

CHAPTER XV.

FRIAR ODORIC. — SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE.

FRIAR ODORIC is the first European who has ever visited Tibet Proper and even Lhasa, and still his description of the country is very meagre if compared with the information brought back by Marco Polo. From Cathay he travelled several day's journey westwards through many countries and cities. Thus he came to the country of Prester John called Penthexoire with the capital Cosan. From this province he came to another called Cossam with the capital Cassam, which was one of the twelve provinces of the Great Kaan.

The scholars who have tried to make out this route, Yule, Klaproth, Pauthier, and Cordier, have not, as could be expected from such scanty material, been successful. According to Cordier the religious traveller went from Peking towards the country of Tangut, passing through Kan-su.

Wherever his Cossam may have been situated, he travelled from there to another very great province which has the name Riboth and borders upon India. Of this kingdom, Tibet, he says:¹

Cel royaume est subgiet au grant Caan, et y treuve-on pain et vin en très plus grant habondance que en nulle part du monde. Les gens de ce pais demeurent en tentes de fuerre noir. Leur maistre cité est moult belle, toute de blanche pierre, et les rues bien pavées. Elle est appellée Gota. En ceste cité nul n'ose esandre sang humain, ne aussi de quelconque beste pour la révérence d'un ydole qu'on y adoure. En ceste cité demeure l'obassy, c'est à dire leur pape en leur langaige. Il est chief de tous les ydolatres et donne les benefices du pays à sa guise.²

¹ Les voyages en Asie au XIV^e siècle du bienheureux frère Odoric de Pordenone Religieux de Saint-François publiés avec une introduction et des notes par Henri Cordier. Paris 1891, p. 449 et seq.

² In HAKLUYT'S version this passage runs thus: »Ultra veni ad unum regnum vocatum Tibek quod est subjectum Cani, in quo est major copia panis & vini, quam sit, in toto mundo ut credo. Gens illius terræ moratur communiter in tentoriis factis ex feltris nigris: Principalis civitas sua murata est pulcherrime ex lapidibus albissimis, & nigerrimis interescalariter dispositis & curiose compositis, & omnes viæ ejus optime pavatæ. In ista contrata nullus audet effundere sanguinem hominis nec alijus animalis, ob reverentiam unius Idoli. In ista civitate moratur Abassi I, Papa eorum, qui est caput & princeps omnium Idolatrarum; quibus dat & distribuit beneficia secundum morem eorum; sicut noster Papa Romanus est caput omnium Christianorum.» (Vol. IV, p. 401.)