

the articles had to be bought in the Levant at a price three or four times higher than they were sold in Cathay or India.



At the end of the fourteenth century some Genoese and Catalan adventurers landed on the then forgotten Canary Isles, whose inhabitants had fallen so low, since their abandonment by Europeans, that they did not know the use of iron, or even how to bake bread, and were clothed in the hides of beasts! This discovery found a mighty echo in the West of Europe, especially in Portugal, which was then under the sway of king John I., surnamed the Great.

A son of this sovereign, *infante* Henry, called the navigator (*Dom Henrique, Navegador*), born 1394, died 1460, did far more for maritime progress than all the Roman emperors together. To second the endeavours of the merchants and manufacturers of his time, who wanted to deal directly with Asia, so as not to have to undergo the exorbitant duties and sundry vexatious delays caused by the hostile Easterns, Henry conceived the plan of reaching Cathay by doubling the unknown southern parts of Africa, and for this purpose he sent Perestrello with ships to explore the western coasts of the Black Continent.

This captain, after a short voyage, was thrown by a heavy gale on the shore of an unknown and uninhabited isle, called by him Porto Santo; from here he saw land, namely, Madeira, which he occupied in the year 1419. This isle, covered with forests and quite uninhabited, was then changed by the Portuguese into an enormous vineyard, the vine having been brought thither from Cyprus; the sugar cane was also introduced from Sicily. In the year 1432 Henry's seamen discovered the Azores equally uninhabited, a year