

87. Before concluding, it may be desirable to say a few words on the subject of important knowledge other than geographical, which various persons have supposed that Marco Polo must have introduced from Eastern Asia to Europe.

Alleged introduction of Block-printed Books into Europe by Marco Polo.

Respecting the mariner's compass and gunpowder I shall say nothing, as no one now, I believe, imagines Marco to have had anything to do with their introduction. But from a highly respectable source in recent years we have seen the introduction of Block-printing into Europe connected with the name of our Traveller. The circumstances are stated as follows : *

"In the beginning of the 15th century a man named Pamphilo Castaldi, of Feltre was employed by the Seignory or Government of the Republic, to engross deeds and public edicts of various kinds the initial letters at the commencement of the writing being usually ornamented with red ink, or illuminated in gold and colours

"According to Sansovino, certain stamps or types had been invented some time previously by Pietro di Natali, Bishop of Aquilœa.† These were made at Murano of glass, and were used to stamp or print the outline of the large initial letters of public documents, which were afterwards filled up by hand. . . . Pamphilo Castaldi improved on these glass types, by having others made of wood or metal, and having seen several Chinese books which the famous traveller Marco Polo had brought from China, and of which the entire text was printed with wooden blocks, he caused moveable wooden types to be made, each type containing a single letter ; and with these he printed several broadsides and single leaves, at Venice, in the year 1426. Some of these single sheets are said to be preserved among the archives at Feltre. . . .

"The tradition continues that John Faust, of Mayence became acquainted with Castaldi, and passed some time with him, at his *Scriptorium*, . . . at Feltre ;"

and in short developed from the knowledge so acquired the great invention of printing. Mr. Curzon goes on to say that

* *A short Account of Libraries of Italy*, by the Hon. R. Curzon (the late Lord de la Zouche) ; in *Bibliog. and Hist. Miscellanies ; Philobiblon Society*, vol. i, 1854, pp. 6. *seqq.*

† P. dei Natali was Bishop of Equilio, a city of the Venetian Lagoons, in the latter part of the 14th century. (See *Ughelli, Italia Sacra*, X. 87.) There is no ground whatever for connecting him with these inventions. The story of the glass types appears to rest entirely and solely on one obscure passage of Sansovino, who says that under the Doge Marco Corner (1365-1367) : "*certe Natale Veneto lasciò un libro della materie delle forme da giustar intorno alle lettere, ed il modo di formarle di vetro.*" There is absolutely nothing more. Some kind of stencilling seems indicated.