CHAPTER II

Europe Prepares

for the Great Discoveries

WHEN knowledge fails, man invariably substitutes his imagination. In the Middle Ages, Europeans had only a small store of geographical information, so to fill the huge gaps they drew on their well-stocked imaginations to create a picture of unknown places. Before the Crusades, they knew scarcely anything about the East beyond Palestine and Syria, yet the Orient held great appeal for them. Even during the Dark Ages, enough Asiatic spices, drugs, jewels, and fine cloth came westward in trade to encourage the belief that Farther Asia was a rich and wonderful place. Both literature and fanciful history lent colorful support to this opinion.

Legend and Romance

There was first the story of the Apostle Thomas. Soon after Christ’s ascension, according to report, Thomas had preached the Gospel in India. The word India in the Middle Ages had no exact geographical meaning to Europeans; it was a convenient expression denoting the East beyond the Mohammedan world. Yet on the strength of the Thomas
legend, it was supposed to be filled with Christians. Nestorian Christians did live in Asia; not actually in India, to be sure, but in lands to the north and west of it; and reports of their existence certainly filtered through to Europe. In view of the geographical darkness then prevailing, their exact location did not greatly matter to the western Christians.

Another source of misinformation about the East came from the Alexander romance. Mediaeval Europe had forgotten the real history of Alexander of Macedon, but everyone knew he had gone far into Asia as a conqueror. During the early Christian era, the entire episode had been distorted into legend by an anonymous writer with a vivid imagination. The Europeans, building on this basis, gradually transformed Alexander into a mediaeval hero, something like King Arthur and the paladins of Charlemagne. They wove into his story every element of wild fancy, and equaled *The Arabian Nights* in their descriptions of his Asiatic adventures.

*Presster John*

When the Crusades, after a fair start, showed signs of ending badly, Europe created the most powerful legend of all—that of Presster John. The Presster was supposed to be a mighty Christian ruler in Asia, living a pious and saintly life and possessing riches too great to count and armies too large to number. This wonderful sovereign, a descendant of the Wise Men who visited the infant Jesus, wished to communicate with western Christians and join them in destroying the unbelieving Moslems. A letter supposedly sent by Presster John began circulating through Europe in 1165. The writer, gathering up the whole stock and store of oriental wonder legends, poured it forth plentifully, extolling the
Prester's virtues and describing the size and marvels of his eastern kingdom. The papacy and western Christendom took it all quite seriously, and to this day no one knows who concocted the weird and wondrous document.

Europe believed in Prester John because it needed him. For centuries the West had fought a losing battle with its great antagonist, Islam. The first crusade had briefly turned the tide, but by the twelfth century Europe was on the retreat again. Nothing could be more welcome at this critical stage than news of an invincible ally in the enemy's rear, anxious to help grind the infidels to powder. Although as the years went by no signs of Prester John's promised aid were forthcoming, Europe refused to abandon hope and listened eagerly to any rumor that seemed to suggest the great eastern Christian sovereign.

Not until the thirteenth century were conditions sufficiently favorable in the East to permit Europeans to visit Asia in considerable numbers. Then they began traveling, some from religious motives and others for commercial reasons. Wherever they went, they kept an eye out for the cherished ally, Prester John. (Of course, Europe did not endow Prester John with personal immortality but thought of him rather as a member of a dynasty.) Occasionally candidates were found among insignificant Nestorian rulers, but these simply did not fill the bill; and the westerners concluded at last that no powerful Christian potentate existed in Asia. Early in the fourteenth century, Europeans moved Prester John to Africa and identified him with the Christian ruler of Abyssinia. There he remained, always an important factor in European speculations about unknown places and usually a main figure in projects of exploration. The undying belief in Prester John gave rise to a plan of European strategy
to circumvent Islam and to secure a base in its rear. Prince Henry the Navigator had such a plan, and the idea figured somewhat in the thoughts of Christopher Columbus.

