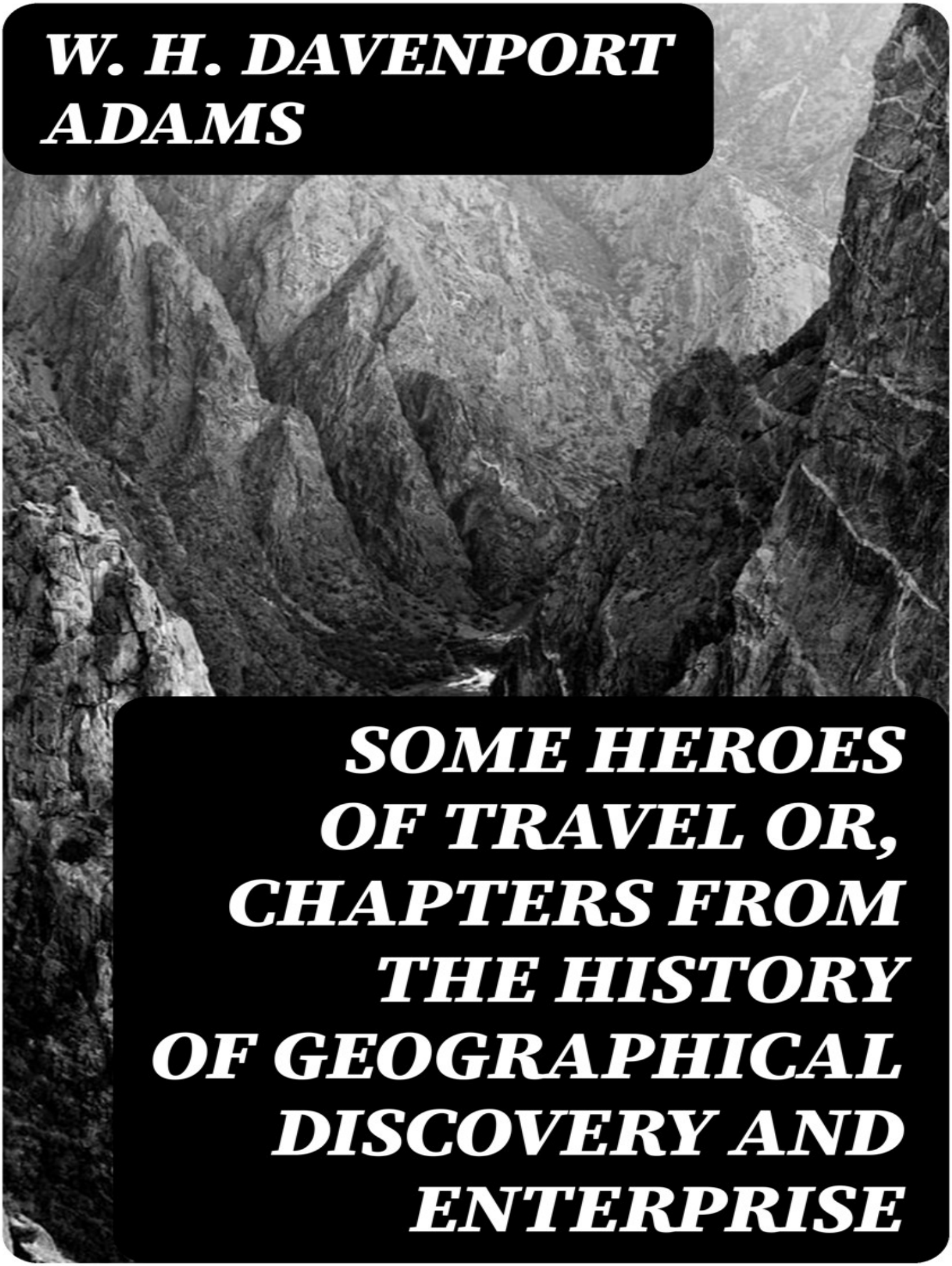
W. H. DAVENPORT ADAMS



SOME HEROES OF TRAVEL OR, CHAPTERS FROM THE HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND ENTERPRISE

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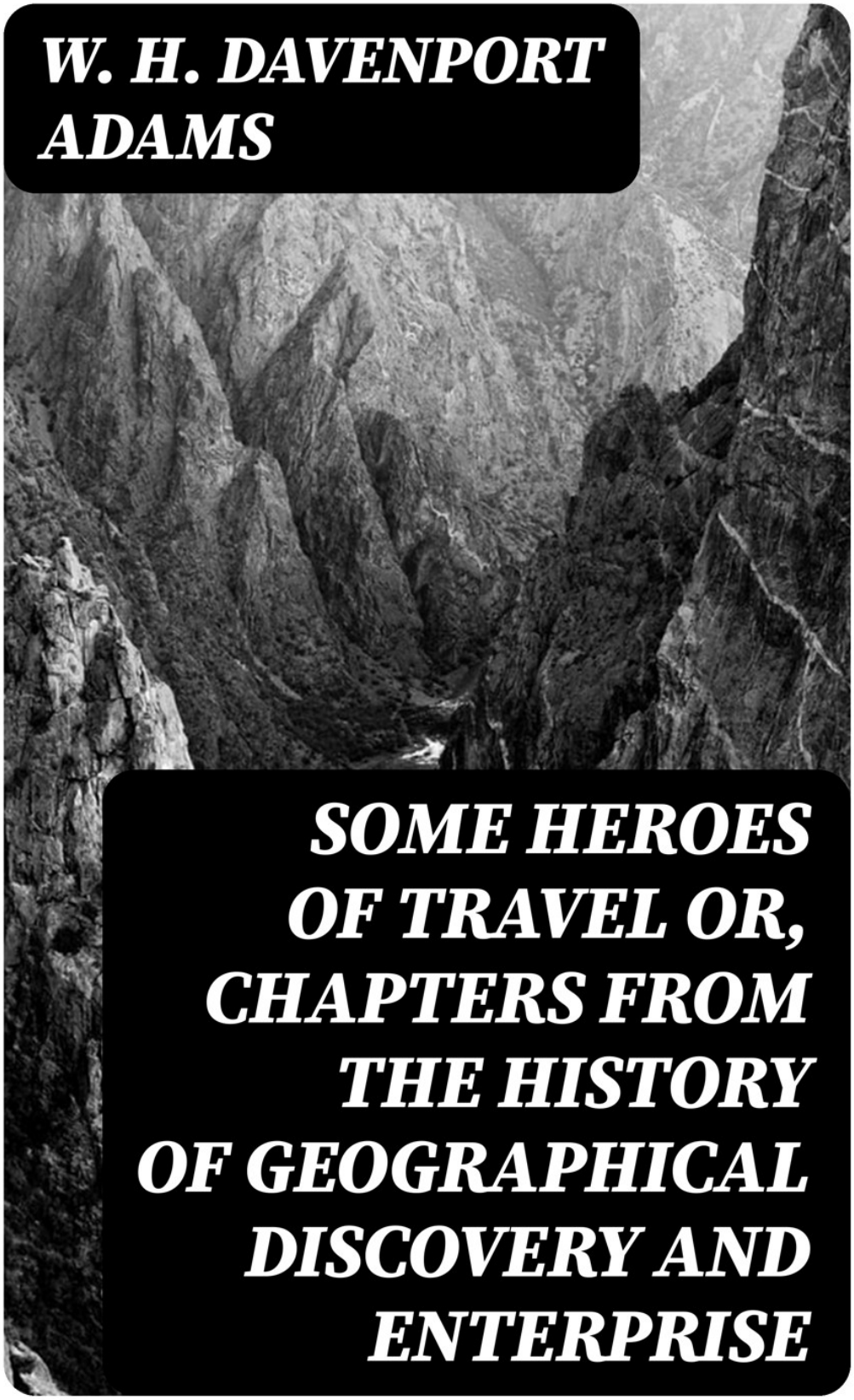

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W. H. Davenport Adams

Some Heroes of Travel or, Chapters from the History of Geographical Discovery and Enterprise

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PREFACE.

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THE present age is sometimes described as an Age of Commonplace; but it has its romance if we care to look for it. Assuredly, the adventures of its travellers and explorers do not lose in importance or interest, even when compared with those of their predecessors in days when a great part of the world was still “virgin ground.” In the following pages, this thesis is illustrated by a summary of the narratives of certain “Heroes of Travel” belonging to our own time; and I believe it will be found that for “stirring scenes” and “hair-breadth escapes” they vie with any which the industrious Hakluyt, the quaint Purchas, or, coming down to a later date, the multifarious Pinkerton has collected. However, on this point the reader has an opportunity of satisfying himself, as, by way of contrast, I have prefixed to these Episodes of Recent Travel a succinct account of the enterprise of Messer Marco Polo, the Pioneer of Mediæval Travellers.

There is no pleasanter mode of learning geography than by studying the works of distinguished travellers; and therefore this little book may claim to possess some slight educational value, while primarily intended to supply the young with attractive but not unwholesome reading. The narratives which it contains have been selected with a view to variety or interest. They range over Mexico, Western Australia, Central Africa, and Central Asia. They include the experiences of the hunter, the war correspondent, and the geographical explorer; and, in recognition of the graceful

influence of women, of a lady traveller, who showed herself as resolute and courageous as any of the so-called hardier sex. And, finally, they have the merit, it is believed, of not having appeared in previous compilations.

As a companion for the fireside corner, this little book will, I hope, be welcome to all English-speaking lads and lasses, who will learn from its pages how much may be accomplished by patience, perseverance, and energy.

SIR MARCO POLO, THE VENETIAN, AND HIS TRAVELS IN ASIA.

