

his Majesty's frank expressions of disgust at the stupidity of his commissioners when they could speak of nothing but the official business on which they had been sent. Profiting by these observations, he took care to store his memory or his note-books with all curious facts that were likely to interest Kúblái, and related them with vivacity on his return to Court. This first journey, which led him through a region which is still very nearly a *terra incognita*, and in which there existed and still exists, among the deep valleys of the Great Rivers flowing down from Eastern Tibet, and in the rugged mountain ranges bordering Yun-nan and Kwei-chau, a vast Ethnological Garden, as it were, of tribes of various race and in every stage of uncivilisation, afforded him an acquaintance with many strange products and eccentric traits of manners, wherewith to delight the Emperor.

Mark rose rapidly in favour, and often served Kúblái again on distant missions, as well as in domestic administration, but we gather few details as to his employments. At one time we know that he held for three years the government of the great city of Yang-chau, though we need not try to magnify this office, as some commentators have done, into the viceroyalty of one of the great provinces of the Empire; on another occasion we find him with his uncle Maffeo, passing a year at Kan-chau in Tangut; again, it would appear, visiting Kara Korum, the old capital of the Kaans in Mongolia; on another occasion in Champa or Southern Cochin China; and again, or perhaps as a part of the last expedition, on a mission to the Indian Seas, when he appears to have visited several of the southern states of India. We are not informed whether his father and uncle shared in such employments;\* and the story of their services rendered to the Kaan in promoting the capture of the city of Siang-yang, by the construction of powerful engines of attack, is too much perplexed by difficulties of chronology to be cited with confidence. Anyhow they were gathering wealth, and after years of exile they began to dread what might follow old Kúblái's death, and longed to carry their gear and their own grey heads safe home to the Lagoons. The aged Emperor

---

\* Excepting in the doubtful case of Kan-chau, where one reading says that the three Polos were there on business of their own not necessary to mention, and another, that only Maffeo and Marco were there, "*en légation.*"