*Mongol Empire*

The European travelers whose reports removed Prester John from Asia were able to roam there because of a new and unprecedented circumstance, the rise of the mighty Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century. Genghis Khan (1167–1227), who began as the chief of an obscure tribe in northern Mongolia, intrigued and fought his way to the command of a military coalition of nomads dominating the caravan routes of east-central Asia. After subduing Manchuria and northern China, he turned westward and overran Turkestan and much of Persia. His armies, which for speed and discipline far outclassed any others of their time, cut a wide and bloody swath across central and western Asia, swallowing cities, provinces, and empires almost as fast as they could spur their hardy little Mongolian horses. During this early period of Mongol conquest, Europe heard distantly of the Khan and naturally identified him with the long-awaited Prester John. Could the grim old warrior have learned of this identification, it might have awakened in him the sense of humor he appeared so utterly to lack. Toward the end of his life, his armies made a brief raid into Russia, and from this Europe learned enough about the invaders to realize that they were neither Moslem nor Christian.

When Genghis died, the Mongols paused in their conquests a few years before raising his favorite son to the throne of the largest empire that history had thus far known. Their next western attack was launched against Russia, this time with the aim of permanent conquest. No people could stand
against them, and after trampling Russia beneath their horses' hoofs, they burst into Poland, eastern Germany, and Hungary. Christian Europe, cowering in mortal terror at reports of the heathen invaders, finally met them in the flesh, but lacked both the unity and the military skill to offer much resistance. Poles, Germans, Magyars, and Czechs were routed, and the Mongols swept to the gates of Vienna and the shores of the Adriatic before turning back. Even then it was the death of the Great Khan (1241) and not Christian valor that stopped them in their course. When news came, borne by fast riders across Asia and Europe, that their mighty overlord had drunk himself into the grave, the Mongol leaders spurred for Karakorum, their capital north of the Gobi, where the new ruler was to be chosen. Western Europe still lay ripe for conquest, but its riches did not include the pasture land the Mongols prized so highly, and thereafter they apparently did not deem its conquest worth the effort. Russia became their European headquarters, and their later European raids were limited to Poland.

*Missions to the Mongols*

Christendom had a breathing spell, but for all anyone knew at the time it might be nothing more. Some European counteroffensive was clearly in order, although the pope sadly realized that Christian disunity made a crusade impossible. As a second best, the Holy Father sent a missionary delegation, headed by the elderly and corpulent Franciscan, Giovanni da Pian del Càpine, to convert the Khan. Fra Giovanni entered the Mongol dominions in Russia and, somewhat to his surprise, was treated fairly well and even assisted on his journey. The Mongol deputy in charge of Russia deemed the Christian missionary important enough to
be sent to the supreme lord of all the Mongols at Karakorum. There the Italian envoy was able to talk at least once with the new Great Khan, the grandson of Genghis. This lordly ruler snubbed the friar’s proposal that the Mongols become Roman Catholics. Otherwise he seemed not altogether hostile to Europeans, and Giovanni was allowed to make his way homeward in 1248 to render his detailed report to the pope.

The truth was that the Mongols had only the crudest religion of their own, but they adopted a tolerant policy toward more advanced faiths. Indifferent themselves, they allowed Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity to be freely practiced in their empire. Moreover, they had instincts of good government. Though ruthless when conquering, they brought peace and comparative security to the subject lands. They wished to foster trade, not stifle it, and the vastness of their empire, stretching from the Pacific to Poland, gave splendid opportunities for commerce and safe travel. Though Fra Giovanni’s mission failed, he could not have made the journey at all had no Mongol Empire existed.

Other Europeans followed Pian del Càrpine to the East. Several who wrote about their travels are known by name, and it is safe to say that many others undertook the adventure and remained anonymous. One important European visitor to Karakorum was Guillaume de Rubruk, a Belgian Franciscan who in 1253 was sent on a mission of conversion by the king of France. Friar Guillaume also failed in his proselytizing effort, although he had a diplomatic interview with another Great Khan, who was unfortunately too tipsy to make the audience an unqualified success. Nevertheless, Guillaume wrote a longer and somewhat better travel narrative than Fra Giovanni.
The Polos

Thus far the Europeans had not pushed as far as China. The distinction of arriving there first was reserved for the Venetian Polo brothers, Niccolo and Maffeo, who about 1265 reached the court of Kublai Khan (1260–1294). This famous ruler, another grandson of Genghis, had transferred the Mongol capital to Peking and was now concentrating on the conquest of southern China. Though the Polos were merely itinerant traders without official status, they returned to Europe bearing Kublai’s request to the pope for Catholic missionaries to work in eastern Asia. The Khan’s interest in western Christianity was probably no more than curiosity, but Europe remembered this flicker of attention for generations and wishfully took it to mean that the East was ripe for conversion to the Catholic faith.

