

MARCO POLO AND HIS BOOK.

INTRODUCTORY NOTICES.

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I. OBSCURITIES IN THE HISTORY OF HIS LIFE AND BOOK. RAMUSIO'S STATEMENTS.

1. WITH all the intrinsic interest of Marco Polo's Book it may perhaps be doubted if it would have continued to exercise such fascination on many minds through successive generations were it not for the difficult questions which it suggests. It is a great book of puzzles, whilst our confidence in the man's veracity is such that we feel certain every puzzle has a solution.

Obscurities
of Polo's
Book, and
personal
History.

And such difficulties have not attached merely to the identification of places, the interpretation of outlandish terms, or the illustration of obscure customs; for strange entanglements have perplexed also the chief circumstances of the Traveller's life and authorship. The time of the dictation of his Book and of the execution of his Last Will have been almost the only undisputed epochs in his biography. The year of his birth has been contested, and the date of his death has not been recorded; the critical occasion of his capture by the Genoese, to which we seem to owe the happy fact that he did not go down mute to the tomb of his fathers, has been made the subject of chronological difficulties; there are in the various texts of his story variations hard to account for; the very tongue in which it was written down has furnished a question, solved only in our own age, and in a most unexpected manner.