

76. It is a melancholy history. For ages after the rise of Mahomedanism, Christianity, in however defective a form, had a wide and even growing influence over extensive regions of the earth, across which now for centuries past a Christian has scarcely dared to steal. Leaving out China, where possibly the Church of Rome may number as many disciples now as the Syrian Church did in its most prosperous days, how many Christians are there in what were up to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries the metropolitan sees of Tangut, Kashgar, Samarkand, Balkh, Herat, Sejistān, and Marw? Whilst at the other end of Asia, Socotra, once also the seat of a Christian Archbishop, and we may hope of some Christian culture, is sunk into the very depths of savagery.¹

VII. LITERARY INFORMATION REGARDING CHINA PREVIOUS TO THE MONGOL ERA.

77. Before speaking of that great opening of the Farther East to European travel, which took place under the reign of the Mongol dynasty in Asia, it will be well to take such a view as is practicable to me of the information regarding China which is to be found in literary works of the middle ages antecedent to that era. These are all, with one slight exception, Arabic.

The earliest of them (at least as regards one half of it) is an Arab compilation of the middle of the ninth century and be-

which was obtained by the Jesuit Philip Couplet from a Chinese in the province of Nanking, is now in the Laurentian Library at Florence. I tried to see it but could not. "How not to do it" is, or was till lately, the principle of administration in that institution, if I may judge from my own experience on two occasions, on the second with an introduction; in this a singular contrast to those other public libraries of Florence which are *not* under clerical management.

¹ There are one or two indications of the existence of Christians in the Indo-Chinese countries and islands which have perhaps been hitherto overlooked. One is found in Marignolli who speaks of there being a few Christians in *Saba*, which we shall see reason to believe to be Java (*infr.*, p. 346), and another in the Travels of Hier. Santo Stephano, who, when his comrade Hieronimo Adorno died in the city of Pegu in 1496, buried him "in a certain ruined church, frequented by none" (*India in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 6). If the *Sornau* of Varthema's Christian fellow-travellers be Siam, this affords a third indication of the same kind.