On reaching home, the Polos found no pope on the throne of St. Peter, and after growing tired of waiting for the election of a new one, they returned to Asia without the missionaries but with the young son of Niccolo. This was Marco Polo, who left Venice in 1271 at the age of seventeen and returned in 1295 when he was over forty. The most important years of his life were thus spent in Asia, principally in China, where he acquired a grasp and understanding of the East that his father and uncle never gained. He became the historian of both Polo expeditions and the best interpreter of the Far East to mediaeval Europe. The Book of Ser Marco Polo, composed soon after his return to Europe, was a collaborative effort between Marco and a professional writer, Rustichello of Pisa. As a result of Italian city-state wars, these two found themselves for some months sharing the same cell in a Genoese prison. Rustichello proposed that they write the
story of Marco's travels, and they worked together more to while away the time than to enlighten posterity. But when the book appeared it became very popular, at least with the general public; the learned preferred to believe what classical writers had said concerning the East. Meanwhile Marco was ransomed from prison and grew old and garrulous in Venice, boring his fellow citizens with endless tales of the wonderful lands and cities he had seen. After his death, many scholars were won over to believing what he had said about Cathay and Manzi (northern and southern China). His hearsay description of Cipangu (Japan), which he declared to be very rich in gold, appealed to some who thought that this island lay directly across the Atlantic from Europe.

The Polo journey to China was by no means the last in Mongol times. On a small scale, at least, the Church's missionary effort finally bore fruit, and from early in the fourteenth century there are reports of an archbishopric in Peking and a subordinate bishopric in southern China. It is difficult to know how seriously to take this, but the best guess must be that the number of converts remained small.

In 1368 a native dynasty drove the Mongols out of China and restored national independence. As a reaction to the conquest, Chinese policy became isolationist and antiforeign, but Europe did not learn of these changes for over a century. Even later than the time of Columbus, the West continued to think of a Great Khan as reigning in the East.

Changing Conditions

Shortly before the return of the Polos from China, the power balance in the Mediterranean tipped sharply, to the disadvantage of western Europe. The capture of Acre by the
sultan of Egypt in 1291 eliminated the last Christian stronghold won during the Crusades. Sporadic efforts to drum up a new crusade failed, and Europe had to face a powerful Egypt standing athwart the best trade route to the East. The merchant republic of Venice made a quick adaptation to the new situation and concluded a commercial alliance with the Egyptians. Thereafter if Europe wanted oriental products it had to pay the prices of these profiteering partners.

By the opening of the fourteenth century, Europe had begun to look toward the Atlantic. Though the Crusades had failed, trading opportunities to the westward had improved. The emergence of Portugal as an independent kingdom and the growing economic importance of England and Flanders attracted the interest of the Italian trading cities. The great fairs of Champagne, where Flemish cloth could be exchanged for eastern spices, also lured the Italians. Presently they began sending trading galleys through the Strait of Gibraltar to the west European coast instead of using the earlier overland caravan routes.

*Aids to Navigation*

As sea voyages became longer, aids to navigation were needed and developed. Just who invented the compass—the Chinese, the Arabs, or the Europeans—is a matter of debate too long and involved to be settled here. Mediterranean seamen, chiefly Italian and Catalan, were certainly using a primitive compass before 1300. Although they knew nothing of the magnetic pole, they were already disturbed by the fact that their compass did not seem to point to the true north. The astrolabe, for finding latitude by astronomy, was also known in the thirteenth century. Unfortunately, the
astrolabe could be used better on land than on the deck of a swaying ship, a factor that postponed its general adoption by mariners.

In the late thirteenth century, probably in the city of Genoa, there appeared the first portolan charts. The old T-in-O disks had illustrated a concept of geography that was mainly religious and could be of no possible use to navigators. A portolan, on the other hand, showed coastal contours in considerable detail and accurately gave distances from place to place. Its maker did not bother with inland points, nor did he exercise his imagination on coasts that had not been thoroughly explored. His business was to provide a working chart to help seamen reach the places for which they were bound. The earlier portolans were figured in terms of relative distance and not in latitudes, presumably because the navigator using them would not be likely to have an astrolabe. Later, during the fifteenth century, the portolans began to be constructed to a latitudinal scale.

