

8. EARLY COMMERCE BETWEEN INDIA AND BABYLON.

Mr. Kennedy concludes his learned and valuable article on this interesting topic (above, 1898, p. 273) with a discussion as to the date of the knowledge of the monsoons, and with the remark that "the true trade route to India—that is, from Persia—was discovered when the black-hulled merchant ships first plunged through the salt sea spray and ploughed their eastward course, under the stars, amid the open ocean."

In preparing my forthcoming translation of the Dialogues of the Buddha, I have come across the following passage in the Kevaddhu or Kevattua Sutta of the Dīgha (fifth century B.C.). The Buddha says:

"Long ago ocean-going merchants were wont to plunge forth upon the sea, on board a ship, taking with them a shore-sighting bird. When the ship was out of sight of land they would set the shore-sighting bird free. And it would go to the East and to the South and to the West and to the North, and to the intermediate points, and rise aloft. If on the horizon it caught sight of land, thither it would go. But if not, then it would come back to the ship again. Just so, brother, etc."

Such a simile would scarcely be made use of, in ordinary talk, unless the habit referred to were of some standing, and matter of general knowledge. It is, I think, the earliest reference in Indian books to ocean-going ships out of sight of land.

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