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We should be inclined to consider Sir Marco Polo as one of the greatest travellers the world has ever seen. It is true he was not a man of genius; that he was not, like Columbus, inspired by a lofty enthusiasm; that he displayed no commanding superiority of character. But when we remember the vast compass of his journeys, and the circumstances under which they were carried out; when we remember, too, how close an observer he was, and how rigidly accurate, and his plenitude of energy and perseverance—we feel that he is, beyond all cavil or question, entitled to be recognized as the king of mediæval travellers. Let us take Colonel Yule's summary of his extraordinary achievements:—

"He was the first Traveller to trace a route across the whole longitude of Asia, naming and describing kingdom after kingdom which he had seen with his own eyes; the Deserts of Persia, the flowering plateaux and wild gorges of Badakshan, the jade-bearing rivers of Khotan; the Mongolian

steppes, cradle of the power that had so lately threatened to swallow up Christendom; the new and brilliant Court that had been established at Cambaluc: the first Traveller to reveal China in all its wealth and vastness, its mighty rivers, its huge cities, its rich manufactures, its swarming population, the inconceivably vast fleets that quickened its seas and its inland waters; to tell us of the nations on its borders, with all their eccentricities of manners and worship; of Tibet, with its sordid devotees; of Burma, with its golden pagodas and their tinkling crowns; of Laos, of Siam, of Cochin China; of Japan, the Eastern Thule, with its rosy pearls and golden-roofed palaces: the first to speak of that Museum of Beauty and Wonder, still so imperfectly ransacked, the Indian Archipelago, source of those aromatics then so highly prized and whose origin was so dark; of Java, the Pearl of Islands; of Sumatra, with its many kings, its strange costly products, and its cannibal races; of the dusky savages of Nicobar and Andaman; of Ceylon, the Isle of Gems, with its sacred Mountain and its tomb of Adam; of India the Great, not as a dreamland of Alexandrian fables, but as a country seen and partially explored, with its virtuous Brahmans, its obscene ascetics, its diamonds and the strange tales of their acquisition, its sea-beds of pearl, and its powerful sun: the first in mediæval times to give any distinct account of the secluded Christian Empire of Abyssinia and the semi-Christian island of Socotra; to speak, though indeed dimly, of Zanzibar, with its negroes and its ivory, and of the vast and distant Madagascar, bordering on the Dark Ocean of the South, with its Roc [3] and other monstrosities; and, in a remotely opposite region, of Siberia

and the Arctic Ocean, of dog-sledges, white bears, and reindeer-riding Tunguses.”

Who can dispute the fame of a man whose name and memory are associated with so marvellous a catalogue of discoveries, who anticipated the travellers of a later generation in many of their most remarkable enterprises? At one time, the authenticity of his statements was frequently and openly impugned; he was accused of exaggeration and inexactitude; but the labours of Marsden, Pauthier, and especially of Colonel Yule, have shown that his statements, so far as they are founded on personal observation, may be implicitly accepted.

In the early part of the fourteenth century there lived at Venice a patrician of good family, named Andrea Polo, to whom were born three sons, Marco, Nicolo, and Maffeo. Nicolo, the second of these sons, was the father of our traveller, Marco Polo, who was born in 1254. Engaged in extensive commercial operations, Nicolo, soon after his son’s birth, journeyed to Constantinople, and thence proceeded on a trading venture to the Crimea, which led to his ascending the Volga for a considerable distance, and crossing the steppes to visit Bokhara and the Court of the great Kublai Khan, on or within the borders of Cathay. Kublai, the hero of so many legends, had never before seen a European. He tendered to Nicolo and his brother Maffeo (who travelled with him) a right royal welcome; was deeply interested in all they told him of the kingdoms and states of Europe; and finally resolved on sending them back, with one of his own nobles, as ambassadors to the Pope. In this capacity they arrived at Acre in 1269; but as Pope Clement

IV. had died in the previous year, and no successor had as yet been elected, the two brothers thought they might reasonably indulge themselves in a visit to their Venetian homes, from which they had been absent for fifteen years.

Nicolo remained at Venice until 1271, when, no Pope having been elected, he deemed it well that he should return to the Great Khan to explain the delay which had taken place in the fulfilment of his mission. Accompanied by his brother Maffeo, and his son Marco, a lad of seventeen, he sailed to Acre, and thence to the port of Ayas on the gulf of Scanderoon, where he was overtaken by the news that a Pope had at last been elected in the person of an old friend of his, Tedoldo Visconti, or Pope Gregory X., at that time legate in Syria. The new Pope immediately sent for the two brothers to Acre, and charged them with a cordial message for the Khan. He also sent him two Dominican monks to teach the truths of science and Christianity; but they took fright at an early stage of the journey, and hurried back to Acre; while the two brothers, with young Polo, started overland for the Court of the Great Khan.

Reaching Hormuz, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, they seem to have taken a northern route; traversing successively the regions of Kerman and Khorasan, Balkh and Badakshan, and ascending the Upper Oxus to the great plateau of Pamir—a route followed by no European traveller, except Benedict Goro, until it was undertaken by Captain John Wood, of the Indian navy, in his special expedition to the sources of the Oxus in 1838. Leaving the bleak wastes of the Pamir, the Polos descended into Kashgar, visited Yarkand and Khotand, passed near Lake Lob, and eventually

traversed the great Desert of the Gobi, since explored by several European travellers, to Tangut, the name then applied by Mongols and Persians to territory at the extreme north-west of China, both within and without the famous Wall. Skirting the Chinese frontier, they came upon the Great Khan at his summer palace of Kaiping-fu, near the foot of the Khin-gan Mountains, and about fifty miles north of the Great Wall. This must have been in May, 1275, or thereabouts, when Marco Polo was close upon one and twenty.

