

of their own religion. Trade flowed afterwards from the north-west of China to Constantinople, and infused such life into that city that the historian Robertson says the decline of the Roman Empire, of which it was then the capital, was retarded in consequence.

When the commerce of India was conveyed by the Persian Gulf, the Euphrates, and the Syrian desert, "Tadmor in the Wilderness" burst into splendour, like some huge tropical blossom. In presence of great and ambitious neighbours it long enjoyed prosperity, and even rivalled the "Eternal City." Egypt, Mesopotamia, and a large section of Asia Minor, were subdued by its arms, and its renowned queen, Zenobia, did not shrink from contesting dominion with a Roman Emperor. When subsequently Eastern commerce was diverted from the Persian to the Arabian Gulf, the sun of Babylon, Bassorah, Palmyra, and Tyre went down, and Petra arose as a chief medium of supplying Europe with Oriental merchandise. At length the renown of Alexandria eclipsed all surrounding commercial centres. The glory of Venice, "the bride of the sea;" of Genoa, "the superb, the city of palaces;" of Florence, the metropolis of arts; of Bruges, the grand inland point for the distribution of Eastern goods to Western Europe under the Hanseatic league, of Antwerp, Lisbon, and London,—the glory of all these cities, whether as seats of commerce, manufactures, learning, or art, was derived in various degrees from their being mouths to receive Oriental freight for the supply of adjacent countries.

The discovery of a path to India by the Cape of Good Hope not only turned the course of trade carried on between Europe and the eastern parts of Asia, but changed the political "balance of power." The golden tide now swept the shores of Portugal and Spain, and by sharing the boon that had enriched other nations, these kingdoms suddenly rose into commercial magnitude, and vied in opulence, political weight, and maritime adventure, with the proudest nations of that time.

The next important historical event bearing upon commerce with the East was the discovery of America. The hope which inflamed the ambition and roused the energy of Columbus in undertaking that first exploratory voyage westward was that across the untracked waters of the Atlantic lay *the true, the shortest, and the best way to the riches of the East*. All the earlier expeditions of discovery from Europe to the shores of the Western Continent had their origin in this idea. It was in prosecuting the search of a passage to the East that the Atlantic seaboard came to be more accurately known. It was while exploring for a maritime route to China that John Cabot, in the reign of Henry VII., discovered the coast of Newfoundland and afterwards entered the St. Lawrence.

The thought that gave inspiration to all the luckless attempts