

Byrne's "MARCO POLO" from 1YA

In the year 1298 a naval battle occurred between the Genoese and the Venetians, in which the latter were defeated. Among the 7000 prisoners taken by the Genoese was a Venetian gentleman named Marco Polo, who had been a great traveller. He had taken part in the first mission to Kubla Khan, and had gone on when the two missionaries had turned back. While this Marco Polo was a prisoner in Genoa, he beguiled his tedium by talking of his travels to a certain writer, who wrote them down. "The travels of Marco Polo" is one of the great books of history.—H. G. Wells in "The Outline of History."

"BEFORE I die, I'll leave you the story of Marco Polo. They've said, 'That's all there is about Marco Polo.' But the scholars are a queer, blind people."

And this is the story that the nonagenarian told Brian Ore as it is recorded in "Messer Marco Polo."

It was nearing night on the first day of spring, and there was a chill about the canals of Old Venice. Young Marco Polo threw down his quill in the counting-house, where he was learning his trade, and wandered out with the discontent of the season on him. There was a lot of shipping in, much of it from the glamorous East, which was at this time attracting the attention of merchants of Venice. They were bringing back many wonderful trophies—silks and satins, jewels, spices and rare curios. The great Mongol Empire was a rich trading place for its wealthy and powerful ruler Kubla Khan, who was both friendly and learned, had extended his dominions almost to Asia Minor. The captains and traders of these adventurous vessels congregated in a certain Venetian wineshop, where they argued and boasted, made friends and killed enemies.

"I'll go in and talk to the strange foreign people," said Marco Polo, for on this night neither the great Venetian lady nor the plump little gown-maker, who was eager for kissing, attracted him. Indoors there was a babel of tongues such as he had never heard before. Men were drinking and dicing, shouting when they won and cursing when they lost. One man was apart. There was no mistaking he was a great man, for he was so restful against the great commotion. You might know from his looks that he was an Eastern man—perhaps from that strange country Japan.

Marco Polo knew him to be a Chinaman, because none of the strange happenings in that place surprised him. He went on calmly smoking his pipe when all others were shouting and gesticulating.

So Marco Polo went over and saluted him politely.

"I wonder if you mind my sitting down by you for a while?" he said. "I perceive you are from China."

The captain smiled—"You guessed right."

And so it came about that young Marco learned of the wonders of the East. "I wonder if you ever met anyone by the name of Polo over there—they are foreigners in the court of the great Khan."

Yes, the captain had heard of them. They were great men; he had never met them. One he knew had a great eye for a horse and for a woman.

"That would be my Uncle Matthew," exclaimed the boy.

"And the other was a trader"—

"That would be my father, Nicholas Polo."

"For God's sake, you are the nephew of one and the son of the other," remarked the captain. "They are fine men and high in the esteem of the Khan."

And so they fell to talking about China and how the captain had last seen the beautiful "Tao Tuen," whom they called 'Golden Bells.' She was the daughter of the great Kubla Khan—a little brown slip of a girl in green coat and trousers, with a flower in her hair. As the captain had slipped past her in his barque she had called out in her tinkling voice and asked him where he was going. The boat stopped, and when the captain said he was going to foreign parts she wished him a safe voyage, saying she would be thinking of him and looking for his return.

"Golden Bells will worry about you. And take this flower for luck," she said to the mariner, giving him a flower from her hair.

Princes had come to woo her, but she didn't want them. "And so she remains in her garden with a great poet and magician to keep her company. She is not the one to refuse love but the right hour has not yet come."

Time went by and Marco Polo still thought of "Golden Bells." But even if he went there, what would she want admiring one such as he when there were princes to choose from. But it would be worth walking the world to see her.

Father and uncle returned in due time, and on their next journey they took him, though his apprenticeship was not yet served.

Only because he agreed to take the Western religion to the court of the great Khan. The mighty empire was still under the doctrines of Confucius, and the teachers from the Pope had not yet penetrated the court at Peking, and Kubla Khan, who had heard of the Western religion, was anxious to know more concerning it, to test if it were more logical than his own. So the young Polo sought audience with the Pope and learned direct from him the doctrine that he was to take to the heathen. He took also the blessing for a safe and profitable trip. Poor little Golden Bells. He wanted to tell her about the Bitter Tree.

And so the three set out on their trip to the East, with their great train of pack-horses and camels.

Moons were born and died. They passed Babel, through Cashmir, through the Tartar lands, and came to the town of Lob and, as a new moon arose, entered the Desert of the Singing Sands.

In terror a third of the caravan fled in one night. Others dropped out or deserted as they neared the heart of the desert. Some lost their reason and went screaming into (Concluded on page 9.)



Mr. J. F. MONTAGUE

On August 12 Mr. J. F. Montague and his Company will broadcast from 1YA the famous play-story, "Marco Polo," adapted for radio production from the late Don Byrne's novel, "Messer Marco Polo." A striking feature of this presentation will be the specially chosen incidental music and the various entr'acte selections.

In marked contrast to "Marco Polo" will be a humorous one-act comedy—"It's Not My Baby"—to be presented by the same Company later in the evening.