THE DUTCH IN THE ARCTIC SEAS.

A DUTCH ARCTIC EXPEDITION AND ROUTE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE signal part which Holland has enacted on the theatre of the world cannot, in the sense of general achievements, be unfamiliar to the historical student. It is well known, moreover, that her place in the European sisterhood of states has in former times been one of importance far out of proportion to the small area occupied by the Netherlands on the map of Europe; and though in the particular domain of Arctic research the work of Holland cannot be compared with that of her great maritime neighbour, yet even in this respect her achievements have been far from insignificant. Here, however, it is to be feared, the work of the Netherlanders has not been so well understood. Unfortunately, too, it

has been wholly confined to the early, though it must be owned memorable, period in the annals of Arctic voyaging. While we shall relate the history of these early labours of Holland in the Arctic field —pretty well assured, too, that her claims will become the better recognised therefor—we shall first of all detain the reader with some considerations for a renewal of Dutch Arctic research.

But in connection with Dutch Northern enterprise, and indeed in any sense whatever, it is not easy to take up the theme of Arctic exploration, which has in some form been more or less familiar to the world for the last three centuries, without bestowing a passing thought on the pioneers in maritime adventure, and reflecting how legitimately our age has developed the dauntless spirit exhibited by the two gallant crews of Britons now braving the hardships and dangers of a Polar voyage.

The glimpses we have of the doings of the earliest maritime nations reveal a decided bent toward adventure and even geographical discovery. Those primeval Hollanders, the Phœnicians, furnish the first marked example of this audacious spirit. The ships of Solomon and Hiram, piloted by Phœnicians, went, we read, on their three-years' voyages, returning so many well-laden

argosies. Nor was there any hesitation on the part of these greatest mariners of antiquity to quit the shores of their native continent for the exploration of new realms. How far northward they may have gone we do not know, though it has been conjectured that they penetrated into the Baltic. The numerous colonies they planted on the shores of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, on the little-known Iberian peninsula, and indeed from the mines of Cornwall and the verdant Milesian island to the Persian gulf, amply attest, however, the extent of their expeditions in furtherance of commercial aims.

Phœnicia itself, like the Phœnicia of the West in modern times, was one of the smallest countries of antiquity. It occupied only a narrow slip of land on the coast of Syria, about 120 miles in length, and probably nowhere more than 18 or 20 in width. This short line of coast was rich, however, in bays and harbours. Seven cities occupied various points, and between them were a number of smaller towns, the abodes of industry and enterprise, forming, as it were, one city, extending along the whole line of coast and the contiguous islands; and this chain of cities, with their harbours and numerous fleets, must have afforded a spectacle

then unequalled in the world, impressing the stranger who visited them with the highest idea of the opulence, the power, and the spirit of the people, who had thus become the common carriers, the colonisers, and the most daring voyagers of their time.*

During the long interval which elapsed between the founding of Sidon and Tyre and the destruction of Carthage, the art of navigation must have very greatly advanced; and though the Carthaginian vessels could hardly bear any comparison with the trim merchantmen or the magnificent floating palaces of the present day, it is evident enough that Hanno's fleet of sixty ships, "capable of carrying thirty thousand colonists of all ages to the western coast of Africa," must have been considerably in advance of some of the Dutch and English pinnaces and fly-boats that braved the Greenland seas in the ages of Maurice and Elizabeth.

Thus enterprise and daring are characteristics by no means peculiar only to our modern civilisation. The spirit which planted Carthage on her great vantage-ground in Africa, and made her the

* Malte-Brun and Balbi, chap. i. Richardson, Polar Regions, Introduction.

not unworthy rival of ancient Rome, and which spurred Rome herself on to the conquest of Europe and the known world, only to give place to other conquerors, and to fall under the enervating influences begotten by the pride of an universal sway, was that which established the chief maritime and commercial *entrepôts* of Europe, and culminated in the brilliant era of discovery when England and Holland, by their wondrous zeal and activity, threatened, for awhile, to leave no new lands to descry or unknown seas to traverse.

Perhaps the most glorious fruits of this spirit are to be found in the discovery of America by Columbus, but the same impulse had already prompted the hardy Northmen, and made them in reality the first Arctic explorers, and, as we now know, the true discoverers of America 491 years before Columbus landed on San Salvador, and 496 years before the Cabots (in nearly the same locality as the Northmen) sighted the mainland.