At first these new maps showed only the Mediterranean coast, but as fast as the Atlantic shores became known in detail they too appeared. Next, the discovery or rediscovery of such island groups as the Canaries and the Madeiras caused them to appear on the portolans, in as accurate a position as the mapmaker’s information would permit.

Early Discovery Voyages

Actual discovery voyages began. One of the bravest adventures ever recorded is the attempt by the Genoese brothers Ugolino and Vadino Vivaldo to sail to the “Indies” in 1291. Though evidence concerning the Vivaldi is scarce, it suggests that they planned to join some of their Genoese friends at the head of the Persian Gulf by going through the
Strait of Gibraltar. But how did the brothers plan to reach their goal—by rounding Africa or by sailing westward in the Atlantic? Since the Vivaldi kept the details of their plan a secret, we shall never know the answer, but whatever their intention, they failed. Their two light galleys were last sighted off the Moroccan coast; after that nothing is known of these brave Italians, who may well have anticipated the plan of another Genoese, Columbus, by a full two hundred years.

Other Italians with less grandiose plans continued to explore in the Atlantic. About 1312 a Genoese named Lanzarote Mallocello discovered the island of the Canary group that still bears the name Lanzarote and established a colony that lasted for several years. The Canaries had been known to a few ancient geographers such as Ptolemy and had even made a hazy appearance on mediaeval maps. But European contact with the islands, at least to our knowledge, had stopped during the Middle Ages.

Evidence from the portolans shows that the Madeira Islands had been rediscovered before the year 1330, and by 1351 an island group resembling the Azores had begun to appear on the charts. But we cannot be sure these were the real Azores. They may have been merely a cluster of imaginary islands, since European cartographers, even the makers of portolans, used a great deal of imagination when dealing with the unknown Atlantic. Maps of the fourteenth and fifteenth century dotted the ocean with fantastic islands bearing such labels as Mayda, Antilia, St. Brandan's Isle, and Brazil!

Not all the early exploration was the work of Italians. The Catalans and Majorcans were also able mariners and showed an interest in exploring the mainland coast of Africa. One
of their voyagers, Jacme Ferrer, departed in 1346 to search for a “river of gold.” Gold had long moved by caravan across the Sahara from Timbuktu to Europe; the Catalans evidently thought they could reach the gold country by sailing up a large river, probably the Senegal, which was reported to flow westward from central Africa to the Atlantic. Jacme Ferrer apparently died in this attempt, for surely his return from the Senegal, with or without gold, would have created excitement enough in Catalonia to provoke written comment and perhaps lead to further expeditions.

Thus between 1290 and 1350 a start was made toward exploring the Atlantic. But interest soon subsided and during the next fifty years some of the little knowledge already gained was lost. Genoese and Catalans had thus far led in discovery, but these were Mediterranean peoples, operating far from their bases and from their countries’ main interests. Further improvements in navigation were needed before the Europeans could make long voyages. The Genoese and Catalan ships were mostly galleys with only a limited range on the ocean. They depended on rowers, whose large numbers and need for space made it difficult either to carry food for a long voyage or to bear substantial cargo. Sailing vessels, such as were gradually being developed, had several advantages: they could cope better with Atlantic winds, they had more cargo space, and they eliminated the need for the unwieldy gangs of rowers who propelled the galleys.

Valuable as their preliminary work was, the future of exploration did not belong to the Genoese and Catalans. It was Portugal and Castile, both facing the Atlantic, that ultimately developed efficient ocean-going ships and became the pioneers in distant adventure and great discovery.
CHAPTER III

Portugal and the East

The modern world owes to Portugal the first planned and organized program of geographical discovery. That little nation became independent in the twelfth century, as a by-product of the Christian crusade to recover the Iberian peninsula from the Moors. Afonso Henriques, who began as Count of Portugal, shook loose from his Castilian overlord and took the title of king in 1140. He then drove southward, conquering or expelling the Moslems as he advanced, and his successors continued the work until by 1249 the liberation had been completed. Portugal in Europe had attained its present size. Over a hundred years later the small kingdom had to stand off the might of powerful Castile, which was intent on reannexing it, but the patriotic Portuguese proved equal to the challenge. Rallying behind their new and popular sovereign, of the house of Avis, they defeated the Castilians in 1385 and insured Portuguese independence for the next two centuries.

