

APPENDIX E.—*The Preface of Friar Pipino to his
Latin Version of Marco Polo.*

(Circa 1315—1320.)

“The Book of that prudent, honourable, and most truthful gentleman, MESSER MARCO POLO of Venice, concerning the circumstances and manners of the Regions of the East, which he conscientiously wrote and put forth in the Vulgar Tongue, I, FRIAR FRANCESCO PIPINO of Bologna, of the Order of the Preaching Friars, am called upon by a number of my Fathers and Masters to render faithfully and truthfully out of the vulgar tongue into the Latin. And this, not merely because they are themselves persons who take more pleasure in Latin than in vernacular compositions, but also that those who, owing to the diversity of languages and dialects, might find the perusal of the original difficult or impossible, may be able to read the Book with understanding and enjoyment.

“The task, indeed, which they have constrained me to undertake, is one which they themselves could have executed more competently, but they were averse to distract their attention from the higher contemplations and sublime pursuits to which they are devoted, in order to turn their thoughts and pens to things of the earth earthy. I, therefore, in obedience to their orders, have rendered the whole substance of the Book into such plain Latin as was suited to its subject.

“And let none deem this task to be vain and unprofitable; for I am of opinion that the perusal of the Book by the Faithful may merit an abounding Grace from the Lord; whether that in contemplating the variety, beauty, and vastness of God’s Creation, as herein displayed in His marvellous works, they may be led to bow in adoring wonder before His Power and Wisdom; or, that, in considering the depths of blindness and impurity in which the Gentile Nations are involved, they may be constrained at once to render thanks to God Who hath deigned to call His faithful people out of such perilous darkness into His marvellous Light, and to pray for the illumination of the hearts of the Heathen. Hereby, also, the sloth of undevout Christians may be put to shame, when they see how much more ready the nations of the unbelievers are to worship their Idols, than are many of those who have been marked with Christ’s Token to adore the True God. Moreover, the hearts of some members of the religious orders may be moved to strive for the diffusion of the Christian Faith, and by Divine Aid to carry the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, forgotten among so vast multitudes, to those blinded nations, among whom the harvest is indeed so great, and the labourers so few.

“But lest the inexperienced Reader should regard as beyond belief the many strange and unheard of things that are related in sundry passages of this Book, let all know MESSER MARCO POLO, the narrator of these marvels, to be a most respectable, veracious, and devout person, of most honourable character, and receiving such good testimony from all his acquaintance, that his many virtues claim entire belief for that which he relates. His Father, Messer Nicolo, a man of the highest respectability, used to relate all these things in the same manner. And his uncle, Messer Maffeo, who is spoken of in the Book, a man of ripe wisdom and piety, in familiar conversation with his Confessor when on his death-bed, maintained unflinchingly that the whole of the contents of this Book were true.

“Wherefore I have, with a safer conscience, undertaken the labour of this Translation, for the entertainment of my Readers, and to the praise of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.”