†

In the last year of the sixteenth century, the English East India Company made its first appearance on the stage of history. On the 22nd of September, 1599, an association of Merchant Adventurers was formed in London for the purpose of prosecuting a voyage to the East, the aggregate sum embarked being £30,000. Queen Elizabeth directed Fulke Greville, afterwards Lord Brooke, to report upon the memorial of the English merchants, and, this report being of a favourable character‡—though Greville makes the egregious error of confounding Taprobane, or Ceylon, with Sumatra—the Queen signified her approval of the projected voyage. The manage-

\* Four gentlemen, members of the Turkey, or Levant, Company, journeyed to India by Aleppo, Bagdad, Ormuz and Goa; and one of the number, Ralph Fitch, who alone returned in 1591, published an account of the journey, which appears in Vol. IX. of Pinkerton's "Collection of Voyages and Travels."

† The history of the rise of the Dutch East India Company, may be perused in Vol. I. of Harris' "Collection of Voyages and Travels."

‡ Fulke Greville's Report, as also the Memorial of the Merchants, appears in Bruce's "Annals of the Hon. East India Company," Vol. I., pp. 115—126.

ment was intrusted to twenty-four directors, exclusive of Alderman (afterwards Sir James) Smith, the first Governor. The fleet consisted of the four following vessels:—the ‘Red Dragon,’ two hundred men, 600 tons, commanded by Captain James Lancaster, with the title of General, or Admiral, of the fleet; the ‘Hector,’ one hundred men, 300 tons, Captain William Davis; the ‘Ascension,’ eighty men, 260 tons; the ‘Susan,’ eighty men, 240 tons; and a pinnace, forty men, 100 tons.

The charter, which occupies twenty-six pages of printed quarto type, was granted on the 31st of December, 1600, and specifies that “Our most dear and loving cousin, George, Earl of Cumberland,\* and our well beloved subjects, Sir John Hart, of London, Knight, Sir John Spencer, of London, Knight, Sir Edward Michelborne, Knight, William Cavendish, Esq.,” also nine Aldermen of London, and other individuals specially named, to the number of two hundred and eighteen, have petitioned that they “at their own adventure, costs, and charges, as well as for the honour of our realm of England, as for the increase of our navigation, and advancement of trade and merchandize, within our said realm, and the dominions of the same, might adventure and set forth one or more voyages, with convenient number of ships and pinnaces, by way of traffic and merchandize to the East Indies, in the countries and parts of Asia and Africa, and to as many of the islands, ports and cities, towns and places, thereabouts, as where trade and traffic may, by all likelihood, be discovered, established, or had.” In accordance with their memorial, Her Majesty constituted the petitioners, “a body corporate and politic, in deed and in name, by the name of *The Governors and Company of the Merchants trading unto the East Indies*,” empowering them and their successors, in that name and capacity, to exercise all the rights and privileges of a body corporate. The charter prescribed the mode of management, and the countries within the limit of which they possessed the exclusive traffic, which embraced all ports, islands, and places of Asia, Africa, America, between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan; while the Queen bound herself and her heirs not to grant trading licences within the limits of the charter to any person whatever “without the consent” of the Company. Other privileges declared the exports of the first four voyages free of duty, credit to be given on the payment of import dues, and permission to export annually the sum of £30,000 in bullion or coin.

The four vessels above-named, together with the ‘Guest,’ victualler, of 100 tons, left Woolwich on the 15th of February, 1601, and finally quitted Dartmouth on the 22nd of April. The

\* The narrative of this Earl’s voyage to the Azores appears in Vol. I. of Pinkerton’s “Voyages and Travels.”

