

NOTE 5.—This chapter is one of the most perplexing in the whole book, owing to the chronological difficulties involved.

SAIANFU is SIANG-YANG FU, which stands on the south bank of the River Han, and with the sister city of Fan-ch'eng, on the opposite bank, commands the junction of two important approaches to the southern provinces, viz. that from Shen-si down the Han, and that from Shan-si and Peking down the Pe-ho. Fan-ch'eng seems now to be the more important place of the two.

The name given to the city by Polo is precisely that which Siang-yang bears in Rashiduddin, and there is no room for doubt as to its identity.

The Chinese historians relate that Kúblái was strongly advised to make the capture of Siang-yang and Fan-ch'eng a preliminary to his intended attack upon the Sung. The siege was undertaken in the latter part of 1268, and the twin cities held out till the spring [March] of 1273. Nor did Kúblái apparently prosecute any other operations against the Sung during that long interval.

Now Polo represents that the long siege of Saianfu, instead of being a prologue to the subjugation of Manzi, was the protracted epilogue of that enterprise; and he also represents the fall of the place as caused by advice and assistance rendered by his father, his uncle, and himself, a circumstance consistent only with the siege's having really been such an epilogue to the war. For, according to the narrative as it stands in all the texts, the Polos *could not* have reached the Court of Kúblái before the end of 1274, *i.e.* a year and a half after the fall of Siang-yang, as represented in the Chinese histories.

The difficulty is not removed, nor, it appears to me, abated in any degree, by omitting the name of Marco as one of the agents in this affair, an omission which occurs both in Pauthier's MS. B and in Ramusio. Pauthier suggests that the father and uncle may have given the advice and assistance in question when on their first visit to the Kaan, and when the siege of Siang-yang was first contemplated. But this would be quite inconsistent with the assertion that the place had held out three years longer than the rest of Manzi, as well as with the idea that their aid had abridged the duration of the siege, and, in fact, with the spirit of the whole story. It is certainly very difficult in this case to justify Marco's veracity, but I am very unwilling to believe that there was no justification in the facts.

It is a very curious circumstance that the historian Wassáf also appears to represent Saianfu (see note 5, ch. lxxv.) as holding out after all the rest of Manzi had been conquered. Yet the Chinese annals are systematic, minute, and consequent, and it seems impossible to attribute to them such a misplacement of an event which they represent as the key to the conquest of Southern China.

In comparing Marco's story with that of the Chinese, we find the same coincidence in prominent features, accompanying a discrepancy in details, that we have had occasion to notice in other cases where his narrative intersects history. The Chinese account runs as follows:—

In 1271, after Siang-yang and Fan-ch'eng had held out already nearly three years, an Uighúr General serving at the siege, whose name was Alihaiya, urged the Emperor to send to the West for engineers expert at the construction and working of machines casting stones of 150 lbs. weight. With such aid he assured Kúblái the place would speedily be taken. Kúblái sent to his nephew Abaka in Persia for such engineers, and two were accordingly sent post to China, *Alawating* of Mufali and his pupil Ysemain of Huli or Hiulie (probably *Ala'uddin* of *Miafaraḡain* and *Ismael* of *Heri* or *Herat*). Kúblái on their arrival gave them military rank. They exhibited their skill before the Emperor at Tatu, and in the latter part of 1272 they reached the camp before Siang-yang, and set up their engines. The noise made by the machines, and the crash of the shot as it broke through everything in its fall, caused great alarm in the garrison. Fan-ch'eng was first taken by assault, and some weeks later Siang-yang surrendered.

The shot used on this occasion weighed 125 Chinese pounds (if *catties*, then equal to about 166 *lbs. avoird.*), and penetrated 7 or 8 feet into the earth.