

driven to discern by indirect and doubtful indications alone, whether he is speaking of a place from personal knowledge or only from hearsay. In truth, though there are delightful exceptions, and nearly every part of the book suggests interesting questions, a desperate meagreness and baldness does extend over considerable tracts of the story. In fact his book reminds us sometimes of his own description of Khorasan:—
“ On chevauche par beaux plains et belles costieres, là où il a moult beaux herbages et bonne pasture et fruis assez Et aucune fois y treuve l'en un desert de soixante milles ou de mains, esquels desers ne treuve l'en point d'eau; mais la convient porter o lui ! ”

Still, some shadowy image of the man may be seen in the Book; a practical man, brave, shrewd, prudent, keen in affairs, and never losing his interest in mercantile details, very fond of the chase, sparing of speech; with a deep wondering respect for Saints, even though they be Pagan Saints, and their asceticism, but a contempt for Patarins and such like, whose consciences would not run in customary grooves, and on his own part a keen appreciation of the World's pomps and vanities. See, on the one hand, his undisguised admiration of the hard life and long fastings of Sakya Muni; and on the other how enthusiastic he gets in speaking of the great Kaan's command of the good things of the world, but above all of his matchless opportunities of sport!*

Of humour there are hardly any signs in his Book. His almost solitary joke (I know but one more, and it pertains to the *οὐκ ἀνήκοντα*) occurs in speaking of the Kaan's paper-money when he observes that Kúblái might be said to have the true Philosopher's Stone, for he made his money at pleasure out of the bark of Trees.† Even the oddest eccentricities of outlandish tribes scarcely seem to disturb his gravity; as when he relates in his brief way of the people called Gold-Teeth on the frontier of Burma, that ludicrous custom which Mr. Tylor has so well illustrated under the name of the *Couvade*. There is more savour of laughter in the few lines of a Greek Epic, which relate precisely the same custom of a people on the Euxine:—

* See vol. ii. p. 318, and vol. i. p. 404.

† Vol. i. p. 423.