"The king of kings" received the three bold Venetians with much favour. "He showed great pleasure at their coming, and asked many questions as to their welfare, and how they had sped. They replied that they had in verity sped well, seeing that they found the Khan well and safe. Then they presented the credentials and letters which they had received from the Pope, and those pleased him right well; and after that they produced some sacred oil from the Holy Sepulchre, whereat he was very glad, valuing it greatly. And next, spying Marco, who was then a young gallant (*jeune bacheler*), he asked who was that in their company. 'Sire,' said his father, Messer Nicolo, 'he is my son and your liegeman.' 'Welcome is he too,' quoth the Emperor. But why should I make a long story? There was great rejoicing at the Court because of their arrival; and they met with attention and honour from everybody. So there they abode at the Court with the other barons."

Among young Marco Polo's gifts appears to have been a facility for acquiring languages. He speedily mastered that of the Tartars, so as both to write and speak it; and in a brief

space he came to know several other languages and four written characters. He studied also the customs of the Tartars and their mode of carrying on war. His ability and prudence greatly recommended him to Kublai, and he began to employ him in the public service. His first embassy was to a country lying a six months journey distant; apparently the province of Yun-nan, which he reached by way of Shansi, Shensi and Szechuen. He had been shrewd enough to observe that the Khan was disgusted with the rigid officialism of his ambassadors, who, on returning from their various missions, would speak only of the business they had transacted, whereas he would fain have heard of the strange things, peoples, and countries they had seen. And so he took full notes of all he saw, and returned to the Khan's Court brimful of surprising information, to which the prince listened with evident pleasure. "If this young man live," he said, "he will assuredly come to be a person of great work and capacity."

For seventeen years Marco Polo remained in the Khan's service, being sent on several important embassies, and engaged also in the domestic administration. For three years he held the government of the important city of Yangchau. On another occasion, with his uncle Maffeo, he spent a twelvemonth at Kangchau in Tangut. He also visited Karakorum, the old Mongolian capital of the Khans, and penetrated into Champa, or Southern Cochin China. Finally, he seems to have been sent on a mission to the Indian Seas, and to have explored several of the southern states of India. And thus it came about that Messer Marco Polo had knowledge of, or actually visited, a greater number of the

different countries of the world than any other man; the more that he was always eager to gain information, and to examine and inquire into everything.

Meantime, the Venetians were growing wealthy, and Marco's father and uncle were growing old; and increasing wealth and increasing years raised in them an apprehension of what might befall them in case of the aged Khan's death, and a desire to return to their native land. Several times they applied to Kublai for permission to depart; but he was loth to say farewell to the men whom he had known and trusted so long, and, but for an opportune event, they might never have succeeded in carrying themselves and their jewels and gold back to Europe. In 1286 Arghún Khan, of Persia, Kublai's great-nephew, lost his favourite wife, the Khatun Bulaghán. On her death-bed she charged him to supply her place with a daughter of her own tribe, the Mongols of Bayaut; and, desirous of fulfilling her dying wish, the bereaved prince despatched three ambassadors to Kublai's Court to seek for him a fitting bride. The Great Khan received them with all honour and hospitality, and then sent for the lady Kukachiu, a maiden of seventeen, and a very beautiful and gracious person. On her arrival at Court she was presented to the three ambassadors, who declared that the lady pleased them well.

The overland route from Peking to Tabriz was long and dangerous, and the envoys decided, therefore, on returning, with their fair charge, by sea. While sojourning at the Khan's Court they had made the acquaintance of the three Venetians, and being greatly impressed by their marvellous good sense and experience, and by Marco Polo's extensive

knowledge of the Indian seas and territories, they entreated the Khan to allow them the advantage and protection of their company. It was with profound reluctance that Kublai gave his consent; but when once he had done so, he behaved with his wonted splendour of generosity. Summoning the three Venetians to his presence, he placed in their hands two golden “tablets of authority,” which secured them a free passage through all his dominions, and unlimited supplies of all necessaries for themselves and for their company. He entrusted them also with messages to the King of France, the King of England, the King of Spain, and other sovereigns of Christendom. Then he caused thirteen ships to be equipped, each with four masts and nine to twelve sails; and when all was ready, the ambassadors and the lady, with the three Venetians, took leave of the Great Khan, and went on board their ships, with a large retinue, and with two years’ supplies provided by the Emperor (A.D. 1292).

The port from which they set out seems to have been that of Zaytou, in Fo-kien. The voyage was long and wearisome, and chequered by much ill fortune; and in the course of it two of the ambassadors died, and as many as six hundred of the mariners and attendants. They were detained for months on the coast of Sumatra, and in the south of India; nor did they arrive at Hormuz until the end of 1293. There they learned that Arghún Khan had been dead a couple of years, and that he had been succeeded by his brother Kaikhatu. The lady, according to the custom of the country, became the wife of Arghún’s son, Prince Ghazan, who is spoken of as endowed with some of the highest

qualities of a king, a soldier, and a legislator; but she wept much in bidding farewell to her noble Venetian friends.