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Cape was doubled on the 1st of November, and, without sighting India, they continued their voyage to the Nicobar Islands, and thence for Acheen, on the north-west extremity of Sumatra. They now commenced privateering operations against Portuguese shipping, which appeared to be more to their liking than peaceful trading. The 'Ascension' and 'Susan' were sent to England with cargoes of cinnamon, cloves, and pepper, and Lancaster continued his cruise with the 'Dragon' and 'Hector,' having taken valuable cargoes at Bantam, in the Island of Java, where he established a regular factory, Lancaster sailed for England, and cast anchor in the Downs on the 11th of September, 1603. The pecuniary results were eminently satisfactory, the returns being no less than ninety-five per cent. on the capital invested. On a second voyage the same ships were employed, though Captain Henry Middleton sailed in the 'Red Dragon' as admiral, and Captain Sufflet in the 'Hector' as second in command. The ships sailed on the 25th of March, 1604, and arrived in Bantam Roads on the 20th of December, whence the 'Hector' and 'Susan,' having completed their cargoes, set sail for England, the two other vessels proceeding to the Moluccas. Owing to the intrigues and opposition of the Dutch, Captain Middleton returned to Bantam, whence he sailed for Europe on the 6th October, and cast anchor in the Downs on the 6th of May, 1606. Notwithstanding that the 'Susan' was lost, and, that of the £60,000 adventured on this voyage, only £1,142 was expended in goods, the returns nearly doubled the capital, a result which was rather due to successful privateering than to honest trading.

The third voyage, for which £53,000 was subscribed, of which sum £7,280 was expended in goods, was undertaken in 1607, the ships being the 'Dragon,' Captain Keeling, who acted as admiral; the 'Hector,' Captain Hawkins; and the 'Consent,' of 115 tons, Captain David Middleton. The latter, who left England on the 12th of March, made the voyage alone, and reached Bantam on the 14th of November, whence he proceeded to the Moluccas, where he was unsuccessful in procuring a cargo; but he was so fortunate as to fall in with a Java junk from Amboyna, whose cargo of cloves he purchased for £2,948 15s., and, on his arrival in England in the following December, sold for £36,287. It was no wonder that such enormous profits excited the cupidity of adventurers, and that the Company jealously resented the granting of licenses by King James I. to any other parties. The 'Dragon' and 'Hector' sailed from the Downs on the 1st of April, 1607, and proceeded in company to Socotra, where the two ships separated, Captain Keeling proceeding to Sumatra and Bantam, and Captain Hawkins direct to Surat—the 'Hector' being thus the first of the Company's ships that anchored in an Indian

port,\* the previous voyagers having only visited the islands in the Indian Ocean, as Sumatra, Java and Amboyna. Hawkins, considering that there was a good opportunity of benefiting himself as well as his masters, resolved to remain at Surat for the purpose of founding a factory, and accordingly ordered his chief officer to proceed in the 'Hector' to Bantam and join Captain Keeling. He had brought a letter from King James to the Great Mogul, and thought he could not do better than proceed to Agra and deliver it in person. This was the first occasion on which an Englishman, representing the Company, made his appearance at the Court of the Mogul, and, apart from its political importance, considerable interest attaches to it in connection with this narrative, as Hawkins was an officer of the Indian Marine. Little thought that mighty potentate, Jehangire,† when he graciously received the ship-captain at the foot of his throne, that, in the humble suppliant for permission for his fellow-countrymen to trade with a distant port of his Empire, he saw before him the representative of the nationality which, by its maritime supremacy chiefly, grew gradually from a "puny infant"—as, a few years later, the Agent of the East India Company called their commercial settlement in Gombroon, or Bunder Abbas—to the strong-limbed giant who was to subvert the dynasty that Baber had founded, and Akbar and Aurungzebe built up and strengthened with such assiduous care.‡

\* This is the account given by Beveridge in his "History of India," Vol. I., page 245. According to other writers, Captain Keeling proceeded to Surat, and having landed Mr. Finch to form a factory, sent Captain Hawkins to the Great Mogul at Agra. Orme speaks of an Englishman named Mildenall, who was the bearer of a letter from Queen Elizabeth to the Emperor Akbar, and arrived at Agra in the year 1603. After a residence there of three years, having obtained a firman for freedom of trade from the Emperor Jehangire, he proceeded to Persia, whence he again repaired to Agra, where he died.

† Jehangire means the "Conqueror of the World," though, unlike his great father, Akbar, this prince was a great tyrant and debauchee, without either talent or courage.

