

15. Of the three sons of Andrea Polo of S. Felice, Marco seems to have been the eldest, and Maffeo the youngest.* They were all engaged in commerce, and apparently in a partnership, which to some extent held good even when the two younger had been many years absent in the Far East.† Marco seems to have been established for a time at Constantinople,‡ and also to have had a house (no doubt of business) at Soldaia, in the Crimea, where his son and daughter, Nicolo and Maroca by name, were living in 1280. This year is the date of the Elder Marco's Will, executed at Venice, and when he was "weighed down by bodily ailment." Whether he survived for any length of time we do not know.

16. Nicolo Polo, the second of the Brothers, had two legitimate sons, MARCO, the Author of our Book, born in 1254,§ and MAFFEO, of whose place in the family we shall have a few words to say presently. The story opens, as we have said, in 1260, when we find the two brothers, Nicolo and Maffeo the Elder, at Constantinople. How long they had been absent from Venice we are not distinctly told. Nicolo had left his wife there behind him; Maffeo apparently was a bachelor. In the year named they started on a trading venture to the Crimea, whence a succession of openings and chances, recounted in the Introductory chapters of Marco's work, carried them far north along the Volga, and thence first to Bokhara, and then to the Court of the Great Kaan Kúblái in the Far East, on or within the borders of CATHAY. That a great and civilized country so called existed in the extremity of Asia had already been reported in Europe by the Friars Plano Carpini (1246) and William Rubruquis (1253), who had not indeed reached its

Marco the Elder.

Nicolo and Maffeo commence their travels.

mistake, as will be explained further on (see p. 74, note). In those days the demarcation between Patrician and non-Patrician at Venice, where all classes shared in commerce, all were (generally speaking) of one race, and where there were neither castles, domains, nor trains of horsemen, formed no wide gulf. Still it is interesting to establish the verity of the old tradition of Marco's technical nobility.

* Marco's seniority rests only on the assertion of Ramusio, who also calls Maffeo older than Nicolo. But in Marco the Elder's Will these two are always (3 times) specified as "*Nicolaus et Matheus.*"

† This seems implied in the Elder Marco's Will (1280): "*Item de bonis quæ me habere contingunt de fraternâ Compagniâ a suprascriptis Nicolao et Matheo Paulo,*" etc.

‡ In his Will he terms himself "*Ego Marcus Polo quondam de Constantinopoli.*"

§ There is no real ground for doubt as to this. All the extant MSS. agree in making Marco fifteen years old when his father returned to Venice in 1269.