

The oars or sweeps used on these great junks were more like masts than oars, and each was pulled by from ten to thirty men. They stood to their work in two ranks, facing each other, pulling by means of a strong cable fastened to the oar (which itself was, I suppose, too great for their grasp), and singing out to the stroke, *La, La! La, La!*

The only ports of Malabar frequented for trade by the China vessels were KAULAM, Calicut, and Hili;¹ but those which intended to pass the Monsoon in India, used to go into the harbour of

Such a statement needs support, and I refer for it to Note C at the end of this Introduction.

¹ Scarcely any change in India, since the days of our travellers, is more remarkable than the decay of the numerous ports, flourishing with foreign as well as domestic trade, which then lined the shores of the country; and the same remark applies in degree also to the other countries of Southern Asia, both eastward and westward of India. The commencement of this decay appears to date nearly from the arrival of the Portuguese, for at that time most of the ports were found still in an active and prosperous state. Somewhat similar circumstances have had course in our own country. The decay of the Cinque Ports can plead natural deterioration, but a more striking parallel occurs on the shores of the Firth of Forth, once lined with seaports which each sent out its little squadron of merchant-vessels, the property of local owners, to the Continental trade; ports which now, probably, can boast only a few fishing-boats, and "merchants" only in the French and old Scotch sense of the term.

The decay of the Malabar ports may have begun in forcible monopoly and in devastating wars, from which the country had previously long enjoyed a comparative exemption, but it has been kept up no doubt by that concentration of capital in the hands of large houses, which more and more characterizes modern commerce, and is in our days advancing with more rapid strides than ever, whilst this cause is being reinforced by that concentration of the streams of produce which is induced by the construction of Trunk Railways. Whatever be the causes, it seems to me impossible to read these old travellers without at least an impression that wealth, prosperity, and probably happiness, were then far more generally diffused on the shores of India than they are now. Is there any ground for hope that the present state of things may be one of transition, and that at a future day the *multiplication* of railways will diminish this intense concentration, and again sow the coasts of India with seats of healthy trade and prosperity? If so, it will not be done by railways of wide gauge and heavy cost like those now made in India.

In a note (D) at the end of this Introduction, I propose to append a review of the Ports of Malabar as they were known from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.