

HOW PEPPER HELPED TO DISCOVER AMERICA.

BY KLYDA RICHARDSON STEEGE.

How would you like a pie not only sweetened and spiced but made hot with a sprinkling of pepper? or a cake full of fruit and also strongly peppered? I rather think you would call these things spoiled, and beg to have them made in a different way. If, however, we had lived some four or five hundred years ago, we should have thought, like every one else in those days, that no dish, sweet or otherwise, was complete without the pungent taste of pepper. No doubt it is as well for our digestions that we in these times like our food prepared in simpler fashion.

Perhaps it would surprise you to know that this taste for pepper, and the value which was once placed upon it, played an important part in the discovery of America. In case this last statement seems improbable, let me tell you something of the history of pepper, and its importance in the commerce of the world during the Middle Ages. There are a great many common things, you know, that have very interesting stories belonging to them, and they are generally worth hearing.

The native country of the pepper-plant is southern India, and its culture there is very old. The berry, or peppercorn, which is ground for our use, is produced on vines which are trained against trees, very much as you may see the grape-vines in an Italian vineyard. The berries are dried in the sun and sent to market in bags. Black and white pepper are made from the same berries, but the black contains the ground husk, which the other does not. This addition of the husk gives the darker color and stronger flavor to black pepper.

The old Eastern nations, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans all knew and used a great many spices, and among them was always pepper. How soon it came to be so highly esteemed as it was in the Middle Ages

is not certain; but as early as 410, when the great Northern conqueror, Alaric the Visigoth, besieged Rome, and was induced to retire by taking a ransom, three thousand pounds of pepper formed part of the treasure he carried away with him.

Later on, taxes began to be paid in pepper instead of in money, and the Jews, especially, who dealt largely in this, among other spices, were obliged, in many cases, to give to the government so many pounds of it yearly. In the twelfth century, according to an old law, the Jews paid to the Pope a tribute of one pound of pepper and two pounds of cinnamon. From certain Provençal villages the archbishop received annually from one half to two pounds of pepper, in payment for allowing the Jews to have a copy of the book of their law, a synagogue, a lamp burning perpetually, and a cemetery. In 1385 the King of Provence imposed on the Jews in his dominions a tax of sixty pounds of pepper.

So much traffic in this spice came to the city of Alexandria that one of its streets and a gate were named for it; and as for Venice, an Italian proverb said, "*Il nero e il bianco hanno fatto ricca Venèzia*," which means, "The white and the black have made Venice rich." In other words, it was through the pepper and the cotton, brought from the East by the ships of Venice, and by her merchants sent all over Europe, that the city gained a large share of its vast wealth. In the fifteenth century pepper was the article, more than any other, that the Venetians sent to France, Flanders, England, and, above all, to Germany.

People used to make presents of pepper. Even kings and ambassadors gave and received it. When the republic of Venice wished to show special gratitude to the Emperor Henry V., they made him an annual gift of fifty pounds of it. After a victory gained

by the people of Genoa in 1101, each soldier received as part of his pay two pounds of pepper.

In many countries there prevailed a curious system which obliged certain persons to furnish, at stated times, pepper in small quantities, in most cases about one pound. These payments were called "peppercorn rents," and the term has not entirely died out yet. In England the tax on pepper in 1623 was five shillings a pound, and even until the eighteenth century it amounted to two shillings and sixpence per pound.

You can easily imagine what a high price people had to pay for an article so much in demand, and what an enormous amount of it must have been used. I said that they put it even in sweet dishes, and, in fact, the rage for peppered food was so great that it was considered absolutely essential in every sauce. People would not have said then, "I have n't enough salt in my soup" or "on my meat," or "enough sugar in my pudding," but, "There is n't enough pepper."

