

EXPLORATION by sea was from early days a characteristic of the British race. Two causes led up to this : the love of adventure, and the love of gain. Trading voyages obviously were intended to reward the merchants who initiated them, and, to some extent, those who shared in their perils. Bridgwater was influenced, at various times, by both these motives. Her shipping trade with foreign trading ports is elsewhere spoken of, and it is known that it brought no small gain to the craftsmen. The sailors who lounged about the great bridge were men who could take and give hard knocks, and who had sailed many a time to French, Spanish, Irish and other ports, well able to give a good account of themselves. The Parret, as being their highway to the outer world, and as the channel of much of their prosperity, was as much revered and valued by the great and little folk of the old town as was the Tiber by the Romans, the Liffey by the Irish, the Thames by the great merchants of London, or the Tagus by the Portuguese. It took them to the Severn Sea, which was a place generally bristling with adventures ; it was the waterway which carried their exports and which brought in their commodities from foreign shores. All Bridgwater men loved their river, and regarded it as being in no small degree the mainstay of their fortunes and of their town. Voyages of adventure became more the fashion in England in the fifteenth century. The famous Christopher Columbus, by his well-narrated expeditions, added zest to the growing appetite for voyaging. His son describes him as being *a person worthy of eternal memory*. *The Admiral Christophorus Colonus* he writes, *imploring the assistance of Christ in that dangerous passage [to the New World], went over safe himself and his company, that those Indian natives might become citizens and inhabitants of the church triumphant in heaven ; for so it is to be believed, that many souls which the devil expected to make a prey of, had they not passed through the waters of baptism, were by him made inhabitants and dwellers in the eternal glory of heaven.**Tales about him were circulated everywhere, of his bravery, his enterprise, his religious fervour. When about to write he would first test his pen by writing the words, *Jesus cum Maria sit nobis in via.*** He died on Ascension Day, 1506, at Valladolid in Spain, and his body was afterwards removed for magnificent burial in Seville Cathedral, with the epitaph, *Colon gave Castille and Leon a new World*. Other great seamen had aroused the popular

imagination. Stories of the voyages of John Cabot and of Sebastian Cabot were in the mouths of every Bristol man. Sir Francis Drake's tales of his marvellous discoveries delighted every one. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, a Devonshire gentleman, was busily engaged in framing plans for making acquisitions in America, and for gaining very full letters patent from Queen Elizabeth. Raleigh was soon to follow suit in similar ventures. There were many others. Voyages of discovery were becoming the vogue ; the notion was in the air.

About this time the brave mariner Master Martin Frobisher, one of the greatest of the Elizabethan seamen, born in Yorkshire in 1535, was pondering over his pet project, the discovery of a north-west passage to Cathay, the great Empire of China. Already, in 1576, he had set out with the two ships *Gabriel* and *Michael*, and a pinnace of ten tons, on a northern journey around the Shetland Islands, towards Labrador. His pinnace was lost, and the *Michael* went astray, but he managed to return, bringing with him some earth which was supposed to contain gold. In the following year he started on a second expedition, from Blackwall, with one of the Queen's ships, the *Aide*, and with the barks *Gabriel* and *Michael*. In this voyage the region about Hall's Island, at the mouth of Frobisher Bay, was taken possession of in the Sovereign's name, and was afterwards designated *Meta Incognita*. More earth— also supposed to be auriferous — was brought home. Still dissatisfied, however, the undaunted sailor determined to embark upon a third voyage, and to set about raising and equipping a well-appointed expedition with which to carry out the great purpose of his life. It was this expedition which was shared in by Bridgwater men.

Thus, in the year 1578, Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth having reigned over England for twenty years, Nicholas Chute being mayor of Bridgwater, Edward Popham and John Edwards members of Parliament for the borough, and Edw. Craftes vicar of the parish, Frobisher's famous third voyage began. Hakluyt's testimony to Frobisher and his plan is interesting enough. *Captain Frobisher, being thoroughly furnished of the knowledge of the sphere, and all other skills appertaining to the art of navigation, as also of the confirmation he hath of the same by many years' experience both by sea and land, and being persuaded of a new and nearer passage to Cataya*

