

THE LITERARY EXAMINER.

India in the Fifteenth Century. Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India in the Century preceding the Portuguese Discovery of the Cape of Good Hope; from Latin, Persian, Russian, and Italian Sources. Now first translated into English. Edited, with an Introduction, by R. H. Major, Esq., F.S.A., Hakluyt Society.

(SECOND NOTICE.)

We return to the collection of the narratives of early travellers in India, which forms the last publication issued by the Hakluyt Society. The travels of Sindbad the Sailor we are to regard as contemporary with and not less genuine than those of Soliman. The fabulous legends in the story, which, although incorporated in the Thousand and one Nights, form in Arabic a distinct book, are not told with the distinct reference to names of places by which, wherever it occurs, we can still trace on each voyage Sindbad's route. For example:

In his fourth voyage Sindbad is again carried to an island (for all countries were regarded as islands by navigators who were unable to complete their explorations). He gives no name to this island, but relates that he found there men gathering pepper. This would seem to be the coast of Malabar. In the district of Cottonara, on this coast, the best pepper is gathered and in the largest quantity to the present day. On this coast Ptolemy places the island of pepper. On this coast Cosmas, in the middle ages, mentions five ports whence pepper was exported; and it is here that Ibn Batuta, an Arab, whose travels in the fourteenth century we have yet to mention, saw and well described the plant, and says that it was the principal source of wealth of the country.

Hence Sindbad went to the Island of Nacous, apparently the Island of Nicobar. "Thence," says he, "we came in six days to the Island of Kêlâ. We travelled into the interior of the kingdom of Kêlâ. It is a large empire bordering on India, in which are mines of tin, plantations of sugar cane, and excellent camphor." The Baron Walckenaer recognizes Sindbad's kingdom of Kêlâ in the province of Keydah, in the Malay peninsula, watered by the river Calung. In this province, which is opposite to Sumatra, the trade in Malacca tin and camphor was principally carried on.

In his fifth voyage, Sindbad, after suffering shipwreck, is cast upon an island, where he becomes the victim of the Old Man of the Sea, whom he is obliged to carry on his back. The Baron Walckenaer believes that the country of the Old Man of the Sea is again a portion of the coast of Malabar. Ibn Batuta, who in the early part of the fourteenth century visited this coast, tells us that in his time there were no horses or beasts of burthen, and that everything had to be carried on men's backs, who hired themselves for this purpose. A proof of the correctness of his inference is drawn by the Baron from the fact that after escaping from the Old Man of the Sea, and setting sail again, he arrives almost immediately at a place where they gathered cocoa nuts, that is, in the Maldives, which lie opposite to the coast of Malabar. "Doubtless," he says, "the cocoa grows in all the islands of the Asiatic Archipelago, but by all oriental geographers the cocoa-nut islands are understood to be the Maldives." "Thence," says Sindbad, "we sailed to the island of pepper and to the peninsula of Comorin, in which is found the aloes wood, called *santy*. Thence we went to the pearl-fisheries. I made a bargain with the divers, who brought me up a considerable number of beautiful pearls, and God heaped me with blessings; after which I travelled without interruption from country to country until I arrived at Bagdad." The Baron Walckenaer well expresses surprise at any mistake having been made respecting a track bearing such clear indications as this. From the Maldives Sindbad sailed to the island of pepper on the coast of Malabar. Thence he goes to the coast of Comorin, in the region of Komar, where he finds the aloes wood, called, as Ibn Batuta informs us, Houd al Komar, or wood of Komar.

Thence he proceeded to the Gulf of Manaar, where the pearl fishery is carried on, and which is a sort of dependency of Ceylon, and after making great profit by his rich cargo he returns to his own country.

There is a good deal to be said too on behalf of the roc, the mighty tortoise, and of the serpents in the valley of diamonds.

