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GREAT PORTS OF
THE EMPIRE

Great Ports of the Empire.

All through the middle Ages Britain had been right on the edge of the known world, isolated from the Mediterranean, the centre of trade and commerce, and with few other trading possibilities. Then quite suddenly, after the Renaissance which led to the discovery of the New World by Columbus and others, Britain found herself in an admirable position for commerce dominating the trade routes between the Old World and the New.

Under the Tudors the English became a Protestant and sea-faring nation, and, unlike the Spaniards, soon learnt to trade with the newly-discovered lands, and merchants sought markets for the cloth which was being manufactured as a result of Huguenot refugees. During Elizabeth's reign the merchants formed companies to finance commercial enterprise and in the last days of Good Queen Bess the East India Company was granted a charter giving it exclusive privileges to trade with the Indies.

The East India Company had no intention of colonizing the territories with which they traded; they merely leased land on which to build factories for their merchandise and houses for their clerks. But in this way they laid the foundations of our greatest Indian ports.

A factory at Surat was established in 1613; but in 1668, since Charles II had married Catherine of Braganza - a Portuguese princess who brought Bombay as part of her dowry,

The Portuguese settlement was made over to the East India Company, who moved their headquarters from Surat to Bombay in 1687

Islands

Bombay was the Company's first acquisition of territory as distinguished from a trading settlement. It has the great advantage of having a good harbour in which ocean-going steamers can safely anchor in all weathers.

Unfortunately the Western Ghats cut it off from the productive regions beyond, and it was not until roads were made to make inland communication more easy that Bombay became a great port. When the Suez canal was opened, bringing it nearer to Europe, and the railway connected it with the North, Bombay began to surpass Calcutta and to rise to the position it now holds in Indian commerce.

It owes this position very largely to its cotton industry. The American Civil War stopped the supply of cotton from the Southern States to England, causing great distress among the Lancashire weavers and spinners. To prevent this from happening again, cotton was grown very extensively in the Gapti basin ensuring a plentiful supply from Bombay.

When the East India Company had firmly established themselves in the West, they turned their attention to the East coast and founded Fort William. Fort William was the beginning of Calcutta which is the last of a series of ports on the Hooghly, all of which were ruined by the silting up and flooding of the river. Calcutta itself is only kept at great expense and is one of the most difficult harbours in the world.

Although it has that disadvantage, Calcutta has an excellent hinterland in the extremely fertile and productive Gangetic plain. It is fortunate also in having coal fields near at hand and good railway communication inland. Its chief exports are coal, jute and tea. Jute was grown in India as a result of the Crimean War which stopped the jute trade between England and Russia.

While Clive was gaining territory in India, Wolfe was winning Canada for the Empire on the Heights of Abraham. The conquest was completed by the capture of Montreal a little later by Amherst.

Montreal, founded by the French in 1642, has gradually superseded Quebec and become a great ocean port. The St. Lawrence, fed by the Great Lakes, is purer than most rivers and so does not silt up at its mouth though unfortunately is more liable to freeze.

The port has an excellent situation at the convergence of five commercial highways. The St. Lawrence estuary leads to ^{the} Atlantic and enables ocean liners to come right to its docks and wharves. By a perfect canal system to avoid the falls, which connect the Lakes, it is in touch with the centre of the great wheat-growing area. The Ottawa river gives access to Toronto, the Dominion capital, and the greatest lumbering region of the country. By the valley of the Richelieu river it has communication with the Hudson Valley and New York. The Canadian Pacific Railway brings in grain and cattle from the prairies, minerals and fruit from the Far West, and the dairy produce and fruit of the Lake Peninsula of Ontario. Thus Montreal has become an important

seat of commerce.

Its winter port, Halifax, open when ice prevents steamers from reaching Montreal, has a large harbour which is deep and safe. It has the advantage of having coal near at hand and of being connected with the rest of Canada by rail.

On the West Coast of Canada, Vancouver is most important, holding as it does the third place in importance among the ports of the Dominion. Burrard Inlet on which it is situated forms an excellent harbour being sheltered and deep. Vancouver is the Western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and has a hinterland productive of timber, minerals and fruit; coal and iron are easily obtainable from Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. Saw-milling, smelting, and engineering industries have been developed: it has a sugar refinery and there are salmon and fruit canneries at New Westminster. A large export trade in wheat from the Western prairies has been carried on since the opening of the Panama Canal.