As for Marco Polo, his father, and uncle, having discharged the trust placed in their hands by Kublai Khan, they proceeded to Tabriz, on a visit to Kaikhatu; and having sojourned there for some months, journeyed homeward by way of Trebizond, Constantinople, and Negropont, arriving in Venice in 1295, after an absence of four and twenty years.

The traditional story of their arrival is related by Ramusio:—

“Years of anxiety and travel, and the hardships of many journeys, had so changed the appearance of the three Venetians, who, indeed, had almost forgotten their native tongue, that no one in Venice recognized them. Their clothes, too, were coarse and shabby, and after the Tartar fashion. Proceeding to their house in Venice, a lofty and handsome palazzo, and known by the name of the Corte del Millioni, they found it occupied by some of their relatives, whom they had no small difficulty in convincing of their identity. To secure the desired recognition, and the honourable notice of the whole city, they adopted a quaint device.

“Inviting a number of their friends and kindred to an entertainment, they were careful that it should be prepared with great state and splendour; and when the hour came for sitting down to table, they came forth from their chamber, all clothed in crimson satin, fashioned in long robes reaching to the ground, such as in those days people wore within doors. And when water for ablutions had been served, and the guests were sat, they doffed these robes, and put on

others of crimson damask, while the first suits were, by their orders, cut up and divided among the servants. After partaking of some of the dishes, they again retired, to come back resplendent in robes of crimson velvet, and when they had again taken their seats, the cast-off robes were divided as before. When dinner was over, they did the like with the robes of velvet, after they had attired themselves in dresses of the same fashion as those worn by the rest of the company. Much wonder and astonishment did the guests exhibit at these proceedings.

“Now, when the cloth had been removed, and all the servants had quitted the dining-hall, Messer Marco, as the youngest of the three, rose from table, and, going into another chamber, brought forth the three shabby dresses of coarse stuff which they had worn, on their arrival in the city. Straightway, with sharp knives they began to rip some of the seams and welts, and to draw forth vast quantities of jewels of the highest value—rubies and sapphires, carbuncles, diamonds, and emeralds—which had all been stitched up in those dresses so artfully that nobody could have suspected their presence. For when they took leave of the Great Khan, they had converted all the wealth he had bestowed upon them into this mass of precious stones, being well aware of the impossibility of carrying with them so great an amount in gold, over a journey of such extreme length and difficulty. The exhibition of this immense treasure of jewels and precious stones, all poured out upon the table, threw the guests into fresh amazement, so that they appeared bewildered and dumfounded. And straightway they recognized, what they had formerly doubted, that the

three strangers were indeed those worthy and honoured gentlemen of the Polo family whom they had claimed to be; and paid them the greatest reverence. And the story being bruited abroad in Venice, the whole city, gentle and simple, hastened to the house to embrace them, and make much of them, with every demonstration of affection and respect. On Messer Maffeo, the eldest, they conferred an office that in those days was of high dignity; while the young men came daily to visit and converse with the ever polite and gracious Messer Marco, and to ask him questions about Cathay and the Great Khan, all of which he answered with such courtesy and kindliness, that every man felt himself in a manner in his debt. And as it chanced that in the narrative which he was constantly called on to repeat of the magnificence of the Great Khan, he would speak of his revenues as amounting to ten or fifteen ‘millions’ of gold, and, in like manner, when recounting other instances of great wealth in those remote lands, would always employ the term ‘millions,’ people nicknamed him Messer Marco *Millioni*—a circumstance which I have noted also in the public books of this Republic where he is mentioned. The court of his house, too, at S. Giovanni Crisostomo has always from that time been popularly known as the Court of the Millioni.” [12]

We pass on to 1298, a year which witnessed a fresh outburst of the bitter enmity between Genoa and Venice. The Genoese, intent upon crushing their formidable rival, despatched a great fleet into the Adriatic, under the command of Lamba Doria. Off the island of Curzola they were met by a more powerful armada, of which Andrea Dandolo was admiral, and one of the galleys of which was

commanded by Marco Polo. The battle began early on the 7th of September, the Venetians entering into it with the glad confidence of victory. Their impetuous attack was rewarded by the capture of the Genoese galleys; but, dashing on too eagerly, many of their ships ran aground. One of these was captured, cleared of its crew, and filled with Genoese. Closing up into a column, the Genoese pushed the encounter hotly, and broke through the Venetian line, which the misadventure we have spoken of had thrown into disorder. Throughout the long September day the fight was bravely supported; but, towards sunset, a squadron of cruising ships arriving to reinforce Doria, the Venetians were taken in flank, and finally overpowered. The victory of the Genoese was complete; they captured nearly all the Venetian vessels, including the admiral's, and seven thousand men, among whom were Dandolo and Marco Polo. The former disappointed the triumph of his victors by dashing out his brains against the side of his galley; the latter was removed to Genoa.

During his captivity Polo made the acquaintance of a Pisan man of letters, named Rusticiano, or Rustichello, who was a prisoner like himself. When he learned the nature of Polo's remarkable experiences, this Pisan gentleman, not unnaturally, urged him to record them in writing; and it would seem that the great traveller complied with the request, and dictated to his new friend the narrative that has since excited so much curious interest. Through the intervention of Matteo Visconti, Captain-General of Milan, peace was concluded in May, 1299, between Genoa and Venice, and as one of the conditions was the release of

prisoners on both sides, Messer Marco Polo soon afterwards obtained his freedom, and returned to his family mansion in the Corte del Sabbrin. He took with him the manuscript story of his world wanderings, and in 1306 presented a copy of it to a noble French knight, Thibault de Cipoy, who had been sent on a diplomatic mission to Venice by Charles of Valois.