The next traveller in the record is the Spanish Jew, Benjamin of Tudela, who in 1159 or 1160 set out on a journey of thirteen or fourteen years over the greater part of the known world, and included India in his route. The next is Marco Polo, who set out with his father and uncle from Venice in 1271, and after spending seventeen years at the Court of Kublah Khan, on the way home again crossed Indian soil. There followed a period during which geography received most help from the Mahometans, and the geography of India was then especially explored by Ibn Batuta, who started as a young man from his native city of Tangier in 1324, and was a traveller for thirty years. A translation of his travels was made from the abridged Arabic MS. copies by Professor Lee, and printed for the Oriental Translation Committee in 1829.

We now come to the Indian travellers of the fifteenth century, at the head of whom is Nicolo de' Conti.

For this translation, and the notes with which it is illustrated, the public is indebted to Mr Winter Jones, the Keeper of the Printed Books in the British Museum.

Another voyage of the same century included by the Hakluyt Society in this collection is that of Abd-er-Razzak, native of Herat, who was sent in 1441 by Shah Rukh on a mission to one of the greatest of the Indian Kings. His account of his embassy was translated by M. Quatremère in the fourteenth volume of the *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits*, and from that version is now first rendered by Mr R. H. Major, the excellent Honorary Secretary of the Hakluyt Society, into English. The style of the Persian traveller is very entertaining. Thus he describes, in his own elegant Persian style, a storm at sea:

The ship, after a million of shocks, reached the open sea.

On a sudden there arose a violent wind on the surface of the sea, and on all sides were heard groaning and cries.

The sailor, who with respect to his skill in swimming might be compared to a fish, was anxious to throw himself into the water like an anchor. The captain, although familiarized with the navigation of all the seas, shed bitter tears, and had forgotten all his science. The sails were torn, the mast was entirely bent by the shock of the wind. The different grades of passengers who inhabited this floating house threw out upon the waves riches of great value, and, after the manner of the Sofis, voluntarily stripped themselves of their worldly goods. Who could give a thought to the jeopardy in which their money and their stuffs were placed, when life itself, which is so dear to man, was in danger? For myself, in this situation, which brought before my eyes all the threatening terrors which the ocean had in its power to present, with tears in my eyes I gave myself up for lost. Through the effect of the stupor, and of the profound sadness to which I became a prey, I remained, like the sea, with my lips dry and my eyes moist, and resigned myself entirely to the Divine Will. At one time, through the driving of the waves, which resembled mountains, the vessel was lifted up to the skies; at another, under the impulse of the violent winds, it descended like divers to the bottom of the waters.

The agitation of the waters of the sea caused my body to melt like salt which is dissolved in water; the violence of the deluge annihilated and utterly dispersed the firmness which sustained me, and my mind, hitherto so strong, was like the ice which is suddenly exposed to the heat of the month of Tamouz; even now my heart is troubled and agitated, as is the fish which is taken out of fresh water.

May the torrent of destruction overturn the edifices of fate, which thus brings in successive waves the waters of misfortune upon my head.

Many times I said to myself, and it was in language dictated by my situation that I repeated, this verse:

*A dismal night! the fear of the waves, and so frightful an abyss!
What judgment can they who are so peaceful on shore form of our situation?*

The pure water of my life was troubled by the agitation of the sea; and the brilliant mirror of my ideas, in consequence of the dampness of the water, and the putrefaction of the air, was covered with rust.

There are the records of two other travellers in India during the fifteenth century, included in this volume. One is the record left by Athanasius Nitikin, a Russian, translated for the Hakluyt Society from a MS. in the monastery of Troitsk Sergivsk, by the late Count Wielhorsky, who, when in London as Secretary to the Russian Legation, won by his genial nature and his high accomplishments affectionate respect from Englishmen, and so died—discharging among sick Crimean soldiers the best offices of humanity, that he has deserved from Europe reverent remembrance.

Nitikin visited the kingdoms of the Deccan and of Golconda between the years 1468 and 1474. The last traveller whose story is contained in this volume, Hieronimo de Santo Stefano, a Genoese merchant, suffered—for his tale is one of suffering and loss—when the century was nearer to its close. His brief narrative, written in 1499, here appears as first translated out of the Italian by Mr Major.