

the Christians of these parts are so ignorant that they achieve nothing and can achieve nothing, whilst you see the Idolaters can do anything they please, insomuch that when I sit at table the cups from the middle of the hall come to me full of wine or other liquor without being touched by anybody, and I drink from them. They control storms, causing them to pass in whatever direction they please, and do many other marvels; whilst, as you know, their idols speak, and give them predictions on whatever subjects they choose. But if I were to turn to the faith of Christ and become a Christian, then my barons and others who are not converted would say: "What has moved you to be baptised and to take up the faith of Christ? What powers or miracles have you witnessed on His part?" (You know the Idolaters here say that their wonders are performed by the sanctity and power of their idols.) Well, I should not know what answer to make; so they would only be confirmed in their errors, and the Idolaters, who are adepts in such surprising arts, would easily compass my death. But now you shall go to your Pope, and pray him on my part to send hither an hundred men skilled in your law, who shall be capable of rebuking the practices of the Idolaters to their faces, and of telling them that they too know how to do such things but will not, because they are done by the help of the devil and other evil spirits, and shall so control the Idolaters that these shall have no power to perform such things in their presence. When we shall witness this we will denounce the Idolaters and their religion, and then I will receive baptism; and when I shall have been baptised, then all my barons and chiefs shall be baptised also, and their followers shall do the like, and thus in the end there will be more Christians here than exist in your part of the world!

"And if the Pope, as was said in the beginning of this book, had sent men fit to preach our religion, the Grand Kaan would have turned Christian; for it is an undoubted fact that he greatly desired to do so."

In the simultaneous patronage of different religions, Kúblái followed the practice of his house. Thus Rubruquis writes of his predecessor Mangku Kaan: "It is his custom, on such days as his diviners tell him to be festivals, or any of the Nestorian priests declare to be holydays, to hold a court. On these occasions the Christian priests enter first with their paraphernalia, and pray for him, and bless his cup. They retire, and then come the Saracen priests and do likewise; the priests of the Idolaters follow. He all the while believes in none of them, though they all follow his court as flies follow honey. He bestows his gifts on all of them, each party believes itself to be his favourite, and all prophesy smooth things to him." Abulfaragius calls Kúblái "a just prince and a wise, who loved Christians and honoured physicians of learning, whatsoever their nation."

There is a good deal in Kúblái that reminds us of the greatest prince of that other great Mongol house, Akbar. And if we trusted the first impression of the passage just quoted from Ramusio, we might suppose that the grandson of Chinghiz too had some of that real wistful regard towards the Lord Jesus Christ, of which we seem to see traces in the grandson of Baber. But with Kúblái, as with his predecessors, religion seems to have been only a political matter; and this aspect of the thing will easily be recognised in a re-perusal of his conversation with Messer Nicolas and Messer Maffeo. The Kaan must be obeyed; how man shall worship God is indifferent; this was the constant policy of his house in the days of its greatness. Kúblái, as Koeppen observes, the first of his line to raise himself above the natural and systematic barbarism of the Mongols, probably saw in the promotion of Tibetan Buddhism, already spread to some extent among them, the readiest means of civilising his countrymen. But he may have been quite sincere in saying what is here ascribed to him in *this* sense, viz. : that if the Latin Church, with its superiority of character and acquirement, had come to his aid as he had once requested, he would gladly have used *its* missionaries as his civilising instruments instead of the Lamas and their trumpery. (*Rubr.* 313; *Assemani*, III. pt. ii. 107; *Koeppen*, II. 89, 96.)