
Review: Toscanelli's Map

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(or Bell island, whichever be the correct form), is that in Conception bay, so that it may not be confounded with Belle Isle in the straits of the same name. It is a pity that English and American geographers cannot agree at least as to the spelling of the river Hwang-ho. The spelling Hoang-ho adopted in this book is suitable enough for the Portuguese and French languages, from which we adopted it, these having no better means of representing the sound of *w*, but in English it is quite misleading. The last point that we have to notice is a serious one, though it belongs less to geography than to economics, which indeed cannot be ignored in commercial geography. On p. 164 it is stated that "those nations thrive best in trade whose foreign commerce includes a large proportion of manufactures." One cannot but ask, with reference to this statement, what is to be the test of thriving? Has New South Wales not thriven? But when the author goes on to add, "the percentage of profit on manufactures is much larger than on foodstuffs and the raw materials of which goods are made," one is compelled to reply that that is in glaring contradiction with facts. One can only say with truth that in some cases the percentage of profits on manufactures is greater than that on raw materials, etc. But the proposition thus altered to meet the requirements of truth loses all its significance. We trust, therefore, that in the next edition of this work this statement will be not modified, but entirely suppressed. As it stands, it can only serve to lead students seriously astray.

GEO. G. CHISHOLM.

GENERAL.

TOSCANELLI'S MAP.*

The essential point of this elaborate and scholarly, if not always convincing, inquiry is defined by the author (p. 251) as follows: Everything goes to show that the map and letter of Paolo Toscanelli, addressed in 1474 to Fernam Martins, Canon of Lisbon and Privy Councillor of King Affonso V., as well as the copy of these two documents addressed to Columbus, and the undated letter (of similar content but slightly different wording) from the same to the same, are apocryphal, and were fabricated with a definite purpose. This purpose was to suggest to men's minds that Columbus's scientific theories, submitted to, and sanctioned by, a great astronomer, led to the discovery of 1492. Further, Bartholomew Columbus, 'a good cosmographer but a bad Latinist,' was probably the author of the fraud, Christopher being either entirely innocent of the whole thing, or showing himself at an early date (probably before 1494) unwilling to have more to do with the 'machination.' The great discoverer's cosmographical ideas were indeed similar (it is admitted) to those we find in the Toscanelli correspondence; but they were his own, and not derived from the Florentine astronomer; they were elaborated *subsequently* to the discovery of 1492, and what they owed to the books or the thoughts of others was principally through Columbus's reading of the 'Imago Mundi' of Cardinal Peter d'Ailly. Lastly, the story of the nameless pilot who discovered the Antilles by chance, or believed himself to have discovered them, is firmly maintained as true and essential by M. Vignaud, who considers that the suggestions communicated to Columbus by this pilot were the determining cause of his enterprise and its success. At the time of his discovery (1492), according to this view, Columbus had no cosmographical theory, no map with the *imprimatur* of Italian science, but only a chart on which he had indicated, in

* 'La Lettre et la Carte de Toscanelli; étude critique. . . par H. Vignaud,' Paris: Leroux, 1901. (Recueil de Voyage et de Documents pour servir à l'histoire de la Géographie, XIII^e.-XVI^e. siècles.)

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conformity with the ideas of his pilot friend, the position of the islands where the pilot believed himself to have been.

M. Vignaud himself admits that his criticisms are in great part hypothetical; and further, that they are encumbered with certain positive difficulties. If we are in the presence of apocryphal documents, we should be able to find a proper explanation of the forgery, whereas we have only conjectures which, however plausible, are by no means proved, and whose probability cannot be admitted without reserves. The suggestion of Bartholomew Columbus's fraud is quite gratuitous, resting only on his skill in cosmography, his weakness in Latin, and his devotion to his brother. The letter of Duke Hercules of Este in 1494 is another stumbling-block. For in this year a great European personage seems to have full knowledge of a past exchange of ideas between Toscanelli and Columbus. Again, the apparent denial of 'any' cosmographical theory to Columbus in the venture of 1492, may be met by the terms of the argument itself, where he is credited with a theory adapted from the un-named pilot; and the view that the Portuguese, before 1474, never sought for the Indies at all, except the India of Prester John, hardly seems to bear in mind various definite passages and indications in thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth century literature and cartography which point to another conclusion.

C. R. B.

THE MONTHLY RECORD.

EUROPE.

The "Landes" of Gascony.—An instructive sketch of the physical conditions prevailing in the district of south-west France known as the "Landes" is given by Dr. Engell, of Copenhagen, in the February number of *Petermanns Mittheilungen*. The writer begins by tracing the geological history of France since early Tertiary times, showing that the "Landes" form one of the most recent areas in the country. He next contrasts the conditions prevailing in this area with those of the rest of France, dividing the country into nine natural provinces on the basis of climate and vegetation, the "Landes" forming a subdivision of the south-western province. Dr. Engell hopes to develop his views as regards these natural provinces—the limits of which he has for the first time endeavoured to lay down approximately—in a subsequent article. Coming to the special subject of the paper, he describes in turn the iron-bound coast-line with its belt of dunes, the heath-lands further inland with their types of vegetation, the scanty animal-life, and the industrial conditions of the district. Among the most interesting points is the extent to which the aspect of the country has been modified by human agency, the once bare and glaring sand of the dunes having given place to a complete covering of *Pinus maritimus*, while in the heath-lands also the extensive planting of trees has interfered with the natural struggle for the mastery between heath and forest, to the advantage of the latter. In the "Landes" proper, population is naturally scanty and scattered, even Arcachon owing its existence to factors not properly connected with the geographical conditions of the district as a whole. The industrial life of the district depends almost entirely on the products of the forests—turpentine, charcoal, timber, etc.—especially the first-named, which is of noted quality, and of which the production is the *raison d'être* of the few factories which the "Landes" possess. It is for the transport of such forest products that the fairly extensive railway system has come into existence.