The closing years of a life which, in its spring and summer, had been crowded with incident and adventures, were undisturbed by any notable event, and in his old age Marco Polo enjoyed the sweetness of domestic peace and the respect of his fellow-countrymen. On the 9th of January, 1324, “finding himself growing feebler every day through bodily ailment, but being by the grace of God of a meek mind, and of senses and judgment unimpaired, he made his will, in which he constituted as his trustees Donata, his beloved wife, and his dear daughters, Fantina, Bellola, and Monta,” bequeathing to them the bulk of his property. How soon afterwards he died, there is no evidence to show; but it is at least certain that it was before June, 1325. We may conclude, therefore, that his varied life fulfilled the Psalmist’s space of seventy years.

Marco Polo, says Martin Bucer, was the creator of the modern geography of Asia. He was the Humboldt of the thirteenth century; and the record of his travels must prove an imperishable monument of his force of character, wide intelligence and sympathy, and unshaken intrepidity. We have thus briefly summarized his remarkable career, and indicated the general extent of his travels. To follow him in detail throughout his extensive journeys would be

impossible within the limits prescribed to us; and we shall content ourselves, therefore, with such extracts from his narrative as will best illustrate their more interesting and striking features, and indirectly assist us in forming some conception of the man himself.

And first, we take his description of the great river of Badakshan and the table-land of Pamir—which the wandering Kirghiz call “The Roof of the World”—substituting modern names of places for those in the original.

“In leaving Badakshan, you ride twelve days between east and north-east, ascending a river [the Upper Oxus] that runs through land belonging to a brother of the Prince of Badakshan, and containing a good many towns and villages and scattered habitations. The people are Mohammedans, and valiant in war. At the end of those twelve days you come to a province of no great size, extending indeed no more than three days’ journey in any direction, and this is called Wakhan. The people worship Mohammed, and have a peculiar language. They are gallant soldiers, and have a chief whom they call *None* [No-no?], which is as much as to say Count, and they are liegemen to the Prince of Badakshan.

“There are numbers of wild beasts of all kinds in this region. And when you leave this little country, and ride three days north-east, always among mountains, you get to such a height that it is spoken of as the highest place in the world. And when you reach this height, you find a great lake between two mountains [Lake Sir-i-kol], and out of it a pure river [the Oxus] flows through a plain clothed with the most beautiful pasture in the world, so that a lean beast would

fatten there to your heart’s content in ten days. There are great numbers of all kinds of wild beasts; among others, wild sheep of large size, with horns six palms in length [the Rass, or *Ovis Poli*]. From these horns the shepherds make great bowls out of which to eat their food; and they use the horns also to enclose folds for their cattle at night. Messer Marco was told also that the wolves were numerous, and killed many of those wild sheep. Hence quantities of their horns and bones were found, and these were made into great heaps by the wayside, in order to direct travellers when snow lay on the earth.

“The plain is called Pamir, and you ride across it for twelve days together, finding nothing but a desert without habitation or any green thing, so that travellers are compelled to carry with them whatever they have need of. The region is so lofty and so cold, that not a bird is to be seen. And I must also observe that, owing to this extreme cold, fire does not burn so brightly, nor give out so much heat as usual, nor does it cook food so thoroughly.

“Now, if we continue our journey towards the east-north-east, we travel fully forty days, continually passing over mountains and hills, or through valleys, and crossing many rivers and wildernesses. And in all this extent you find neither habitation of man, nor any green thing, and must carry with you whatever you require. The country is called Bolor [the Tibetan kingdom of Balti]. The people dwell high up in the mountains, and are savage idolaters, living only by the chase, and clothing themselves in the skins of beasts. They are, in truth, an evil race.”

[In February, 1838, Captain John Wood crossed the Pamir, and his description of it may be compared with the Venetian traveller's. "We stood, to use a native expression," he says, "upon the *Báni-i-Duniah*, or 'Roof of the World,' while before us lay stretched a noble, but frozen sheet of water, from whose western end issued the infant river of the Oxus. This fine lake (Sir-i-kol) lies in the form of a crescent, about fourteen miles long from east to west, by an average breadth of one mile. On three sides it is bordered by swelling hills about 500 feet high, while along its southern bank they rise into mountains 3500 feet above the lake, or 19,000 feet above the sea, and covered with perpetual snow, from which never-failing source the lake is supplied. Its elevation is 15,600 feet. . . . The appearance of the country presented the image of a winter of extreme severity. Wherever one's gaze rested, a dazzling bed of snow covered the soil like a carpet, while the sky above our heads was of a sombre and melancholy hue. A few clouds would have refreshed the eye, but none could be anywhere seen. Not a breath rippled the surface of the lake; not a living animal, not even a bird, presented itself to the view. The sound of a human voice had been harmonious music to the ear, but, at this inhospitable season of the year, no one ventured into these icy realms. Silence reigned everywhere around us; a silence so profound that it oppressed the heart." [17]

Of the city of Lop (or Lob) and the great Desert of Gobi, Marco Polo writes:—

"Lop is a large town on the border of the desert which is called the Desert of Lop, and is situated between east and

north-east. It belongs to the Great Khan, and the people worship Mohammed. Now, such persons as propose to cross the desert take a week's rest in this town to refresh themselves and their cattle; and then they make ready for the journey, taking with them a month's supply for man and beast. On quitting this city they enter the desert.

