

II.

LETTERS AND REPORTS OF MISSIONARY
FRIARS FROM CATHAY AND INDIA.

INTRODUCTORY NOTICES.

THE two first letters in this part of our collection are from the pen of John of Monte Corvino, the founder of those Catholic missions in China which enjoyed so much apparent prosperity during the continuance of the Mongol dynasty, and also the first Archbishop of Cambalec or Peking. They are transcribed by Wadding from an old chronicle which he assigns to Odoric of Pordenone, erroneously as we have seen.¹

The third document also, I believe, for reasons which will be given, to contain a letter from the same ecclesiastic, of earlier date than the two preceding.

The birth of this John is fixed to about the year 1247, by an incidental allusion in the first of these letters. The place of his birth is doubtful, as the honour has been claimed by two towns or villages of the name; one in the Capitanata near Lucera, and the other about fifteen miles east of Salerno in the Principato Citra.²

The first mention of him that I have found is on the occasion

¹ *Ante*, p. 17.

² Wadding (vi, p. 94) mentions the double claim. The former village is marked in Murray's Map as Pietra Montecorvine, about twenty-two miles west of Foggia.