In mediæval days the spice trade formed the base of a large part of the commerce carried on, particularly between the East and Italy, and gave the name to it. There were a few merchants who sold nothing else but cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and such things, including, of course, pepper, and there were, in Paris, men known as *pevriers*, who dealt exclusively in pepper. Generally, however, a spice merchant enlarged his business to include a great many other things besides what we now call spices, and would sell olive-oil, dried fruits, medicines and perfumeries, paints and pigments, pearls, corals, minerals, metals, soap, and even paper; also, strange to say, he would be expected to keep on hand a stock of furs and skins. But spices were bought and sold in larger quantities than any of the other articles just mentioned, and were of greater importance. In France a grocer is still called an *épiciier*,—a spice merchant,—which is, of course, the old name that has never been changed.

You must imagine yourself in the Middle Ages, and think of all the difficulties then connected with carrying on business. When our

merchants want anything, there are swift ships and fast trains everywhere; all countries are open, and we can telegraph from one end of the earth to the other. The products of India and Africa are at our very doors, and we have only to ask to obtain them. But it has not always been so, and we ought to remember the long voyages taken, the weary searching made, the dangers from wild beasts and savage peoples encountered, before we, in our time, could obtain so comfortably and easily what seem to us only ordinary necessities.

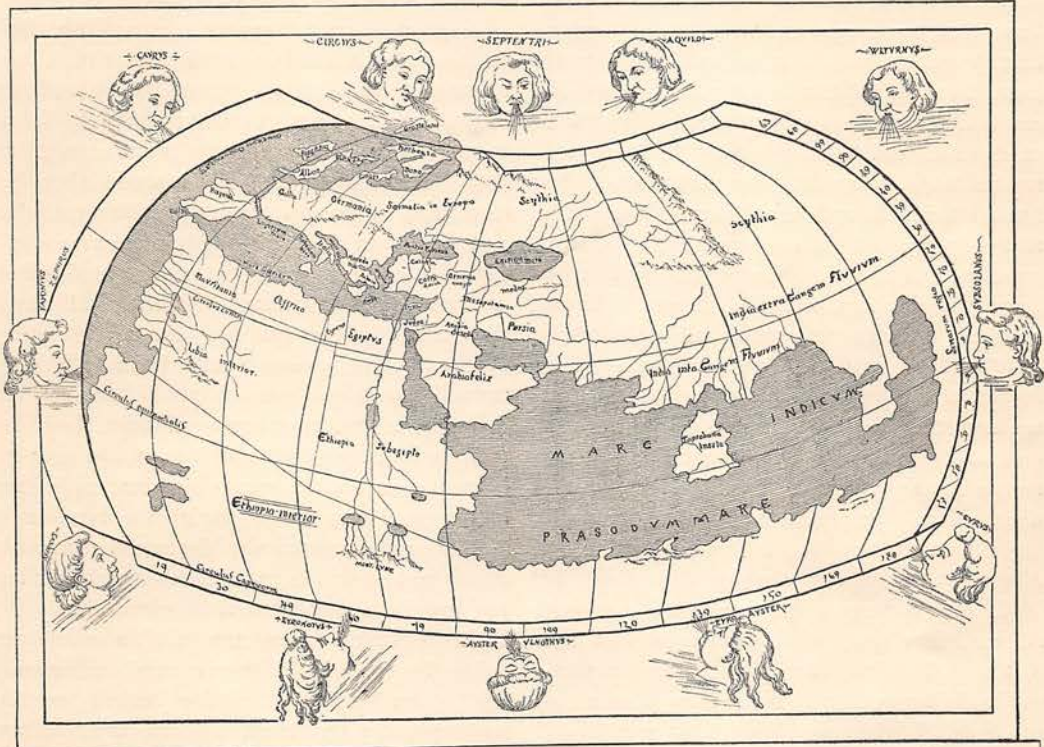
Four and five hundred years ago there was, it is true, a great amount of luxury in France and Italy. People wore beautiful clothing, magnificent jewels, and ate choice food; art flourished, and science made great progress. But at what a cost were even the necessaries of living obtained! From the far East to Europe, how long the journey was, and what months were consumed in bringing, over the deserts of Arabia, across the plains and mountains of Persia, under the burning sun of India, or in boats from Syrian and Turkish ports, the things which European civilization required. When we remember the difficulties of the mediæval merchants, we can understand one of the principal motives which led so many persons to search for new and shorter routes to the countries where the spices grew, and where the land was rich in products which would bring them wealth. It was the love of adventure and the desire to see new and strange places which started large numbers of the early voyagers, but it was, more than all, for commercial reasons that most of the expeditions were undertaken.

