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THE EVOLUTION OF COMMERCE.¹

FOR over three thousand years the great highway for commerce has been from India by the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates or by the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and thence through the Mediterranean by Gibraltar to western and northern Europe, and, in our day, thence to America.

Along this route cities and nations have sprung up, increased in wealth and power, and passed away, giving place to other cities and nations further westward. These nations have been great carriers and distributors of minerals and goods, as well as capitalists and bankers, or carriers, bankers and manufacturers; in either case controlling the commerce of the world. This control has never for any long period been held by the same race, but has passed from one nation to another, always from the east toward the west.

The earliest highway of commerce was from India through the Persian Gulf, up the Euphrates to the Mediterranean; and carpets and precious stones were then as now carried over this route. Explorations and surveys for a railroad have been recently made along this "our future highway to India." Caravans brought spices from Arabia and rich stuffs from Babylon and Nineveh to the shore of the Red Sea. Solomon made a navy of ships and Hiram sent in the navy his "Servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, and they brought gold from Ophir, great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones."

Tyre and Sidon founded colonies on the shores of the Mediterranean, enslaving the Spaniards and compelling them to work the mines of gold and silver already opened in Spain. Their ships sailed through the Mediterranean, by the Pillars of Hercules, into the Atlantic Ocean, turning northward to England for tin and copper and on into the Baltic Sea for furs and amber; turning southward along the western coast of Africa, passing certainly two thousand miles to the equator and probably rounding the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean. Products from the west were brought in ships to Tyre and Sidon and exchanged for the goods of the east, their merchants making profits on each

transaction both as merchants and as carriers. Tyre and Sidon became wealthy, luxurious, and effeminate. Some of their citizens saw in Africa a richer soil and a better situation for a large city, and founded Carthage. The Carthaginians inherited the trade of Tyre and Sidon, and in addition opened highways to Egypt and into the interior of Africa, bartering their wares in Egypt for corn and grain and in Africa for ivory, gems, and slaves. They planted colonies in Africa and Sicily, and for a time were successful rivals of Greece and Rome.

The rule of the ocean transferred from Asia to Africa remained there but a short time, for the day of Europe came with the rise of Greece and Rome.

The Greeks founded colonies in Asia Minor, Sicily, and Italy. The ruins of great cities with Grecian temples and amphitheatres are found at Girgenti and Syracuse in Sicily, at Pæstum and other places in Italy. Under Pyrrhus, their armies were defeated by the Romans and their colonies captured. Deprived of these, their power rapidly declined and Greece became a Roman province.

Rome.

Rome founded few colonies, but she conquered the nations of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and brought under her sway cities, kingdoms, and empires. She boasted of five hundred cities in her Asiatic province that had been founded or enlarged and beautified by the Cæsars. One hundred and twenty vessels each year brought the goods of India from the delta of the Ganges, and large fleets from Egypt came laden with corn and grain. She imported from every country, but exported little, paying for her imports by taxes levied on her colonists.

Rome was the first power to incorporate conquered states into her dominion and extend citizenship to all the people in her empire; so that Paul could say in truth, "I am a Roman citizen and to Cæsar I appeal." So salutary and beneficial was her rule that under it these countries prospered more than under their own rulers. What Rome seized with strong hands she defended, and in return for taxation gave protection. She has no more enduring monuments than her roads, the remains of which are now found in every country of Europe. Though built as military and post-roads, they were used largely for commerce. All started from the golden mile-stone in the forum; one ran over the Brenner pass north-eastward to the Baltic Sea, another followed the north-western coast of the Mediterranean to Spain and southern France, another crossed the Alps and extended through France to the British Channel and through England to Scotland, where the Romans built a wall, ruins of which now bear witness to its strength. Another way went southward to Naples and Brindisi, and another led eastward to Macedonia and Greece. As these were the only roads in all these countries, it was truly said, "All ways lead to Rome;" and over them the messengers of Cæsar travelled more rapidly than the mail-carrier of our fathers on our mail-routes.

Venice and Genoa.

After five hundred years of empire Rome fell, and the Dark Ages followed. From A.D. 400 to A.D. 800 commerce and trade died out. The only vessels on the Mediterranean and Baltic were piratical crafts; Jerusalem and the Holy Land were captured by the Turks; the Crusades began, forerunners of a higher civilization and more extended commerce. Thousands and tens of thousands of people from all parts of Europe and all ranks of life, bearing the pilgrim's badge—the blood-red cross—journeyed toward the Holy Land, first in vast crowds led by Peter the Hermit, then in great armies led by kings and generals. For two hundred years this movement continued. Venice and Genoa furnished ships to carry the armies of France from Italy to the Holy Land. The Venetians were shrewd merchants and drove hard bargains, stipulating for cessions of land at the best commercial points and adequate compensation for their services. After the failure of each Crusade they brought back remnants of the troops and pilgrims, and with them the products of Asia Minor, and books and art treasures from Greece. These were distributed all over Italy, and led to the renaissance of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The trade with the East brought power and wealth to Venice

¹ Annual address by the president, Hon. Gardiner G. Hubbard. Presented to the National Geographic Society Jan. 15, 1892. Nat. Geog. Mag., Vol. IV., 1892.