"The extent of this desert is so great, that it is said it would take a year and more to ride from one end of it to the other. And here, where its breadth is least, it takes a month to cross it. It is all composed of hills and valleys of sand, and contains not a thing to eat. But after riding for a day and a night you find fresh water, enough mayhap for some fifty or one hundred persons with their beasts, but not for more. And all across the desert you will find water in like manner, that is to say, in some twenty-eight places altogether you will find good water, but in no great quantity; and in four places also you find brackish water.

"Beasts there are none; for there is no food for them. But there is a marvellous thing related of this desert, which is that when travellers are on the march by night, and one of them chances to drop behind, or to fall asleep or the like, when he tries to regain his company, he will hear spirits talking, and suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name; and thus shall a traveller frequently be led astray so that he never finds his party. And in this way many have perished. Sometimes the travellers will hear as it were the tramp and murmur of a great cavalcade of people away from the real line of road, and taking this to be their own company, will follow the sound; and when day breaks they discover the deception, and

perceive that they are in an evil plight. Even in the day time the spirits may be heard talking. And sometimes you shall hear the sound of various musical instruments, and still more commonly the rattle of drums. Hence, in performing this journey, it is customary for travellers to keep close together. All the animals, too, have bells at their necks, so that they cannot easily get astray. And at sleeping time a signal is hoisted to show the direction of the next march.

"And in this way it is that the desert is crossed."

As the sea has its mermaids, and the river its water-sprites, Undines, or Loreleys, which entice their victims to death, so the deserts and waste places of the earth have their goblins and malignant demons. The awe inspired by the vastness and dreary solitude of the wilderness suggests to the imagination only gloomy ideas, and it is conceived of as a place where no influences or beings favourable to man can exist. Its sounds are sounds of terror; its appearances all foster a sentiment of mystery. Pliny tells us of the phantoms that start up before the traveller in the African deserts; Mas'udi, of the Ghûls, which in night and solitude seek to lead him astray. An Arab writer relates a tradition of the Western Sahara:—"If the wayfarer be alone the demons make sport of him, and fascinate him, so that he wanders from his course and perishes." Colonel Yule remarks that the Afghan and Persian wildernesses also have their *Ghûl-i-Beában*, or Goblin of the Waste, a gigantic and fearful spectre which devours travellers; and even the Gaels of the West Highlands have the desert creature of Glen Eiti, which, one-handed, one-eyed, one-legged, seems exactly to answer to the Arabian Nesúas or *Empusa*. And it may be

added that the wind-swept wastes of Dartmoor, limited as is their expanse, are, in the eyes of the peasantry, haunted by mysterious and malevolent spirits.

The effect of the Desert on a cultivated mind is well described by Madame Hommaire de Hell:—“The profound stillness,” she says, “which reigns in the air produces an indescribable impression on our senses. We scarcely dare to interrupt it, it seems so solemn, so fully in harmony with the infinite grandeur of the desert. In vain will you seek a calm so absolute in even the remotest solitudes of civilized countries. Everywhere some spring murmurs, everywhere some trees rustle, everywhere in the silence of the nights some voices are heard which arrest the thought; but here nature is, so to speak, petrified, and we have before us the image of that eternal repose which the mind is hardly able to conceive.”

Concerning the customs of the Tartars, Marco Polo writes:—

“The Tartar custom is to spend the winter in warm plains where they find good fodder for their cattle, while in summer they betake themselves to a cool climate among the mountains and valleys, where water is to be found, as well as woods and pastures.

“Their houses are circular, and are made of wands covered with felt. These are carried along with them whithersoever they go; for the wands are so strongly interwoven, and so well combined, that the framework can be made very light. Whenever these huts are erected, the door is always placed to the south. They also have waggons covered with black felt so efficaciously that no rain can

enter. These are drawn by oxen and camels, and the women and children travel in them. The women do the buying and selling, and whatever is necessary to provide for the husband and household; for the men all lead the life of gentlemen, troubling themselves about nothing but hawking and hunting, and looking after their goshawks and falcons, unless it be the practice of warlike exercises.

“They live on the meat and milk which their birds supply, and on the produce of the chase; and they eat all kinds of flesh, including that of horses and dogs, and Pharaoh’s rats, of which there are great numbers in burrows on these plains. Their drink is mare’s milk. . . .

“This is the fashion of their religion: They say there is a most high God of Heaven, whom they worship daily with thurible and incense, but they pray to him only for health of mind and body. But they have also a certain other god of theirs called Natigay, and they say he is the God of the Earth, who watches over their children, cattle, and crops. They show him great worship and honour, and every man hath a figure of him in his house, made of felt and cloth; and they also make in the same manner images of his wife and children. The wife they put on the left hand, and the children in front. And when they eat, they take the fat of the meat and grease the god’s mouth withal, as well as the mouths of his wife and children. Then they take of the broth and sprinkle it before the door of the house; and that done, they deem that their god and his family have had their share of the dinner.