By this time there were already strong signs that Portugal's future lay on the ocean. Geographically the country was a narrow coastal strip without much hinterland. Trade by sea existed, some of it already borne in Portuguese ships. The people were hardy and warlike, anxious to carry the fight
Africa and fifteenth-century Portuguese discoveries.
against the Moslems into Africa. Although the kingdom was small, it was by 1400 more compact and unified than were the larger European states. And for the particular direction in which sea exploration was to go, Portugal possessed the best point of departure on the European Continent.

Henry the Navigator

King John I (1385–1433), the founder of the Avis dynasty, had a gifted group of sons of whom the famous Prince Henry was the third. This prince and his brothers persuaded their father to lead a fleet and army across the strait in 1415 to capture the Moroccan seaport of Ceuta. Though the old king undertook this adventure with no thought beyond the immediate military advantage involved, Henry, who accompanied his father, looked upon Ceuta as a mere beginning. He studied Africa: its people, its trade routes, and its known resources. He became especially interested in the reports of gold from the distant south. He also wished to know how far the Islamic religion extended and what peoples lay beyond. Could they possibly be Christians? By this time the ruler of Abyssinia was positively identified with Prester John, but who knew how much of Africa the Prester’s kingdom covered? When Henry heard reports of a great empire in the Sahara, he leaped to the conclusion that this was the domain of Prester John. The Saharan empire, though it had existed a few years earlier, had already broken up and of course had nothing to do with Abyssinia, which lay two thousand miles farther east.

With Henry the search for gold probably came first, for Portugal then suffered from a severe shortage of that precious metal and badly needed a new source of supply. So, for that matter, did all western Europe. The Egyptian-
Venetian monopoly of the Asiatic spice trade through the Red Sea and Alexandria had set up an adverse trade balance that was bleeding the West of its currency.

Whether Henry was also a religious crusader is hard to tell. Although in youth he had his gayer moments, he was pious in mature years and lived a monkish life. He unquestionably wished to convert all Africans found in the course of exploration, and he had a great desire to make contact with Prester John. But all through his career—even though he freely used the resources of the Portuguese Order of Christ, of which he was grand master—he seemed mainly concerned with profit, perhaps because his work was expensive and he needed revenue to carry it on.

Since the prince never sailed with his voyagers, his surname “Navigator” is not exactly appropriate, but he was nevertheless the heart and soul of the exploring effort. He did the planning and financing and supervised the collating of data. He set up headquarters at the peninsula of Sagres, at the southwestern corner of Portugal, where he assembled a galaxy of talented seamen and scientists. Foreigners who wished to help were as welcome as Portuguese; Henry’s servants included Italians, Catalans, and even a Dane.

His first important achievements were the discovery and colonization of the Madeiras and of the Azores. The prince probably knew that these were actually rediscoveries, and in all likelihood he used older maps of Italian and Catalan origin in directing his captains to the islands. Neither group had inhabitants, for although sighted in the previous century by Italians, they had never been occupied. Henry now sent colonists as fast as possible. The settlers from Portugal were placed under proprietors called donataries, who held their land grants on feudal terms. The islands showed a profit al-
most from the start. Madeira became an exporter of sugar and wine, while the Azores bred excellent livestock. Henry also made a gesture toward the Canary Islands, which were populated by a magnificent breed of warlike white savages. But Castile had begun the conquest of the Canaries in 1402, and Henry decided to avoid international complications by concentrating his efforts elsewhere.

The Coast of Africa

Cape Bojador, in southern Morocco, stood in the way of exploration to the south. Tradition said this promontory had never been rounded, although Catalan ships had certainly passed it less than a century before. Imagination pictured great dangers lying beyond Bojador, and it was believed that no vessel sailing around it could return. Not until 1434 did Henry succeed in persuading one of his captains to double the much-feared cape, but once past it the mariners found calm weather and a placid sea. Henry, much encouraged, pushed his captains on.