There is no need to tell American boys and girls anything about the men who discovered the different parts of their own country, but it is possible that you will like to hear about one or two of the persons who inspired those discoveries, and especially to know what part pepper had in leading travelers to new and unexplored regions.

In the year 1260 there passed through Constantinople two Venetians, named Maffeo and Niccoló Polo. They were on their way, as a matter of speculation, toward the East, and, by various chances and changes, went

on until they reached Bokhara in Turkestan, where they felt a long way from home, and thought they had made a great journey. But here they fell in with certain envoys on a mis-

There is no time to tell of how they found Kublai Khan at a place called Cambaluc (the old name of Peking), just rebuilt by him, or of his beautiful country-seat at Shangtu, north



EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY MAP OF THE WORLD.

This map is a copy of a very beautiful one made in the early part of the fifteenth century, and now preserved in the famous library of San Lorenzo, at Florence. When you look at it you will see what a small part of the world was known in those days, and what curious ideas people must have had of the relative positions and sizes of different countries. Notice, for instance, the place occupied by India, and see how the land shuts in the Indian Ocean.

You must remember that this and all other maps of the period were drawn largely from imagination and a slight amount of actual knowledge. But they were founded on the measurements and speculations of a famous Egyptian philosopher and geographer, called Ptolemy, who lived in the second century, and who left very extensive writings. Although in the copies of his

works there were no drawings of maps to be found, it is certain that such drawings were made, and he left most accurate directions for future scholars to follow. So, from his time until the discoveries of the great navigators, what was called, from this early geographer, the Ptolemaic system of geography was the best and only system known.

Some of the names on this map may puzzle you, for they are the old ones by which the people of the Middle Ages knew the countries. But you will be able to make out a good many of them. You will see the island of Ceylon called *Taprobane*, the Straits of Gibraltar, *Calpe*; *Gallia* and *Albion*, of course, you will recognize as France and England, since the names are not unknown to-day, and a little study will soon show you how the different countries were supposed to be placed.

sion to Cathay, or China, and bound to the court of the great monarch Kublai Khan. The two brothers were induced to accompany them, and thus became, as far as we know, the first European travelers to reach China.

of the Great Wall. But some day, when you read those lines which Coleridge left unfinished, and which begin,—

At Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree,

you might remember the visit the two Venetians paid the place.

The Chinese monarch was delighted to meet these intelligent men from the distant and civilized West, and when they went home he made them his messengers to the Pope, begging them to return with teachers and missionaries from Europe. After a long time they did reach China again, having visited home in the meanwhile, and although they had not succeeded in having the teachers sent, they brought with them Niccoló's son Marco, then fifteen years old, who became the famous traveler and the first European explorer to write a book about what he had seen. If you have not done so yet, you should read it.*

When you read his book, you will notice how often he speaks of the spices of the Eastern countries, and how he mentions pepper as one of the most important articles of commerce in those lands. The Chinese, at that time, valued pepper so much that they willingly paid fifteen ducats for a bushel, and Marco Polo says that for one ship which left India with a cargo of pepper to be sent on to Alexandria, a hundred or more went to China.

Marco Polo's book made a great impression on his fellow-countrymen, and the interest already felt in the unexplored East was largely increased by reading his stories. One traveler after another sailed from the different ports of Italy, and made voyages, more or less successful, in various directions. As at this time the principal traffic of Europe came through Venice, the Venetians were the first to interest themselves in expeditions to distant countries. Every year a Venetian squadron passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, and stopped at Lisbon on the way to England and Flanders. The sailors told stories of the Eastern countries with which their city carried on commerce, and the Portuguese and Spaniards were the next to catch the exploring fever, and began to make voyages of exploration for themselves. They went down the west coast of Africa, making their own one bit of territory after another, until, as you know, Vasco da Gama sailed quite around the Cape of Good Hope, and showed that path to India.