[Cathay] than *Capa de Buona Speranca*, which the Portugals yearly use ; he began first with himself to devise, and then with his friends to confer, and laid a plain plot unto them, that that voyage was not only possible by the north-west, but also he could prove, easy to be performed. And further he determined and resolved with himself, to go make full proof thereof, and to accomplish or bring true certificate of the truth, or else never to return again ; knowing this to be the only thing of the world that was left yet undone, whereby a notable mind might be made famous and fortunate. But although his will were great to perform this notable voyage, whereof he had conceived in his mind a great hope, by sundry sure reasons and secret intelligence, which here for sundry causes I leave untouched, yet he wanted altogether means and ability to set forward and perform the same. Long time he conferred with his private friends of these secrets, and made also many offers for the performing of the same in effect unto sundry merchants of our country, above fifteen years before he attempted the same.* The merchants, however, appeared obdurate to Frobisher's allurements, and held their hand. He then appealed to the Court, and was encouraged by Dudley Earl of Warwick, and others. When his second voyage was ended Frobisher hastened to the Queen with the joyful news of the discovery of abundance of gold ore, and Elizabeth was not proof against the prospect of gaining untold wealth. Preparation was made of ships and all other things necessary, with such expedition as the time of the year then required. The scheme certainly promised well. Fifteen good ships were supplied, bravely equipped and well manned. Moreover valiant preparations were made for procuring and storing more gold ore, which would surely, it was believed, pay for the whole charges of the fleet, with something handsome to spare. Plans were schemed for letting some discreet soldiers and others stay in *Meta Incognita*, in order to guard the treasure which would be stored up. A cunningly devised timber-house was made, conveyed in pieces which could be joined together, to be erected with sufficient accommodation and comfort to protect the custodians of the treasure from frost and tempest during the long winter sojourn which would be theirs in the northern land. The following ships made up the fleet.

The <i>Aide</i> with the Admiral	Captain Frobisher.
The <i>Thomas Allen</i> , with the Vice-Admiral	Captain Yorke.
The <i>Judith</i> with the Lieutenant-General	Captain Fenton.

The <i>Anne Francis</i>	Captain Best.
The <i>Hopewell</i>	Captain Carew.
The <i>Beare</i>	Captain Philpot.
The <i>Thomas</i> , of Ipswich	Captain Tanfield.
The <i>Emanuel</i> , of Exeter	Captain Courtney.
The <i>Francis</i> , of Fowey	Captain Moyles.
The <i>Moon</i>	Captain Upcot.
The <i>Emanuel</i> , of Bridgwater	Captain Newton.
The <i>Solomon</i> , of Weymouth	Captain Randal.
The bark <i>Dennis</i>	Captain Kendal.
The <i>Gabriel</i>	Captain Harvey.
The <i>Michael</i>	Captain Kinnersley.

The last two of these ships had, as we have seen, been in the 1576 and 1577 expeditions ; the *Aide*, a powerful vessel of 180 tons, in the expedition of 1577 always acquitting herself well. Captains Fenton, Best, and Philpot were all tried men, highly experienced mariners. One hundred men offered, and were to stay in *Meta Incognita* all the year, of whom forty were mariners for the ships, thirty miners for gathering the gold ore together for the next year, and thirty soldiers for guarding the rest. Twelve ships were to return with cargoes of gold ore at the end of the summer, three ships remaining behind for the use of those captains who should inhabit the distant land. All being prepared, Frobisher, the general, with all his captains, appeared before the Court, then situate at Greenwich, where Her Majesty graciously bade them farewell. Upon Frobisher a fair chain of gold was bestowed ; the rest of the captains kissed the Queen's hand. On May 27th, 1578, the fifteen ships met together at Harwich, where the captains mustered their companies. Four days later the fleet set sail. Captain Newton, of our good Bridgwater ship *Emanuel*, otherwise known as the *Busse* of Bridgwater, had also a master on board his vessel, one James Leech. There was with them too in the ship a passenger, Thomas Wiars, who afterwards wrote a brief but interesting report of the *Emanuel's* journey home.

Before starting, each captain received from Frobisher certain articles for the direction and management of the men on board, and these have peculiar interest as showing to us the way in which a great sailor in Elizabethan times ruled his crews.

Swearing, vice, card-playing, and filthy communication were to be banished. It was to be the rule to serve God twice a day, with the ordinary service usual in the Church of England, and to clear the glass, according to the old order of England. The admiral carried the light, and when this was put out no man

