

The reports of Prester John's power, opulence, and sanctity expanded without limit, and letters were circulated throughout Europe, and survive in many continental libraries, which he was alleged to have addressed to the Emperor of the East and other Christian princes. In these his great power and glory were vaunted with the most extravagant details; India and the tomb of St. Thomas being always claimed as a prominent part of his dominions. Large extracts from such a letter may be seen in Assemani, and a translation has been given by Mr. Layard.¹ By the circulation of these letters, glaring forgeries and fictions as they are, the idea of this great Christian conqueror was planted in the mind of the European nations, and twined itself round every rumour of revolution in further Asia that penetrated to Europe. Even when the noise of the real conquests of Chinghiz began to make itself audible in the west, he was invested with the character of a Christian king, and more or less confounded with the mysterious Prester John.² After this delusion was dispelled and the diffusion of the Mongol power had opened up the east, travellers naturally sought traces of the vast monarchy of which Europe for a century past had heard so much, but with invariable disappointment. Eventually the Chief of the Keraite tribe of Tartars became identified as the representative of Prester John, but a portion of the facts which combined with so much fable to form the legend have another source.³

¹ *Assemani*, p. 488-493; *Layard's Nineveh*, i, 250.

² See *Eccard, Corpus Historic.*, ii, 1451, "Relatio de Davide Rege Tartarorum Christiano." The name Prester John does not, I think, occur in this, but the idea seems to be there.

³ There is a letter in the Ecclesiastical Annals of Baronius, quoted from the Chronicle of Roger Hoveden, addressed, in 1177, from Venice by Pope Alexander to "*Carissimo in Christo filio illustri et magnifico Indorum regi, sacerdotum sanctissimo.*" The Pope recites how he had heard from his beloved son, Master Philip the physician, about the king's pious desire to have instruction in Catholic doctrine, etc., and to possess a church in Rome and an altar in Jerusalem. He found it too difficult, on account of the length and obstructions of the way, to send any one *a latere*, but he would despatch the said Philip to communicate instruction to him. It is not stated that Philip had actually been to the king's court, but only that he had heard of his majesty's pious desires from conversation with honourable persons of his kingdom, whom the physician