Prince Henry of Portugal, himself a navigator, was largely responsible for these African discoveries, and he was influenced by Marco Polo's book to attempt his own expeditions and encourage those of others.

Here in Portugal pepper was again of importance, for it is said that the desire to find it by an easy and cheap route, and thus to reduce its price, was one of the reasons why the Portuguese were so anxious to get to India by sea. Its price was certainly lowered after the merchants began to bring it directly from India and Ceylon in ships; and it became a monopoly of the Portuguese crown, continuing so until the eighteenth century. About this time the culture of pepper was extended to the Malay Archipelago, and part of the traffic was turned naturally from Italy to Portugal, as being in more direct communication.

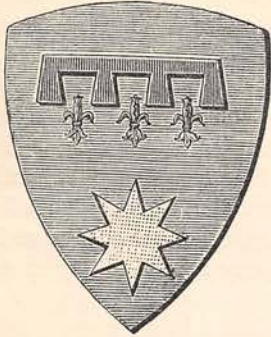
Now let us go back a little, and this time to Florence, one of the greatest commercial cities of the past, particularly during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Her merchants were of the richest in the world, and certain trades and arts flourished there as nowhere else.

Among these merchant families was one called Toscanelli, and they carried on business in "spices" and in the other articles usually coming under that head in those days. They sent in every direction for their goods, and every year visited the old Italian town called Lanciano, where was held the great fair of spices, and where merchants came to buy and sell from all countries of Europe, and even from Asia. Here one would be sure to find many travelers, and to hear many stories of strange lands and little known peoples, and here, no doubt, great impetus was given to research in new directions.

The Toscanelli family were rich, and owned a great deal of property in Florence, and a street in the city still bears their name. There is, too, a fine old villa, not far away, which belonged to them nearly five hundred years ago. But they are remembered especially for one famous representative of their name, and he was a man whom Americans should hold in great regard. Well known and esteemed in his own day, Paolo Dal Pozzo Toscanelli has

* See "The Story of Marco Polo," in ST. NICHOLAS, from June, 1896, to May, 1897.

almost been forgotten since by the world in general, until comparatively recent times.



ARMS OF THE TOSCANELLI FAMILY.

However, in 1871, at the meeting in Antwerp of the Geographical Congress, all the scholars, historians, and scientists present unanimously agreed in calling him the inspirer of the discovery of America. He died in 1482, ten years before Columbus touched the shores of the New World; but it was by the chart he drew, and according to his plans, that the great Genoese laid his course.

Toscanelli lived out the whole of his long life in Italy, a hard student, a skilful physician, and a remarkable scientist. He was the founder of modern astronomy, and was the first to mention some of the comets best known to later astronomers. His knowledge of mathematics was profound, and his interest in geographical researches intense. There is still, in the Cathedral of Florence, the gnomon, or sun-dial, he made, and it has been considered the most perfect in existence.

On the death of his brother, he took the place almost of a father to his nephews, and, as they carried on the business, he interested himself largely in their success. It was for their sake that, aside from his scientific interest in the voyages of the day, he began to think and plan new routes and ways to the country of the spices. The Turks were interfering with the introduction into Venice, and thus into Italy, of the products of India, and merchants of Florence were beginning to feel the effect of this obstacle to commerce, when Toscanelli declared it possible to reach the East by sailing west. On the chart which he made he traced a line from Lisbon, across the sea to

Quin-sai (Han-chau), on the Chinese coast; and in a letter which he wrote on June 25, 1474, to his friend Christopher Columbus, he explained his ideas and theories regarding the voyage.