Below Cape Bojador they came to an inlet they named River of Gold (Rio de Ouro) from the half-legendary river reported in earlier times, a river probably to be identified with the Senegal, much farther south. Since Rio de Ouro is not a river and produces no gold, the discoverers soon realized their mistake and continued the southward search. It was slow work, for the ships seldom ventured far from the coast and invariably turned back after exploring a few miles beyond the limits reached by their predecessors.

The greatest advance down the west African coast in Henry’s time came in the decade of the 1440’s. In those years the prince’s ships passed Cape Verde and discovered the mouths of the Senegal and Gambia. For the rest of Henry’s
days the Portuguese captains never pressed far south of those rivers, although one of them sighted the impressive range of mountains called Sierra Leone. Their immediate and main interest became the exploration of the rivers in quest of Christians and gold. Some gold they found, because the old reports they followed had a grain of truth. Christians were of course out of the question, since Prester John's Abyssinia lay on the other side of the African continent. But rumors of Christians persisted, and the natives cheerfully co-operated by revising what little they knew of the interior to correspond with the kind of information they soon found was wanted.

Meanwhile the Portuguese traded along the coast and up the rivers and eked out their profits with cargoes of fish and sealskins. In a limited way they began the modern African slave trade, carrying back to Portugal a few Negroes originally received as presents from friendly native rulers. The traffic at first amounted to little, since Portugal had small use for slaves in the fifteenth century. Later, following the Spanish discovery of America and the development of the Portuguese Atlantic islands, the human cargoes became large and economically profitable.

The last important discovery made in Prince Henry's lifetime was that of the Cape Verde Islands. Alvise da Cadamosto, a Venetian in the prince's service who was sailing for the Gambia, sighted several of the eastern members of the group in 1457. The Cape Verdes were uninhabited and hence offered the Portuguese a new colonizing opportunity.

Henry died in 1460 at the age of sixty-six. Although the events of his life are fully known, we have next to no information regarding his personality. His official biographer portrayed him as a somber, ascetic man, solely concerned
with his great plans of discovery. No doubt this portrait applies better to Henry's later years than to his youth, when he appears to have been a gallant who partook of the pleasures and frivolities of the era. There can be no doubt of the tremendous importance of his work. Though the extent of his plans and aspirations is frequently exaggerated, one may still call him the greatest figure in the history of exploration. Certainly he was the first man who devoted his life to patronizing discovery and to gathering geographical data. Even though he had no grandiose plan for rounding Africa and approaching the East through the Indian Ocean, his work ultimately suggested the idea to others. His very failure to reach Prester John and a supply of gold by the southern water route forced his successors to pursue and modify the plan.

King John II

Over twenty years elapsed between Henry's death and the reign of his grandnephew John II (1481–1495), who was the next royal patron of discovery. Even though the Portuguese government neglected Africa during the intervening years, exploration still went on. Private merchants, foreign as well as Portuguese, sought a share in the trade of Guinea, as the whole west African coast was then coming to be called. From 1469 to 1474 the government gave the trade monopoly there to Fernão Gomes, on condition that he send out exploring as well as trading expeditions.

Gomes faithfully kept his part of the bargain. Besides bringing back cargoes of slaves, ivory, gold dust, and melegueta pepper, he sent his ships eastward along the Gold, Ivory, and Slave Coasts and around the bend at the Cameroons almost to the mouth of the Congo. But for all Gomes'
energy, the contract was not renewed, because the vigorous young Prince John decided that the African enterprise should return to royal hands.

The prince was unable to push the exploration effectively until the death of his romantic and ineffectual father, Afonso V, made him king of Portugal in 1481. Then, although harassed by the conspiracies of his great nobles, who were determined to kill him, he found time and resources to outfit an African expedition. This succeeded in establishing a fort and trading post at Mina on the Gold Coast which could serve as a base for further explorations. Like Prince Henry, John had hoped to reach Prester John from some point in West Africa, but already he had greater ideas. India was now what interested him. Though the geographical riddle of the Dark Continent had not been solved, John already guessed the answer and was prepared to gamble that Africa could be rounded.