‡ From a pamphlet published in 1615, called "Trade's Increase," we gain information as to the number and size of the ships in that year belonging to the East India Company. "You have built," says the writer, apostrophizing the Company, "more ships in your time, than any other merchant's ships, besides what you have bought out of other trades, and all those wholly belonging to you. There hath been entertained by you since you first adventured, one-and-twenty ships, besides the now intended voyage of one new ship of seven hundred tons, and happily some two more of increase. The least of your shipping is of four-score ton, all the rest are goodly ships of such burthen as never were formerly used in merchandise; the least and meanest of these last is of some hundred and twenty ton, and so upward even to eleven hundred ton. You have set forth some thirteen voyages; in which time you have built of these, eight new ships, and almost as good as built the most of the residue, as the 'Dragon,' the 'Hector,' &c." The same writer thus describes a ship, called, like the pamphlet, the 'Trade's Increase.' "It was a ship of eleven hundred tons, for beauty, burthen, strength, and sufficiency surpassing all merchant's ships whatsoever. But, alas! she was but shown; out of a cruel destiny, she was overtaken with an untimely death in her youth and strength."

Soon after Hawkins' arrival at Agra on the 16th of April, 1609, Jehangire, after promising to grant all the trade privileges solicited for the Company, proposed to him to remain permanently at his Court as the English representative, on a salary which was to begin at £3,200 a-year. Hawkins consented to the proposal, as he quaintly said in a letter to his employers giving his reasons:—"Trusting upon his promise, and seeing it was beneficial both to my nation and myselfe, being dispossessed of the benefit which I should have reaped, if I had gone to Bantam, and that after halfe a doozen of yeeres, your worships would send another man of sort in my place, in the meantime I should feather my neast and do you service; and, further, perceiving great injuries offered us by reason the King is so farre from the ports, for all which causes above specified, I did not think it amiss to yield unto his request." But the Court nobles and some Portuguese Jesuits intrigued against this new Court favourite, whom they regarded as an interloper, and Hawkins, fearful of being poisoned, appealed to the Emperor, who proposed that he should marry "a white mayden out of his palace," the orphan daughter of an Armenian Christian. Not long after his marriage, Hawkins found that the fickle monarch had got tired of him, and, so far from "feathering his nest," he did not receive even the promised salary, while all the commercial privileges conferred on the English were cancelled; he, accordingly, left Agra, and made his way to Surat.

In the meantime the 'Hector' had proceeded to Bantam to join Captain Keeling, who assumed command of her, having sent the 'Dragon' to England with her cargo. Captain Keeling first proceeded to the Moluccas and then to Bantam, whence, having placed the factory on a more satisfactory footing, he sailed for England, which was reached on the 9th of May, 1610. During the absence of the 'Hector,' two other ventures had been fitted out, the first consisting of two vessels, the 'Ascension' and 'Union,' which proved a total failure, the former being lost in the Gulf of Cambay, and the latter, while returning, in the Bay of Biscay. The second venture, consisting of one ship, called the 'Expedition,' Captain David Middleton, was more fortunate; she sailed on the 24th of April, 1609, and returned to England with a valuable cargo obtained at the Moluccas, the profits of which, even including the losses of the previous voyage, amounted to no less than two hundred and thirty-four per cent.

As, owing to the opposition of the Portuguese at Surat, it became evident that the Company's ships must be prepared to repel force by force, for which more ships would be required, an application was made to King James in 1609, when only six years of the original fifteen granted by the charter remained



