

had honours and presents bestowed upon them; and although all of them in turn promised to bring back thine answer to our Lord aforesaid, never yet hath he had any reply from thee or from the Apostolic See. Wherefore let your Holiness see to it that this time and henceforward there may be no doubt about a reply being sent, and an envoy also, as is fitting from your Holiness. For it is cause of great shame to Christians in these parts, when their fellows are found to tell lies." (Date as above.)

The position of these Alans in China suggests a curious and perplexing problem. We shall find that Marignolli speaks of them as "the greatest and noblest nation in the world, the fairest and bravest of men"; as those to whose aid Chinghiz owed all his great victories; and who in the writer's own day were to the number of thirty thousand in the service of the Great Khan, and filled the most important offices of state, whilst all were, at least nominally, Christians.

The Alans were known to the Chinese by that name, in the ages immediately preceding and following the Christian era, as dwelling near the Aral, in which original position they are believed to have been closely akin to, if not identical with, the famous Massagetæ. Hereabouts also Ptolemy (vi, 14) appears to place the Alani-Scythæ, and Alanæan Mountains. From about 40 B.C. the emigrations of the Alans seem to have been directed westward to the Lower Don; here they are placed in the first century by Josephus and by the Armenian writers; and hence they are found issuing in the third century to ravage the rich provinces of Asia Minor. In 376 the deluge of the Huns on its westward course came upon the Alans and overwhelmed them. Great numbers of Alans are found to have joined the conquerors on their further progress, and large bodies of Alans afterwards swelled the waves of Goths, Vandals, and Sueves, that rolled across the Western Empire. A portion of the Alans, however, after the Hun invasion retired into the plains adjoining Caucasus, and into the lower valleys of that region, where they maintained the name and nationality which the others speedily lost. Little is heard of these Caucasian Alans for many centuries, except occasionally as mercenary soldiers of the Byzantine emperors or the