AUSTRALASIA


The career of Vespucci has probably aroused more controversy than that of any other early navigator, and the judgments of critics have varied within extraordinarily wide limits. While some have regarded him as one of the most skilful pilots and cartographers of his time, others have pronounced him little better than a vain-glorious charlatan. The latter verdict is no doubt unjust, and a work which like the present starts with the avowed intention of re-establishing the credit of the navigator is valuable as a corrective to such tendency to excessive depreciation. But the rôle of a clever advocate maintained by the author throughout lessens the claim of the book to be considered a judicial presentment of the evidence, and may even defeat its own object by putting the reader on his guard against too easy acceptance of the views pronounced. Still, the book is undoubtedly one to be read by all students of the question, and it gives evidence of immense industry and knowledge on the part of its author.

In the first part of the book M. Vignaud ably discusses the complicated bibliography of Vespucci's career, treating of the whole history of the early editions of the 'Mundus Novus' and the 'Lettera'—the only undoubtedly authentic sources—as well as the other writings which have been attributed to the Florentine, and the large body of modern literature and reprints, the whole making up a total of 272 items. Even the two first-named documents offer problems which cannot yet be regarded as settled. It could have been wished that M. Vignaud had been able to consider the new arguments lately put forward by Prof. Northup (see Journal vol. 50, p. 377) in support of the view that the letter to Soderini was originally written in Spanish, and that in any case the Italian version of 1505 or 1506 was not the common source of all later editions, but that both it and others—e.g. the Latin of Basin and Waldseemüller—derive from a lost original. In this view the Latin version, instead of being a somewhat faulty translation through the French from the known Italian, may sometimes help us to re-establish the sense of the original text. The question has an important bearing on the disputed first voyage, as we shall see presently. M. Vignaud is uncompromising in the view that the existing Italian version is the only one worthy of credence, and it would be interesting to know whether or not Prof. Northup's arguments have left him equally firm in this conviction.

The second part of the book deals with the little we know of Vespucci's life, and with his voyages—the four described in the 'Lettera,' and supposed later ones on which the data are less authentic. It is the first voyage—that of 1497-98—which has caused the most heated controversy. The suspicion cast on Vespucci's veracity has been due to the lack of contemporary evidence in corroboration, and still more perhaps to the subsequent attacks of Las Casas, who, as a partisan of Columbus, would naturally be slow to accept the claims of another to have preceded the Genoese as discoverer of the American Continent. It is impossible to reconcile all the statements in the letter with any possible itinerary of this first voyage, but while accepting unhesitatingly all that tends to enhance the extent of the discoveries, M. Vignaud passes lightly over the difficulties, and airily gets over the chief by saying that the text is evidently corrupt—an attitude into which his rôle of advocate too often tempts him. He
believes that the expedition in which Vespucci took part (as subordinate) struck the continent at the head of the Bay of Campeachy and afterwards traced the whole contour of the Gulf of Mexico and a considerable part of the Atlantic Coast of the United States. He entirely rejects the notion that the Lariab of the Italian version really represents Paria in South America (though this is the reading of the name in the Latin version), declining to attach any weight to the latter where it diverges from the Italian. The coast-lines of the Cantino and Canerio charts are called in in support of the above view, though they are at least capable of another explanation, as was shown by the late Sir Clements Markham. It may be that there is no valid reason for discrediting the narrative, but caution still seems desirable in placing any great trust in its accuracy. As M. Vignaud allows, the letter "n'est pas un rapport qui vise à être complet. C'est un simple lettre à un compatriote qui n'a d'autre objet que de l'intéresser."

An examination of the records of the second voyage—that under the command of Hojeda—leads to the conclusion that this anticipated the landfall of Cabral on the Coast of Brazil, and represents the first Spanish discovery of that country, though Portuguese navigators, about whose voyages nothing definite is known, had probably been there before. The third voyage, during which the coast of South America was followed down to perhaps 50° (here too the author recognizes that all the figures in the 'Lettera' cannot be accepted as they stand), was certainly a great achievement, though it must be remembered that in none of the voyages was Vespucci in chief command. M. Vignaud of course recognizes this, yet he is somewhat apt to lapse into the implication that the whole or main credit of the results is due to his hero. As regards the later voyages attributed to the Florentine, he wisely hesitates to accept their genuineness, and agrees that in any case they led to no new discoveries.