At the same time that Toscanelli sent this letter to Columbus (who was then at Lisbon), he also wrote to another person a letter to be given to the King of Portugal. In this letter, among other things, he said:

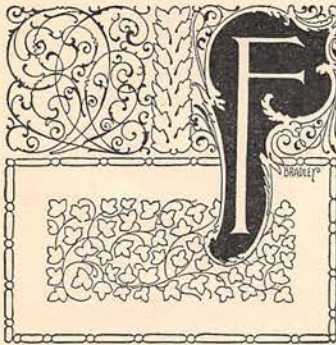
"Many other times I have reasoned concerning the very short route which there is by way of the sea from here to India,—the native land of the spices,—and which I hold to be shorter than that which you take by Guinea. For greater clearness of explanation, I have made a chart such as is used by navigators, on which is traced this route, and I send it to your Majesty. . . . I have depicted everything from Ireland at the north as far south as Guinea, with the islands and countries, and I will show how you may reach the places most productive of all sorts of spices. Also I have shown in this chart many countries in the neighborhood of India, where, if no contrary winds or misadventures arise, you will find islands where all the inhabitants are merchants. Especially is there a most noble port, called Zaitou, where they load and unload every year a hundred great ships with pepper, and there are also other ships, laden with other spices. This place is thickly populated, and there are cities and provinces without number, under the rule of a prince, called the Great Khan, which name means 'King of Kings.' . . . Here you will find not only very great gain and many rich things, but also gold and silver and precious stones, and all sorts of spices in great abundance. . . . From the city of Lisbon you may sail directly to the great and noble city of Quin-sai, where are ten bridges of marble, and the name of the place signifies 'City of Heaven.' Of it are told most marvelous things of its buildings, of its manufactures, and of its revenues. This city lies near the province of Cathay, where the king spends the greater part of his time. . . . You have heard of the island of Antilia, which you call the Seven Cities, and of the most noble island of Cipango, which is rich in gold, pearls, and

precious stones, and the temples and royal palaces are covered with plates of gold. . . . Many other things could be said, but I will not be too long. . . . And so I remain always most ready to serve your Majesty in whatever you may command me."

With such ideas as these in his mind, you know why Columbus thought he was landing in the Orient when he stepped ashore on the island of San Salvador. He had even brought with him a letter and fitting gifts for the Great Khan, or Emperor of Cathay.

To-day pepper grows in many countries besides those of the East, though the best still comes from India, and a great deal of business is carried on in its cultivation, preparation, and exportation. It has become an ordinary thing to us, and we expect it on the table as a matter of course. Perhaps, however, when you remember its old importance, and that the trade in this spice really did help to lead voyagers toward America, you will regard it as something much more interesting than a mere every-day addition to your food.

HOW PEPPER MADE AN EMPRESS.



FROM 1500 to 1600 the Portuguese had to themselves all the trade with the East. But at the end of this century of supremacy their imports from India, of which pepper was the most important, were secured by the Dutch. Bruges, Antwerp, and Amsterdam received the spices that the Portuguese had brought from the Orient, and made a fine profit by retailing them to the Europeans.

When the Dutch became the rulers of the waves, they soon began to compete with the Portuguese for the control of the Indian spice-market. But even before they had driven the Portuguese from the trade, they considered themselves strong enough to fix the price of pepper at any figure that suited their convenience. So in 1599 they doubled the price, charging the English six and eight shillings a pound, instead of three.

The merchants of London made up their

minds not to stand this, and they called a meeting, with the Lord Mayor in the chair, for the purpose of forming a company to trade with the East Indies. Thus began the corporation so long known as "John Company,"—the East India Company,—an association of English merchants that, beginning in a small way with certain trading privileges, gradually increased the territory it controlled until it became the most powerful body in India.

You will read, some day, the wonderful feats of arms performed by Clive, Lawrence, Campbell, Outram, Dalhousie, and others as brave; from the battle of Plassey—in which young Clive, with a force of thirty-two *hundred*, defeated fifty *thousand* Bengalese, and established the power of the English in India—to the victories of "Bobs Bahadur," General Lord Roberts, now commanding in South Africa.

In 1858 the authority of the East India Company was transferred to the crown, and in 1877 Queen Victoria was declared Empress of India. And it all began with the attempt of the Dutch merchants to charge the English too much for a pound of pepper.

So remember never to charge too much for pepper, or otherwise you may perhaps lose an empire, as the Dutch did.

Tudor Jenks.