was to go ahead of him, but each was to set sails to follow the admiral's ship as near as may be. Either by day or night, the ships were to keep within a mile of the admiral. Every night all the fleet was to come up and speak with the admiral, and if weather forbade, then some must speak with the vice-admiral, and receive the order of their course from Master Hall, the chief pilot. If mischance happened to any man by day, they were to shoot off two pieces, and if by night, to shoot off two pieces and show two lights. If any man in the fleet come up in the night, and hail his fellow, knowing him not, he was to give the watchword, *Before the world was God*. The other (if he were one of the fleet) must reply, *After God came Christ his Son*. In foggy weather every ship was to keep up a reasonable noise with trumpet, drum, or otherwise, in order to keep clear of one another. If land were discovered by night, due warning was to be given to the admiral, and if the ships chanced to lose company by force of weather, they were to get into a certain latitude until they made Friesland, and being once entered within the straits every ship was to shoot off a good piece every watch, and look out well for smoke and fire, until all the fleet be come together. Should any enemies be encountered, four ships, viz. the *Francis*, of Fowey, the *Moon* the *Dennis*, and the *Gabriel*, were to attend upon the admiral ; four others were to wait upon Lieutenant-General Fenton in the *Judith*; and the remaining four, viz. the *Anne Francis*, the *Emanuel* of Bridgwater, the *Thomas*, and the *Michael*, were to follow Vice-Admiral Yorke in the *Thomas Allen*. Lastly, any man in the fleet behaving disorderly was to be kept in custody until such time as he could be taken before the admiral to be punished as his offence should deserve. Such were the rules of sea-going expeditions from England two and a quarter centuries ago.

On May 31st the ships left Harwich, and sailing along the south coast of England westwards, came by Cape Clear, off the south-west coast of Ireland, on June 6th. Here chase was given to a small bark supposed to be a pirate, but which turned out to be manned by some unfortunate men of Bristol who had been sorely mauled by Frenchmen, who had spoiled and slain many of them. The general came to the help of his countrymen *with surgery and salves to relieve their hurts, and with meat and drink to comfort their pining hearts*, and bade them farewell. Pursuing their journey, Frobisher and his ships sailed north-

west from Ireland — being carried somewhat out of their way by a strong current from the south-west — and after sailing for fourteen days without sight of any land, or any living creatures save the sea-birds, made West Friesland on the 20th of June. Friesland is the group of islands now known as the Faroe Islands, belonging to Denmark.* Frobisher promptly landed and took possession of them in the name of his Sovereign, and there is little wonder that *the savage and simple people*, as he termed them, *fled fearfully away*. After three days at the Faroes** the fleet left for Frobisher's Straits, looking tenderly back, as they sailed away, at a high cliff which was the last land in sight, and which *for a certain similitude*, they named Charing Cross. Bearing in a southerly direction, through driving ice, and meeting in one place with many whales, they came in sight of the Queen's Foreland on the 2nd of July, and by nightfall had entered into the Straits.

From this time the troubles of the expedition began. The ships were greatly hindered by ice which drifted hither and thither by reason of the continually shifting winds, and the first misfortune was the sinking of the hundred-ton bark *Dennis* which was shattered by an iceberg and sank in sight of the whole fleet. Unfortunately the *Dennis* had on board part of the timber house which was to have been erected on *Meta Incognita* for those sailors who were to winter there. This accident greatly depressed the men. The bad weather continued, and the admiral, baffled by fogs, got some of his vessels into the *Mistaken Straits* believing them to be Frobisher's Straits. But, wisely concealing his error, he induced the fleet to follow him, declaring that all was well. His crew afterwards reported that *he hath since confessed that if it had not been for the charge and care he had of the fleet and fraughted ships, he both would and could have gone through to the South Sea, and dissolved the long doubt of the passage which we seek to find to the rich country of Cataya*. Poor Frobisher! His faith in the existence of a north-west passage to the golden East was strong ; he could not let it go. And, luckily for the sailors and for discipline, they believed in the passage-way too, because their master did. Like all true leaders, he gained their obedience because he led captive their imagination, and then dominated their will.

There was considerable scattering of the fleet. Towards the end of July the Bridgwater

ship *Emanuel* was missing, and it was not until the 27th that she got out of the ice, and met with the fleet under Hatton's Headland. Their ship, the crew pleaded, was so leaky that they must of necessity seek harbour and her stem was so beaten in that she could scarcely keep afloat. They had had 500 strokes at the pump in less than half a watch ; they were so worn out that they had to appeal for help from the crews of the other vessels. Considerable murmuring arose at this time amongst some of the crews, but Frobisher was able to allay it. Would that he could equally well have controlled the weather ! The storms increased, with snow and bitter cold, and the fleet was separated. When three of the ships, the *Aide*, the *Michael*, and the *Gabriel*, chanced to meet in the Countess of Warwick's Sound, the rejoicing was most heartfelt. *They highly praised God, and altogether upon their knees gave Him due, humble, and hearty thanks ; and Master Wolsall, a learned man, appointed by Her Majesty's Council to be their minister and preacher, made unto them a godly sermon, exhorting them especially to be thankful to God for their strange and miraculous deliverance in these so dangerous places.* Master Wolsall was a well-beneficed English clergyman who had volunteered to sail with the expedition, and whose ministrations the sailors received with abundant gratitude.