unexpired, for a new deed. This was granted, the number of members being increased from two hundred and eighteen to two hundred and seventy-six, and the provisions against “interlopers” being made more stringent, while the charter was made perpetual, with a clause reserving to the Crown power to recall it “after three years’ warning.” Three vessels were now fitted out for a sixth voyage at a cost of £82,000, of which the goods cost £21,500. The command of this expedition was given to Sir Henry Middleton, the leader of the second voyage, who hoisted his flag on board the ‘Trade’s Increase,’ a vessel of 1,100 tons burden. In consequence of the report of the factors at Bantam and the Moluccas, that the cloths and calicoes imported from India were in great request in those islands, and their recommendation that a trade should be opened at Surat and Cambay to supply them with those commodities for exchange for the spices and other products of the islands, Sir Henry Middleton was directed to steer for the western coast of India. He sailed in the spring of 1610, and proceeded to Aden, where he left the ‘Peppercorn,’ the second largest of his vessels, and then steered for Mocha, where the native pilots ran his flagship aground. Sir Henry Middleton, fearing that she could not be got off, sent ashore a portion of her cargo, and landed with some of his crew, when he was taken prisoner by the Arabs. After a long detention and the loss of many of his men, he obtained his release, recovered his ships and sailed for Surat, where he anchored on the 26th of September, 1611. Here he found a Portuguese squadron, consisting of seven ships lying outside the roads, and thirteen smaller vessels inside the bar. They had heard of his arrival in the Red Sea, and, though the English were not then at war with Portugal, now made him aware that they disputed his right to trade at Surat, and would not even allow him to communicate with the Englishmen who had been left there by Captain Hawkins. This arbitrary proceeding the Portuguese admiral justified on the ground that he was invested with the office of Captain-Major, an office which made him guardian of all the northern coast of India, and warranted him in seizing all vessels which presumed to trade without his carta or permit. Such a right would have made the Company’s charter little better than waste paper, and Sir Henry Middleton at once declared his determination not to recognise it.

In the correspondence which ensued, he told the Captain-Major that he had been sent by the King of England with a letter and rich presents to the Great Mogul, in order to establish the trade which his countrymen had already commenced; and that, as India was a country free to all nations, and neither the Mogul nor his people were under vassalage, he was determined to persevere, at all hazards, and, if necessary,

to repel force by force. When he gave this answer, he was in the belief that an extensive and lucrative trade had been, or was about to be, established by the Company at Surat; but the information which he shortly after received, convinced him that for the present all idea of establishing such a trade must be abandoned.\* Captain Hawkins, by the information he imparted on his return from Agra, made it evident that no trading privileges were to be expected from Jehangire while the Portuguese, being able to support their pretensions by force, appeared to him the European Power whom it was most conducive to his interests to propitiate. If he had any doubts as to the impossibility of trading at Surat in the present position of affairs, it would have been dissipated by the natives themselves, who confessed that so long as the Portuguese retained their ascendancy, they durst not venture to incur their displeasure. Their advice, therefore, was that the English vessels should quit Surat for the port of Gogo, in the Gulf of Cambay, where it was said the Portuguese would be less likely to interfere. Sir Henry Middleton had another plan in view; and, after taking on board Captain Hawkins and his wife, who had arrived from Agra, and the Englishmen who had been left at Surat, he called a council for the purpose of determining their future course. "At this council," says Sir Henry, "I propounded whether it would be best to goe from hence directly for Priaman, Bantam, &c., or to returne to the Red Sea, there to meet with such Indian shippes as should be bound thither; and for that they would not deal with us at their owne doores, wee having come so far with commodities fitting their countrie, nowhere else in India vendable, I thought we should doe ourselves some right, and them no wrong, to cause them barter us; wee to take their indicoes and other goods as they were worth, and they to take ours in lieu thereof." The latter proposal was carried unanimously, and Sir Henry Middleton returned to the Red Sea and continued his course of compelling the traders to barter their goods for those he could not dispose of at Surat; and it is very probable that many acts of violence were committed under the pretence of legitimate trading. But seamen of the school of Drake, Frobisher, and Hawkins, were not likely to be very squeamish; as the Scotch proverb has it, "it's a far cry to Loch Awe," and there was small chance of their being called to account on their return to England.

In the meantime the Company fitted out another expedition consisting of three vessels, the 'Clove,' 'Hector,' and 'Thomas,' which sailed from England on the 18th of April, 1611, under command of Captain John Saris. As his destination was the ports in the Red Sea, a firman was obtained from

\* See Beveridge's "History of India," Vol. I., page 248.