In the war which won Canada for the Empire, James Cook served his apprenticeship on the English ships; and when the war was over he explored the coasts of New Zealand and the East of Australia. He landed at Botany Bay in 1770 where later in 1787 it was decided to found a penal settlement. The governor of the settlement soon moved to Port Jackson and there laid the foundations of a great port and city - Sydney.

Sydney's harbour of Port Jackson is the finest in the world: it is sheltered, capacious and deep enough for the largest vessels at all times. The port has coalfields to the North and South, and is connected by rail with an excellent hinterland which produces wool, wine, copper and gold and agricultural products.

In the same year in which Cook landed at Botany Bay (1770), he also charted the New Zealand coasts but no attempt was made to colonize these islands until 1839, and early in 1840 a settlement was made at Wellington. This settlement has grown to be the chief port of New Zealand. It is situated on the Northern shores of Cook Strait and possesses a good harbour. It has communication by rail with all the settled parts of the North Island and by steamship with the South Island. Its chief exports are wool, frozen meat and dairy produce.

The third of our three great Southern Dominions - South Africa - was not colonized by English settlers until 1806 when Cape Town was occupied for the second time during the Napoleonic war.

Cape Town is important as a port of call on the route to India and it has a wine industry but it is superseded commercially by Durban, port of Natal and coaling station for the Navy. Durban was the landing place of Da Gama on his voyage of exploration to India in 1497. The first British settlers were a few elephant hunters who

went out in 1824 but the township was not laid out until 1835. Its importance grew with the discovery of gold and diamonds. Durban has the best natural harbour in South Africa and is the centre of the whaling activities and of the sugar industry of Natal. It has the advantage of having plentiful and easily available supplies of coal.

In West Africa, Lagos is the most important port. Its island harbour had, until 1918, a shifting bar across the entrance making it difficult for large vessels to enter. But now the harbour has been extended and the bar made lower by dredging operations. Its chief export, cotton, is grown in its hinterland, Nigeria, which also produces rubber, palm oil and palm-kernels.

A year after the English settlement of Wellington, New Zealand, Hong-kong was ceded to the British by the Chinese after a war with China caused by the importation of opium (which was contraband) from India by the English. Since then the Kowloon Peninsula on the mainland has been added to it.

Hong-kong is situated in the mouth of the Canton River and is the port for all large ocean-going ships trading with Canton. The island has a fine natural harbour on the North and has grown to be a great commercial centre for the Far East and the entrepôt for Southern China. Hong-kong is also the centre of the largest rice-growing district in the world. It follows the free port policy and ships of all nations can be

seen in its harbour. It is the place of trans-shipment for merchandise passing between China and the outer world and it is the only port of the Empire which has a larger tonnage of shipping entering and clearing annually than London.

The other important British port in the Far East is Singapore. Singapore is situated on an island at the extreme South of the Malay Peninsula, dominating the trade routes from India, China, Japan, Australia and the surrounding islands. The importance of its position was realised by Sir Stamford Raffles who founded it in 1819. It has a sheltered harbour and like Hong-kong follows the free-port policy which has attracted an enormous amount of trade. It is a coaling station and the entrepôt for the commerce of the Eastern Seas.

A list of the great ports of the Empire would not be complete without the inclusion of London - the centre and main spring of them all. London owes its commercial importance chiefly to the fact that it is situated right in the centre of the land hemisphere, and that the distance between it and the greatest ports of the world is less on an average than any other port.

After the consolidation of England and the rise of English trade under the Tudors, London increased in importance as a port, so that before the Industrial Revolution it was the focus of national commerce and in spite of the growth of the Northern

ports such as Liverpool, Hull, and Glasgow as the result of the Industrial Revolution. London continued to grow steadily with the increase of the wealth and commerce of Great Britain, London has become a great monetary and business centre so that all manufacturing and other companies must have relations with it.

London has the great advantage of being situated at the head of the estuary of a river deep enough to allow large ocean-going vessels to ascend far into the country. Its excellent facilities for inland communication have made it the greatest import market in the world, and its means of redistribution by land and sea have made it an important entrepôt and transshipment centre, the port for Eastern products such as tea, coffee, cocoa, and spices; and the centre of the Australian trade.

The British Empire may be likened to a great wheel with the Mother Country and London as the hub on which it turns. The colonies and dominions form the spokes and the ports are the "fellows" which unite them. But the tyre which binds the whole together is the bond of good fellowship and the spirit of unity.

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