

which drains the Yung-ch'ang plain communicates with the Salwen by a river called the 'Nan-tien,' not to be confounded with the 'Nan-ting,' about 45 miles south of that city, a fair journey of two and a half days. Knowing, as we now do, that it must descend some 3500 feet in that distance, does it not seem reasonable to suppose that the valley of this rivulet is the route alluded to? The great battle on the Yung-ch'ang plain, moreover, was fought only a few years before Marco's visit, and seeing that the king and his host of elephants in all probability entered the valley from the south, travellers to Burma would naturally have quitted it by the same route.

"But again, our mediæval Herodotus reports that 'the country is wild and hard of access, full of great woods and mountains which 'tis impossible to pass, the air is so impure and unwholesome; and any foreigners attempting it would die for certain.'

"This is exactly and literally the description given us of the district in which we crossed the Salwen.

"To insist on the theory of the descent by this route is to make the traveller ride downhill, 'over mountains it is impossible to pass.'

"The fifteen days' subsequent journey described by Marco need not present much difficulty. The distance from the junction of the Nan-tien with the Salwen to the capital of Burma (Pagán) would be something over 300 miles; fifteen days seems a fair estimate for the distance, seeing that a great part of the journey would doubtless be by boat."

Regarding this last paragraph, Captain Gill says (II. 345): "An objection may be raised that no such route as this is known to exist; but it must be remembered that the Burmese capital changes its position every now and then, and it is obvious that the trade routes would be directed to the capital, and would change with it. Altogether, with the knowledge at present available, this certainly seems the most satisfactory interpretation of the old traveller's story."—H. C.]

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## CHAPTER LIV.

CONCERNING THE CITY OF MIEN, AND THE TWO TOWERS THAT ARE THEREIN, ONE OF GOLD AND THE OTHER OF SILVER.

AND when you have travelled those 15 days through such a difficult country as I have described, in which travellers have to carry provisions for the road because there are no inhabitants, then you arrive at the capital city of this Province of Mien, and it also is called AMIEN, and is a very great and noble city.<sup>1</sup> The people are Idolaters and have a peculiar language, and are subject to the Great Kaan.

And in this city there is a thing so rich and rare that I must tell you about it. You see there was in former days a rich and puissant king in this city, and when he