

THE FOURTH CENTENARY OF THE SEA ROUTE TO INDIA

HOMAGE

TO

DOM VASCO DA GAMA

ON

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOURTH CENTENARY

OF

THE DISCOVERY OF A NEW ROUTE TO INDIA

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THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FOURTH CENTENARY OF THE DISCOVERY,
BY THE PORTUGUESE, OF A NEW ROUTE TO INDIA

The celebration, at Lisbon in 1897, of the fourth Centenary since the discovery, by the Portuguese of a maritime route to India, is not an isolated national festivity, but rather the glorification of a fact in which the civilised world pays homage to the memory of the daring mariners, who starting from the extreme west of Europe, opened a way across those «Seas never before navigated», for commerce, civilisation and christianity.

That historical fact has been frequently commented upon, but by no one more sympathetically than by the Rev^d Lafitau («Histoire des découvertes et des conquêtes des Portugais»), who moved by a noble and generous sentiment, declares: «Quoi de plus illustre que d'avoir apporté à tous les peuples de l'Europe, les facilités du commerce dont ils jouissent aujourd'hui, en leur traçant une route jusque alors inconnue, pour rassembler chez eux les trésors et les richesses des pays les plus reculés?»

The maritime route to India was first traced by Bartholomeu Dias, as far as the great promontory, in 1486, by him denominated Cabo Tormentoso. That name was soon changed to Cabo da Boa Esperança, by King John II. But the completion of the great work is due to Vasco da Gama, who landed at the city of Calicut on the 22nd May 1498, and established his quarters permanently at the city of Goa on the 25th November 1510.

The Portuguese influence spread itself rapidly over the whole Indian peninsula, reaching the Persian Gulf, Ormuz, Aden, Sokotra, Malacca, Moluccas, Macao, the coast of China, and Japan.

Soon after the same indefatigable explorers built the fortresses of Ormuz, Cochim, Coulam, Calicut, Maldiva, Diu, Damão, Cananor, Sofala, and made tributaries to the Kings of Portugal, the Kings of Ormuz, Fidore, Ceylon, Melinde, Zanzibar, Quiloa, Betecara and Pacom.

The extraordinary achievements of Alfonso de Albuquerque, on the coast of Arabia, deserve special mention; as likewise those of the Athaydes, and Lopo Vaz de Sampaio in the destruction of the Samorim's fleet; the victories of Antonio da Silveira in the siege of Diu, in 1538, and of D. João de Castro and D. João de Mascarenhas in the second siege, in 1540, when the siege was finally raised and the enemy was put to flight.

The struggle having thus ended in 1540, the power of Portugal became supreme in the Indian seas.

To Portugal also appertains the glory of having introduced the Christian faith in India.

By Papal Bull of Leo X: «Pro eccellente Magistro, &c.» the Royal Patronate of Portugal was established at the island of Madeira. The utility of extending its salutary effects to Asia was recognized soon after.

Portugal having supplied ample means for the endowment of the Patronate, it was confirmed by Papal Bull: «Aequum Reputamus» of 3rd November 1540, when the Archbishopric, Primacy of the East, was created, with its residence in Goa.

The benefits derived from that venerable institution are acknowledged by impartial and competent authorities.

Monseigneur Zaleski, Papal Legate («Voyage à Ceylon et aux Indes, 1887») affirms, among facts that came under his notice: «Dans ce séminaire Patriarchal de Richol, le Recteur seul est Européen, tous les élèves sont Indiens indigènes, et je puis affirmer qu'il différerait peu des séminaires que j'avais visité en Europe». Monseigneur adds: «Mais voici que, dans les Indes Portugaises, tout le Clergé est indigène et il n'est pas inférieur à celui de beaucoup de diocèses de l'Europe; j'ai vu plus d'une, même en Italie, dont le Clergé est inférieur à celui de Goa».

Among the Asiatic Christians those of Ceylon are remarkable for their attachment to the Royal Patronate. They retain the Portuguese language, and carefully transmit from father to son, the history of the conversion of their ancestors, by the Portuguese Missioners of the Order of St Francis in 1577, expressly sent there by the Duke Constantine de Bragança, Viceroy of India. They likewise remember, that many of their ancestors were made martyrs for their faith by the Dutch, in 1658, figuring amongst the victims an Asiatic priest named Caldero, who was barbarously assassinated.

Historical traditions of this nature do not die. The faith of the Asiatic is unmovable; to deny them the free exercise of it would be a grave offence, which they would repel, and to which they would never submit.

The British Government, convinced of this fact, avoids interfering with the religion of the native population, fearing that a contrary line of policy would find itself unsupported.

The confirmation of this wise policy is to be found in the Proclamation of Queen Victoria, of 1858, which expresses Her Majesty's sentiments: «Firmly relying on the truth of Christianity, — we disclaim alike the right to impose our convictions on any of our subjects. And we strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us, that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects, on pain of our highest displeasure»—.

A considerable amount of the property belonging to the Royal Patronate lies at present in the British dominion, and is consequently under the protection of British law.

As regards the ecclesiastical jurisdiction in British India, that Government, consistently with its profession of toleration and liberty of worship, respects and causes to be respected the religions of other nationalities, as declared in the above Proclamation.

As regards Portugal there are additional motives actuating to the respect due to the faith of those inhabitants of British India who acknowledge the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Royal Patronate.


By the marriage of the Infanta Dona Catharina de Bragança, with Charles II, England received (in dowry) Tangier, Bombay, and two hundred thousand Cruzados, as specified in the marriage contract, dated 23rd June 1661, upon the express condition of maintaining the free exercise of the Catholic faith. Later on, this clause was reiterated and amplified in the Act of the handing of Bombay over to England, dated 18th February 1665.

The British Government has maintained its neutrality, and justice has been exercised whenever there has been occasion for it. The wisdom of this policy is highly appreciated throughout the vast dominions of England in Asia; it gives prestige and vigour to the native Christian population of European origin, whose assistance England may require at some future day.

The same daring explorers raised in India a new race of Portuguese blood, known by the denomination of Goanese. This race is endowed with remarkable intelligence, and proves its aptitude and importance in every condition of life, whether in the higher grades which require scientific studies, or in more ordinary callings.

This remarkable race is the only one that in India is willing to serve under Christian Masters; the pure Asiatic will not do it as his religion prohibits him; all praise be to those who thus do honour to the blood of their ancestors.

In conclusion, it is evident that the discovery of a maritime route to India by Vasco da Gama, the implantation of the Christian faith as well as the introduction of a race of European blood in Asia, are facts which deserve an international demonstration of gratitude for the work of those daring mariners, who four centuries ago surprised Europe with the magnitude of their achievements, from which sprung a mighty Empire to Great Britain, and an inexhaustible field of commerce to the world.



In consequence it is evident that the discovery of a new world
is due to the fact that the navigation of the Atlantic had
as well as the navigation of a sea of European blood in Asia and
then also because an international communication of goods for
the world of these things matters, was but a century ago
brought with the discovery of their continents from which they
a world of things to great things and an unbroken line of con-
tinuity to the world.