“Their drink is mare’s milk, prepared in such a way that you would take it for white wine, and a good right drink it is,

called by them komiz.

“The clothes of the wealthy Tartars are for the most part of gold and silk stuffs, lined with costly furs, such as sable and ermine, vair and fox skin, in the richest fashion.”

As in succeeding chapters of this volume we shall have something to say about the manners and customs of the Mongolian nomads, we may here be content with observing that Marco Polo’s “Natigay” seems identical with the “Nongait” or “Ongotiu” of the Buriats, who, according to Pallas, is honoured by them as the tutelary god of sheep and other cattle. Properly the divinity consists of *two* figures, hanging side by side, one of whom represents the god’s wife. These two figures are merely a pair of lanky flat bolsters with the upper part shaped into a round disc, and the body hung with a long woolly fleece; eyes, nose, breasts, and navel being indicated by leather knobs stitched upon the surface. The male figure commonly has at his girdle the foot-rope with which horses at pasture are fettered, whilst the female, which is sometimes accompanied by smaller figures representing her children, is adorned with all sorts of little nick-nacks and sewing implements.

The Tartar customs of war are thus described:—

“All their harness of war is excellent and costly. Their arms are bows and arrows, sword and mace; but, above all, the bow, for they are capital archers, indeed the best that are known. On their backs they wear armour of cuirbouly, [22] prepared from buffalo and other hides, which is very strong. They are excellent soldiers, and passing valiant in battle. They are also more capable of hardship than other

nations; for many a time, if need be, they will go for a month without any supply of food, living only on the milk of their mares and on such game as their bows may win them. Their horses also will subsist entirely on the grass of the plains, so that there is no need to carry store of barley, or straw, or oats; and they are very docile to their riders. These, in case of need, will abide on horseback the livelong night, armed at all points, while the horse will be continually grazing.

“Of all troops in the world these are they which endure the greatest hardship and fatigue, and cost the least; and they are the best of all for making wide conquests of country. And there can be no manner of doubt that now they are the masters of the larger half of the world. Their armies are admirably ordered in the following manner:—

“You see, when a Tartar prince goes forth to war, he takes with him, say, a hundred thousand horse. Well, he appoints an officer to every ten men, one to every hundred, one to every thousand, and one to every ten thousand, so that his own orders have to be given to ten persons only, and each of these persons has to pass the orders only to other ten, and so on; none having to give orders to more than ten. And every one in turn is responsible only to the officer immediately over him; and the discipline and order that comes of this method is marvellous, for they are a people very obedient to their chiefs. . . . And when the army is on the march they have always two hundred horsemen, very well mounted, who are sent a distance of two marches in advance to reconnoitre, and these always keep ahead. They have a similar party detached in the rear and on either

flank, so that there is a good look-out kept on all sides against surprise. When they are going on a distant expedition, they take no gear with them except two leather bottles for milk, and a little earthenware pot to cook their meat in, and a little tent to shelter them from rain. And in case of great urgency, they will ride ten days on end without lighting a fire or taking a meal. On such an occasion they will sustain themselves on the blood of their horses, opening a vein and letting the blood jet into their mouths, drinking till they have had enough, and then staunching it.

“They also have milk dried into a kind of paste to carry with them; and when they need food, they put this in water, and beat it up till it dissolves, and then drink it. It is prepared in this way: They boil the milk, and when the rich part floats on the top they skim it into another vessel, and of that they make butter; for the milk will not become solid till this is removed. Then they put the milk in the sun to dry. And when they go on an expedition, every man takes some ten pounds of this dried milk with him. And of a morning he will take a half-pound of it and put it in his leather bottle, with as much water as he pleases. So, as he rides along, the milk-paste and the water in the bottle get well churned together into a kind of pap, and that makes his dinner.

“When they come to an engagement with the enemy, they will gain the victory in this fashion: They never let themselves get into a regular medley, but keep perpetually riding round and shooting into the enemy. And as they do not count it any shame to run away in battle, they will sometimes pretend to do so, and in running away they turn in the saddle and shoot hard and strong at the foe, and in

this way make great havoc. Their horses are trained so perfectly that they will double hither and thither, just like a dog, in a way that is quite astonishing. Thus they fight to as good purpose in running away as if they stood and faced the enemy, because of the vast volleys of arrows that they shoot in this way, turning round upon their pursuers, who are fancying that they have won the battle. But when the Tartars see that they have killed and wounded a good many horses and men, they wheel round bodily, and return to the charge in perfect order, and with loud cries; and in a very short time the enemy are routed. In truth, they are stout and valiant soldiers, and inured to war. And you perceive that it is just when the enemy sees them run, and imagines that he has gained the battle, that he has in reality lost it; for the Tartars wheel round in a moment when they judge the right time has come. And after this fashion they have won many a fight.

"All this that I have been telling you is true of the manners and customs of the genuine Tartars."