It did not take him long to act. In 1482 and again in 1484 he sent out Diogo Cão, a brave and experienced commander, to push as far as possible to the south. The timid advances of Prince Henry’s day were a thing of the past now, and the Portuguese advanced by giant strides. On his first expedition, Cão discovered the mouth of the Congo River, being guided to it by the mud and vegetation the mighty stream poured into the Atlantic. After exploring far down the coast of Angola, he returned to the Congo, where he picked up several hostages who were subjects of the Mani Congo, an interesting African prince who ruled in pomp and style a few miles up the river. Cão took these Negroes to Portugal, where the king gave them Christian baptism and a thorough briefing not only regarding his plans but their own role therein. The Congolese were particularly urged to be alert
for any word of Christians to the east and to pass on such information to the next white men (naturally Portuguese) whom they met.

On his second trip to Africa, Cão restored the Congo natives to their people and then, leaving the river once more, pushed far beyond the limit of his first voyage to Cape Cross in what today is Southwest Africa. Some unexplained circumstance, perhaps the commander's death, caused the Portuguese to halt at the cape and then return. John, however, felt that his next voyager would make a great discovery.

The Route to India

Having by now solved the problem of his rebellious nobles by killing the ringleaders, the king could proceed unhampered to the solution of his other great problem, Africa. The continent, though still important to him, had become largely the means to an end, and the end was India. In order to examine the problem from both sides, John prepared two expeditions for the year 1487. He began by sending two Arabic-speaking Portuguese across the Mediterranean, to go from North Africa to India and Prester John's Abyssinia. One scout soon died, but the other, Pero de Covilhã, managed to visit all lands assigned to both. After reaching India, he returned to Cairo and from there sent back a letter informing King John that the most promising trading port in India was Calicut on the coast of Malabar. Covilhã then entered Abyssinia, where the ruler somehow failed to recognize himself in the role of Prester John, and, taking the Portuguese visitor for a spy, refused to let him leave the country.

King John's other expedition, commanded by Bartolomeu Dias, set out in a small fleet with orders to pass Diogo Cão's farthest point and if possible to turn the tip of Africa. Dias
accomplished his mission. After being driven below the southern limit of the continent by storms, the ships touched Africa again east of the cape. The brave commander then persuaded the weary and homesick seamen to continue sailing east until the northward bend of the continent clearly showed that they were entering the Indian Ocean. Not until their homeward voyage did the Portuguese explorers finally see the mighty cape near the southern end of Africa. The name Good Hope was given by the king in recognition of the boundless prospects opened by its discovery.

By the end of 1488 King John had learned the two things he needed most to know. Africa ended about 36° S., and beyond that lay the open route to India. But though the king lived and reigned another seven years, his elaborate preparations for a new voyage were not completed by the time of his death. Dias had reported that the lateen-rigged caravels, in which most of the previous expeditions, including his own, had sailed, were too light, too fragile, and too low in the water to navigate the turbulent waters of the cape and the southern Atlantic. Instead, he recommended naus, a heavier rounder type of ship with square rigging and a greater draft. Slower though they were, naus would be more seaworthy in those waters and would provide more space for seamen's quarters and provisions. Almost at once, on royal orders, Dias set to work supervising the construction of proper naus, the ships that would bear Vasco da Gama to India.

_Treaty of Tordesillas_

In 1493 Christopher Columbus, returning from the discovery of America, was driven into Lisbon by bad weather. He underwent a thorough questioning from John, and although
the Portuguese ruler doubted that Columbus had been to Marco Polo's Cipangu (first identified with Haiti), he did feel that the new explorations in the names of Ferdinand and Isabella represented something dangerous to Portuguese ambitions. John coolly claimed that all the western lands belonged to him; Columbus and his Spanish sovereigns rushed a message to Rome appealing to the pope. Alexander VI was himself a Spaniard and on much better terms with Castile and Aragon than with Portugal. He issued a series of bulls during the year designed to reinforce the claims of the Spanish rulers to any new lands they wanted, east or west. John, paying slight heed to this papal interference, let his Spanish neighbors know that he was prepared to fight unless he got a better settlement. Though reluctant to make concessions, Ferdinand and Isabella finally yielded and in June of 1494 signed the Treaty of Tordesillas with the emissaries of Portugal. This agreement divided the spheres of exploration by an imaginary line drawn from pole to pole through the Atlantic 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, approximately where the forty-sixth meridian of longitude runs. East of the line Portugal gained full and exclusive rights to discovery and conquest, and Spain (or rather Castile) received the same privileges to the west.

