

frontiers, but had met with its people at the Court of the Great Kaan in Mongolia; whilst the latter of the two with characteristic acumen had seen that they were identical with the Seres of classic fame.

17. Kúblái had never before fallen in with European gentlemen. He was delighted with these Venetians, listened with strong interest to all that they had to tell him of the Latin world, and determined to send them back as his ambassadors to the Pope, accompanied by an officer of his own Court. His letters to the Pope, as the Polos represent them, were mainly to desire the despatch of a large body of educated missionaries to convert his people to Christianity. It is not likely that religious motives influenced Kúblái in this, but he probably desired religious aid in softening and civilizing his rude kinsmen of the Steppes, and judged, from what he saw in the Venetians and heard from them, that Europe could afford such aid of a higher quality than the degenerate Oriental Christians with whom he was familiar, or the Tibetan Lamas on whom his patronage eventually devolved when Rome so deplorably failed to meet his advances.

18. The Brothers arrived at Acre in April,* 1269, and found that no Pope existed, for Clement IV. was dead the year before, and no new election had taken place. So they went home to Venice to see how things stood there after their absence of so many years.

The wife of Nicolo was no longer among the living, but he found his son Marco a fine lad of fifteen.

The best and most authentic MSS. tell us no more than this. But one class of copies, consisting of the Latin version made by our Traveller's contemporary, Francesco Pipino, and of the numerous editions based indirectly upon it, represents that Nicolo had left Venice when Marco was as yet unborn, and consequently had never seen him till his return from the East in 1269.†

* Baldelli and Lazari say that the Bern MS. specifies 30th April; but this is a mistake.

† Pipino's version runs: "Invenit Dominus Nicolaus Paulus uxorem suam esse defunctam, quae in recessu suo fuit praegnans. Invenitque filium, Marcum nomine, qui jam annos xv. habebat aetatis, qui post discessum ipsius de Venetiis natus fuerat de uxore