WAS ODORIC OF PORDENONE EVER IN TIBET?

BY

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In January of this year the Hakluyt Society began to re-issue Colonel Sir Henry Yule's memorable work Cathay and the Way Thither, published in 1866. We cannot be grateful enough to Professor H. Cordier for having taken upon himself the difficult task of thoroughly revising and re-editing this learned work, the republication of which meets a long-felt want, the first edition having been exhausted for at least fifteen years. The additional up-to-date information supplied by the wide erudition of Professor Cordier has increased the bulk of the work to such an extent that in its new garb it will comprise four, instead of the former two, volumes. Volume II, containing the description of the journey of Friar Odoric of Pordenone, is the one that has now been issued. In Chapter 45, "Concerning the Realm of Tibet, where dwelleth the Pope of the Idolaters," Professor Cordier has added a note, taken from L. A. Waddell's Lhasa and its Mysteries (p. 425), to this effect: "As to Friar Odoric's alleged visit, as the first European to enter Lhasa, it seems to me very doubtful whether the city he visited in the fourteenth century A. D. could have been this one at all, as his description of the place is so different from Lhasa as we now find it... Now none of the streets of Lhasa are paved, although
plenty of stones are locally available for the purpose, and it seems unlikely that a city which was formerly 'very well paved' should have so entirely given up this practice and left no trace of it."
The weight of this argument is not very cogent, and hardly presents a sufficient basis in favor of the desired proof. Still more categorically P. Landon ¹ has given vent to his feelings in the words, "It seems clear that he never reached Lhasa." This conclusion, however, is not backed up by any evidence; and for the rest, Landon adheres to the general view that "Odoric appears to have visited Tibet about 1328." Whatever the foundation of these contentions may be, on reading Odoric's account of Tibet carefully, it seems to me a fitting time now to raise the broader question, Was Odoric of Pordenone ever in Tibet?

It is with a considerable amount of reluctance and gêne that this challenge is advanced. No lesser geographer than Colonel Sir Henry Yule has indorsed the tradition that Odoric, starting from Peking, turned westward through Tenduc, the Ordos country, and Shen-si, to Tibet, and its capital Lhasa, where "we lose all indication of his further route, and can only conjecture on very slight hints, added to general probabilities, that his homeward journey led him by Kabul, Khorasan, and the south of the Caspian, to Tabriz, and thence to Venice." ² F. v. Richthofen ³ and C. R. Markham ⁴ have shared this opinion, and Friar Odoric has thus acquired the fame of having been the first European traveller to visit Tibet and Lhasa. Mr. Rockhill ⁵ opens a history of the exploration of Tibet in the words: "As far as my knowledge goes, the first European

² Cathay, Vol. II, p. 10; again, on p. 23, "We are ignorant of his route from Tibet westward."
⁴ Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle, p. XLVI.
⁵ Diary of a Journey through Mongolia and Tibet, p. ix.