Roughly, King John and his descendants received the Eastern Hemisphere and the Spanish monarchs the Western, except for the shoulder of Brazil that turned out to lie on the Portuguese side, and part of Australia and the east Asian coast, which went to Spain. Neither country proved overly scrupulous in abiding by the agreement, but in general it proved workable for them until the eighteenth century. Since the pope later gave his blessing to the pact, other Cath-
olic countries were obliged to pay some attention to it, although Protestant states felt no such obligation.

**Vasco da Gama**

King John died late in 1495 without sending an expedition to India, which the treaty awarded to him. His brother-in-law and successor Manuel I (1495–1521), better known as Manuel the Fortunate, lacked John's ability but was energetic and determined to carry out the plan. The new king spent the year 1496 in regulating home affairs, particularly in arranging for the expulsion or forced conversion of the Portuguese Jews, a policy destined to prove damaging to his country later. But by 1497 all was ready for the voyage to India. The new ships built by Dias had been finished and placed under the command of a little-known member of the Portuguese nobility, Vasco da Gama. This Da Gama, whose fortune it was to initiate direct European contact with the East, was a man of iron physique and surly disposition. Unlettered, brutal, and violent, he was nevertheless loyal and fearless. For some assignments he would have been useless, but for this one he was made to order. The work lying ahead could not be accomplished by a gentle leader.

On July 18, 1497, Vasco da Gama took his four ships across the bar of the Tagus and, after dropping down to the long-familiar Cape Verde Islands, made a daring innovation. His predecessors—Cão, Dias, and the rest—had merely coasted Africa, seldom venturing far from shore, but Da Gama, after leaving the Cape Verdes, described a huge semicircle in the South Atlantic and swung over almost to the Brazilian coast. On reaching the higher southern latitudes he encountered the west winds that blew him eastward until he
sighted land at St. Helena Bay, a few miles north of the Cape of Good Hope. Rounding the cape, he sailed into the Indian Ocean and up the east coast of Africa, through waters never before cut by a European keel.

The first Arabs they met cordially received the Portuguese strangers; but on learning that they were Christians, the Moslems quickly guessed that their guests would prove dangerous, and friendship chilled to open hostility. The Portuguese luckily avoided several traps laid for them and continued their northward cruise. Not until reaching Malindi, a city in the modern Kenya territory, did they find a warmer welcome. There a sultan, who for local political reasons decided to befriend the strangers, even provided Da Gama with a pilot to guide him to Calicut, the goal of the Portuguese ever since Pero de Covilhã’s letter to John II.

Reaching Calicut in 1498, Vasco da Gama found a Hindu ruler who seemed utterly unimpressed with him and his bedraggled expedition. The Portuguese bargained for spices, although they had little to offer in trade, since the Indians turned up their noses at the few European goods they had brought. Da Gama, after displaying what for him was unusual patience, managed finally to stock his holds with a slim cargo of spices and other oriental luxuries. Then, avoiding an armed clash with Arab traders, who scented the danger his pioneering expedition offered and wished to destroy it, he sailed for home. One of his four ships had been broken up during the outward voyage; another had to be abandoned and burned on the way back, as sickness took a steady toll of the dwindling crews. The remaining two vessels finally reached Lisbon in the summer of 1499.
Aftermath of the Voyage

This voyage is one of the landmarks of world history. It established, for the first time, direct sea communication between the Occident and the Orient, thereby opening the fabled East and its treasures to the cupidity and daring of the West. Portugal could anticipate immediate wealth, and King Manuel loudly trumpeted his joy, but in the long run all Europe stood to profit from this epoch-making feat.

As an achievement of exploration, however, the voyage had definite limitations. Dias had already proved that Africa could be rounded; the Indian Ocean had been sailed by civilized Asiatics for centuries; and the great voyage failed, for the moment at least, to change Europe’s concept of the eastern ocean and of Hindustan. Ptolemy still held sway there for several years, and his erroneous map was copied by some European cartographers long after the Portuguese had revealed its obsolescence. But these mossbacks gradually abandoned the field, for science now was truly on the march.