A chapter is devoted to an estimation of the value of Vespucci's services, which the author is of course disposed to rate highly. By accepting the maximum of new discovery claimed for the first voyage M. Vignaud reckons that Vespucci stands above all the navigators of his time for the extent of coast-line explored in the New World. Even if this be so, the relative merit of Columbus, the pioneer, is in no way lessened, any more than Livingstone, the pioneer, is to be placed after Stanley, the inheritor of the pioneer's mantle. Vespucci's special merit is held to be that he was the first to recognize the independence of America from the other continents and its title to be called a fourth part of the world. We must remember, however, that Vespucci's narrative enjoyed an unprecedented currency through its dissemination by the press, and that it is quite possible that in it he was but voicing the geographical notions of his associates in the voyages. The high estimation in which he was held in his own time is certainly indicated by his appointment to the responsible post of pilot-major to the King of Spain, and we may allow that he must have reached a high degree of proficiency in the acquirements needed for such a post. But high posts do not always go to the best man, and there is little or nothing in his letters to point to his possession of unusual intelligence in matters nautical. In all this we have no wish to insist that M. Vignaud's estimate is necessarily mistaken, but merely to suggest that there may still be two sides to the question, and that the truth probably lies between the extreme positions held by panegyrists and detractors, though possibly nearer the former than the latter.

Another section brings together very completely the whole history of the bestowal of Vespucci's name on the New World, and here there is less room
for divergence of opinion. Finally the texts of all the documents relating to the voyages, authentic and doubtful, are reprinted, and supply the student with the raw material from which he can work out his own conclusions. The book is certainly the most important contribution to the subject that has appeared for many years. Misprints are unfortunately rather numerous, but some excuse may be found in the difficulties of the times. There is a good index.

E. H.

THE MONTHLY RECORD

EUROPE

Water-power in North Italy.

The question of the utilization of available sources of water-power is everywhere coming to the front, and nowhere more insistently than in Italy, where the difficulties of coal-supply have been heightened by the war at the same time that the need of power has likewise been augmented. Things have therefore moved faster in this respect than might otherwise have been the case. An article by Signor G. Anfossi in the Annales de Géographie for May 15 last supplies an opportune summary of the progress so far realized, and is of special interest to geographers from the care which the writer has taken to trace the influence of diverse geographical conditions on the development of water-power resources in different parts of the country. Many will no doubt regret that such development cannot fail to interfere with the scenic charm of the mountain districts which unfortunately, by the nature of things, are just those which also offer the greatest attractions to the hydraulic engineer, but the inexorable demands of modern industry are hardly likely to be gainsaid on such grounds as these. Signor Anfossi points out that enough data are not yet available for the estimation of the total water-power that might be utilized, but he gives the total of the actual concessions for power-use in Northern Italy, which amounts to nearly half a million kilowatts—the bulk naturally enjoyed by Piedmont and Lombardy. The largest share seems to be taken by the textile industries, metallurgy and electro-chemistry coming next, while a certain amount is used for railways and tram-lines. An attempt to estimate the total available water-power has been made by Signor Perrone, who puts down 3,700,000 kilowatts for all Italy, 1,500,000 for Northern Italy, on the basis of the mean discharge of the streams. The Alpine region shows considerable differences in its different parts. The Piedmontese Alps are at a disadvantage owing to the sudden transition from the mountains to the plain without the intermediary of foothills. Communications with the locations of power-supply are not easy; still the perennial glacier-fed water-supply is an advantage, and important power-stations have been established in the valleys of the Maira, Dora Riparia, and Dora Baltea, mostly not far from their lower ends, as well as in the middle and upper valley of the Toce, which possesses excellent communications, though at a distance from the industrial areas. The Alps of Lombardy, with their well-developed foothills, are somewhat better placed, being easy of access, well-watered, and with an industrial population in the lower valleys and adjoining plains. The copious and regular discharges of the lakes also offer unusual facilities. The longitudinal valley of the upper Adda—the Valtellina—is easy of access and provided with abundant water-power, its only drawback being its distance from...