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PREFACE.

IN June 1867, my father and I, who had been studying the maps and plans of a former expedition in the province of Paraná, were commissioned by the Minister of Public Works at Rio de Janeiro to explore the Madeira River, and to project a railroad along its bank where, by reason of the rapids, navigation was rendered impossible.

Since the end of the last century—when, in consequence of the treaty of Ildefonso in 1777, Portuguese astronomers and surveyors ascended the Madeira—no regular or reliable plans had been executed of the immense forest-covered valley. The bold descent effected some twenty years ago by the American naval officer Gibbon, I may observe, was too hurried, and undertaken with too slender means; and another expedition, commanded by the Brazilian engineer, Major Coutinho, proved to be a complete failure, though certainly not for lack of means.*

Upon the ensuing of peace, after the long war with Paraguay, the old question of a way of communication between the Brazilian coast and the province of Mato Grosso came to the front; and as that clever diplomatist, Conselheiro Felipe Lopez Netto, had also succeeded in concluding a treaty of boundaries and commerce with Bolivia,† by which was secured the prospect of a passage through the valley of the Madeira, it was thought necessary that a thorough

* Another voyage of discovery undertaken by Mr. Coutinho on the Purus (an affluent of the Solimões) gave similar negative results. That river afterwards became better known through the daring of Mr. Chandless.

† By this treaty the Brazilio-Bolivian boundary is to touch the left shore of the Madeira under 10° 20' south latitude, near the mouth of the Beni.