

northern frontier of China they at last reached the presence of the Kaan, who was at his usual summer retreat at Kai-ping fu, near the base of the Khingan Mountains, and nearly 100 miles north of the Great Wall at Kalgan. If there be no mistake in the time (three years and a half) ascribed to this journey in all the existing texts, the travellers did not reach the Court till about May of 1275.*

20. Kúblái received the Venetians with great cordiality, and took kindly to young Mark, who must have been by this time one-and-twenty. The *Joenne Bachelier*, as the story calls him, applied himself to the acquisition of the languages and written characters in chief use among the multifarious nationalities included in the Kaan's Court and administration; and Kúblái after a time, seeing his discretion and ability, began to employ him in the public service. M. Pauthier has found a record in the Chinese Annals of the Mongol Dynasty, which states that in the year 1277, a certain POLO was nominated a second-class commissioner or agent attached to the Privy Council, a passage which we are happy to believe to refer to our young traveller.†

Marco's
employment
by Kúblái
Kaan; and
his journeys.

His first mission apparently was that which carried him through the provinces of Shan-si, Shen-si, and Sze-ch'wan, and the wild country on the East of Tibet, to the remote province of Yun-nan, called by the Mongols Karájàng, and which had been partially conquered by an army under Kúblái himself in 1253, before his accession to the throne.‡ Mark, during his stay at court, had observed the Kaan's delight in hearing of strange countries, their marvels, manners, and oddities, and had heard

* Half a year earlier, if we suppose the three years and a half to count from Venice rather than Acre. But at that season (November) Kúblái would not have been at Kai-ping fu (otherwise Shang-tu).

† *Pauthier*, p. ix., and p. 361.

‡ That this was Marco's first mission is positively stated in the Ramusian edition; and though this may be only an editor's gloss it seems well-founded. The French texts say only that the Great Kaan, "l'envoia en un message en une terre ou bien avoit vj. mois de chemin." The traveller's actual Itinerary affords to Vochan (Yung-ch'ang), on the frontier of Burma, 147 days' journey, which with halts might well be reckoned six months in round estimate. And we are enabled by various circumstances to fix the date of the Yun-nan journey between 1277 and 1280. The former limit is determined by Polo's account of the battle with the Burmese, near Vochan, which took place according to the Chinese Annals in 1277. The latter is fixed by his mention of Kúblái's son, Mangalai, as governing at Kenjanfu (Si-ngan fu), a prince who died in 1280. (See vol. ii. pp. 24, 31, also 64, 80.)