By the time that August had well set in it became clear that no habitation could be put up on Meta Incognita that year, and the fleet, with all the crews, must fain return home in due course. Meanwhile ore in considerable quantities was dug, and placed in the ships. *The Emanuel* had put on board from the Countess of Sussex mine, 30 tons ; from Dyer's Passage, 20 tons ; from Bear's Sound, 60 tons. This work filled up the days until September. On September 2nd the *Emanuel* again got into trouble. Some sailors on board one of the pinnaces reported that as they came out of Bear's Sound they *did see the Emanuel in great danger to be lost to the leeward of the Sound, and did strike their sails upon the last of the flood, to anchor as they did judge among the rocks, and then it was not likely they should ride to escape all the next ebb, the wind at N.N.W. and a very great gale : God be merciful unto them.* Ultimately the general set out to sea in the *Gabriel* to seek the fleet, leaving the *Busse* of Bridgwater and the *Michael* behind in Bear's Sound. The *Michael* followed, leaving our Bridgwater ship, *which was doubtful of ever getting forth.* So the captains of the great

expedition turned the bows of their vessels toward English shores. It was a long voyage home, as voyages reckoned in those days, and there was no lack of perils right up to the end. The *Emanuel* had a terrible time. *Among other, it was most marvellous how ye Busse of Bridgewater got away, who being left behinde the fleete in great daunger of never getting forth, was forced to seek a way northward, thorowe an unknown channel full of rockes, upon the back side of Beare's Sound, and then by good hap found out a way into the North Sea (a very dangerous attempt) save that necessitie which hath no law, forced them to try masteries. This foresaide N. sea is the same which lyeth upon the back side of all the N. land of Frobisher's straits, where first ye Generall himself in his pinnesses, and some other of our company have discovered (as they affirme) a great foreland where they would also have great likelihood of the greatest passage towardes the South Sea, or Mare del Sur.** Thus nearly, as the old chronicler tells us, did the Bridgwater mariners come to threading the mysterious sea-passage to Cathay.

On the *Emanuel's* homeward voyage, however, Thomas Wiars the passenger tells us of further glories gained by the Bridgwater captain and crew. They were now quite alone on the high seas. Leaving Bear's Sound, they set sail, and fell in with the shores of Friesland on September 8th at six of the clock at night. Leaving the south-west point of Friesland, they encountered shifting winds, but these at length abating, and they steering south-east by south, kept their course until September 12th, when at about 11 a.m. they descried land some five leagues away. This new-found island they accounted to be twenty-five leagues in length, and the longest way of it south-east and north-west. The southern part of it was in the latitude 57 and one second part, or thereabout. They kept the island in sight from the 2th, to the 13th of September at 3 p.m. There appeared to be two harbours upon the coast, and great quantities of ice abounded, from which, indeed, they did not get clear until September 15th. Continuing their journey, on the 25th September they sighted the welcome coast of Galway, thence along the south coast of Ireland, and home. By the 1st of October, we are told, all the ships of Frobisher's fleet—save the ill-fated *Dennis*—arrived safe in various ports. Not more than forty men lost their lives in the whole expedition, which number, as the writer says, was not great, considering how many ships were in the fleet, and what strange fortunes they passed.

The ore, alas, was useless, and contained no gold. But it was safely stored, some in London, some in Bristol town, no doubt to the great admiration of the people of those famous ports. Glad and thankful indeed must Captain Newton, and Master James Leech, and Thomas Wiars, and all the Bridgwater sailors have been as they sailed up the winding River Parret, with the tall spire of St. Mary's getting clearer and clearer to their view. How many were the greetings on the quay, how eager were the congratulations of the townsmen, how for many and many a day would the sailors on the old bridge talk of the glorious voyage of the *Emanuel*. The inscription beneath the statue of the old sea-hero Blake, now standing in the centre of the town, indeed applies well to those sturdy sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men who went down to the sea in ships, to do business in the great waters of the outer world.

Sleep after toyle,
Port after stormy seas ;
Ease after war,
Death after life,
Doth greatly please.



p. 1

* *Life of Colon*, by his son Don Ferdinand Colon. *Pinkerton's Voyages*, Vol. XII, p. 3.

** May Jesus with Mary be with us in our journey.

p. 2

*Pinkerton, Vol XII, p. 511

p. 3

*See note in Rear-Admiral Collinson's *Three Voyages of Frobisher*, p. 125.

* AUTHOR'S NOTE. — Hakluyt speaks (in the account of Frobisher's second voyage) of Friesland as being a ragged and high land, having the mountains almost covered over with snow, and the coast full of drift ice. This was on the 4th of July. I was myself in the Faroe Islands in June 1896, and saw no trace of either snow or ice. It was warm, and no sign of frost was to be seen. But the climate may have changed there since 1577.

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* Hakluyt, in Admiral Collinson's *Three Voyages of Frobisher*.

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