

## NOTE IX.

EXTRACTS FROM THE TOPOGRAPHIA CHRISTIANA OF  
COSMAS THE MONK.

(Circa 545.)

1. "But, as is said by those who are without,<sup>1</sup> in discoursing of this matter (and here they speak truth), there are on this earth four gulfs which enter the land from the ocean; to wit, this one of ours which penetrates the land from the west side, and extends from Gades right through Romania; then the Arabian Gulf called also Erythræan, and the Persian Gulf, both which are offshoots from that of Zinj, and penetrate the southern and eastern side of the earth overagainst the region called Barbary, which forms the extremity of the land of Ethiopia. And those who navigate the Indian Sea are aware that Zinj, as it is called, lies beyond the country where the incense grows, which is called Barbary, and which is compassed round by the ocean as it passes on into those two gulfs. And the fourth gulf enters from the north side of the earth, further to the east, and is called the Caspian or Hircanian Sea. Now navigation is confined to these gulfs only. The ocean it is impossible to navigate, on account of the multitude of currents and the fogs that rise and obstruct the rays of the sun, and because of its vast extent. These things, then, I have made known as I received them from the Man of God (as has been mentioned); or indeed, I might rather say in this case, from my own experience. For I myself, for purposes of trade, have sailed on three out of those four gulfs; to wit, the Roman, the Arabian, and the Persian; and I have got accurate information about the different places on them from the natives as well as from seafaring men.

"Once upon a time, when we were sailing to Further India,<sup>2</sup> we had crossed over within a little way of Barbary, beyond which is Zinj (for so they call the mouth of the Ocean), and there I saw to the right of our course a great flight of the birds called *suspha*. These are birds twice as big as kites and somewhat more. And I observed that in that quarter there were signs of very unsettled weather. So all the men of experience on board, whether mariners or passengers, began to say that we were getting near the Ocean, and so they called out to the steersman, 'steer the ship to port, and bear up into the gulf, or the currents will sweep us out into the Ocean, and we shall be lost'. For the Ocean driving up into the gulf was creating a very heavy sea, and the currents from the

<sup>1</sup> *Oi ἕξωθεν*, meaning those who are not Christians.

It should be noted that the book is illustrated with sketches and diagrams, the originals of which would appear to have been drawn by Cosmas himself.

<sup>2</sup> Literally "Inner India."