Between the ancient Phœnicians and the sturdy sons of Holland there are some striking points of analogy. The bent of both races on becoming conscious of a distinctly national life was toward the achievement of an empire on the seas and by means of colonisation, which the limited area of

their native territories forbade at home. In both alike the necessities of independent existence prompted to wondrous feats of engineering skill, so that the fortifications of Tyre, its junction with the mainland of Syria, and the extensive and massive piers which formed the harbour of Sidon, and received the fruitful harvests gleaned upon every ocean wayside, were marvels of early civilisation fitly to be compared with the system of canals, dykes, and dams by which the Netherlands have been rescued from the incursions of the sea. Nor has a Dutch historian unfitly compared the Netherlands to Venice,* two names evoking analogous recollections, joyous as well as gloomy; and, years ago, Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft, the famous Drossart of Muiden, in allusion to the shields of the two old republics, inquiringly sang—

"Waer is paer van vernuft en kraften zoo kloek,
Als de Leeuw met het swaerdt en de Leeuw met het boek?"†

Reverting to the Northmen, who occupy a sort of middle place in history between the Phœnicians and the Venetians, it is impossible to deny to this

* J. C. de Jonge, Nederland en Venetie ('s Gravenhage, 1852), Preface.

† "Where, of a pair so skilled in craft and wit, is there record,
Save in th' Lion with the book and th' Lion with the sword?"

daring race, though the record is but a shadowy one, the earliest page in the annals of modern maritime enterprise and discovery. Indeed, far back in mediæval times, scarcely after the death of Charlemagne, and several centuries before the northern and western voyages of Columbus, or even the still earlier voyages of the Zeni to the Faröe Islands and Greenland—now proved beyond all further cavil to be authentic*—the Vikings became the rulers on every sea. Few countries were there in the then known world that did not feel the force of Norse authority in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, and few were the shores to which the adventurous crafts of Scandinavian seamen did not find their way. Not content with scouring the ocean from the deep fjords of Norway to the warm seas of Spain and Italy, they turned the prows of their frail barks northward, and, unaided by the compass, yet scorning to creep timidly along the coast, like the more southern navigators, and those of ancient times, they boldly plunged into the ice-encumbered ocean, and entered the Arctic regions.†

* See the learned Introduction to the Voyages of the Venetian Brothers, Nicolo and Antonio Zeno, to the Northern Seas, in the Fourteenth Century. By R. H. Major, F.S.A. Printed for the Hukluyt Society, 1873.

† C. R. Markham, Franklin's Footsteps, p. 2.

As early as A.D. 890 the great Saxon King Alfred put in living characters the story of the first Arctic expedition, narrated by old Ohthere himself, who "dwelt furthest north of any Norman," and was the first to sail beyond the North Cape.* Iceland, discovered by Naddodr, became settled by Scandinavian nobles, who disdained to yield their liberties to King Harold Haafarger, and there set up, 1002 years ago, a free republic. Likewise Greenland, discovered by Erick the Red, in 982, and colonised by men of true Norse blood, found in Lief, the son of Erick, a Christian missionary, more than seven centuries before the pious Hans Egede began his disinterested work among the Eskimo tribes on those inhospitable shores; and it required the brawny arms and dauntless spirit of an equally valiant race, the Frisians—who, with the Batavians and Caninefates, proved to Tiberius and Vespasian the powerful effects which could be wrought by

* Longfellow has taken "a leaf from King Alfred's 'Orosius,'" and given us, in his "Birds of Passage," a choice poetical rendering of the simple narrative of this first Arctic discoverer, who says to "Alfred, King of the Saxons"—

"And there uprose before me,
Upon the water's edge,
The huge and haggard shape
Of that unknown North Cape,
Whose form is like a wedge."

patriotic courage and love of freedom—to overcome the audacious Vikings. It is an historical fact that those primeval inhabitants of the North Netherlands engaged in this work; and Frisian officers and seamen were, moreover, employed by King Alfred the Great in organising the first English fleet.*

* According to Mr N. W. Posthumus, Adam of Bremen has recorded, as a fact, that Frisian vessels actually sailed nearly to the North Pole about the year 1035 (De Nederlanders en de Noordpool-expeditiën, p. 4).

CHAPTER I.

THE GRAND MODERN EXEMPLAR.

As, therefore, the motives which have animated men from the earliest times have induced them to claim for their possessions the uttermost parts of the earth, and, perchance, to penetrate to them, it is not a little singular that so large a portion of the world should remain still unmarked in our maps and charts. Sir Henry Rawlinson has been quoted as saying, with much appositeness, that outside of Europe—excepting, we may ourselves say, the central portion of North America—little is really known of the geography of the world beyond the highroads of communication. Many interesting geographical problems await solution by the patient toil of future investigators. But it is in the northern and southern extremities of the globe that the widest fields, not hitherto tracked by human endeavour, remain to challenge men's industry and perseverance.