

journey, no one from Europe has dared to repeat it,* whereas in the very year following the discovery of the Western Indies many ships immediately retraced the voyage thither, and up to the present day continue to do so, habitually and in countless numbers. Indeed those regions are now so well known, and so thronged by commerce, that the traffic between Italy, Spain, and England is not greater."

5. Ramusio goes on to explain the light regarding the first part or prologue of Marco Polo's book that he had derived from a recent piece of luck which had made him partially acquainted with the geography of Abulfeda, and to make a running commentary on the whole of the preliminary narrative until the final return of the travellers to Venice:—

Recounts a tradition of the travellers' return to Venice.

"And when they got thither the same fate befel them as befel Ulysses, who, when he returned, after his twenty years' wanderings, to his native Ithaca, was recognized by nobody. Thus also those three gentlemen who had been so many years absent from their native city were recognized by none of their kinsfolk, who were under the firm belief that they had all been dead for many a year past, as indeed had been reported. Through the long duration and the hardships of their journeys, and through the many worries and anxieties that they had undergone, they were quite changed in aspect, and had got a certain indescribable smack of the Tartar both in air and accent, having indeed all but forgotten their Venetian tongue. Their clothes too were coarse and shabby, and of a Tartar cut. They proceeded on their arrival to their house in this city in the confine of St. John Chrysostom, where you may see it to this day. The house, which was in those days a very lofty and handsome palazzo, is now known by the name of the *Corte del Millioni* for a reason that I will tell you presently. Going thither they found it occupied by some of their relatives, and they had the greatest difficulty in making the latter understand who they should be. For these good people, seeing them to be in countenance so unlike what they used to be, and in dress so shabby, flatly refused to believe that they were those very gentlemen of the Ca' Polo whom they had been looking upon for ever so many years as among the dead.† So these three gentlemen,—this is a story I have often heard when I was a youngster from the illustrious Messer GASPARO MALPIERO, a gentleman of very great age, and a Senator of eminent virtue and integrity, whose house was on the Canal of Santa Marina, exactly at the corner over the mouth of the Rio di S. Giovanni Chrisostomo, and just midway among the buildings of the aforesaid Corte del Millioni, and he said he had heard the story from his own father and grandfather, and from other old men among the neighbours,—the three gentlemen, I say, devised a scheme by which they should at once bring about their recog-

* A grievous error of Ramusio's.

† See the decorated title-page of this volume for an attempt to realise the scene.