John Mandeville’s *Travels* (c.1356)

Mandeville was a fourteenth-century author who supposedly traveled across Europe and the Mediterranean to venture into Arabia, India, and Eastern Asia. However, there is little proof that Mandeville actually existed outside of this account, or that he ever visited the East, given that large portions of his text are directly taken from the travel narrative of Marco Polo, published some half-century earlier. As you read, consider the following: how do Mandeville’s descriptions change over the course of this narrative? What underlying assumptions does he betray? Since this book was widely read (and imitated) in other late medieval and early modern travel accounts, what can you say about European attitudes toward non-European cultures? What is the importance of fantastical description to this narrative—i.e., what is the purpose of the dog-headed people?

CHAPTER IV

[Of the Way from Constantinople to Jerusalem.] Of Saint John the Evangelist. And of the Hippocrates’ Daughter, transformed from a Woman to a Dragon

NOW return I again, for to teach you the way from Constantinople to Jerusalem. He that will through Turkey, he goes toward the city of Nike, and passes through the gate of Chienetout, and always men see before them the hill of Chienetout, that is right high; and it is a mile and an half from Nike.

And whoso will go by water, by the brace of St. George, and by the sea where St. Nicholas lies, and toward many other places - first men go to an isle that is called Sylo. In that isle grows mastic on small trees, and out of them comes gum as it were of plum-trees or of cherry-trees.

And after go men through the isle of Patmos; and there wrote St. John the Evangelist the Apocalypse. And ye shall understand, that St. John was of age thirty-two year, when our Lord suffered his passion; and after his passion, he lived sixty-seven year, and in the hundredth year of his age he died.

From Patmos men go unto Ephesus, a fair city and nigh to the sea. And there died St. John, and was buried behind the high altar in a tomb. And there is a fair church; for Christian men were wont to hold that place always. And in the tomb of St. John is nought but manna, that is called angels’ meat; for his body was translated into Paradise. And Turks hold now all that place, and the city and the church; and all Asia the less is called Turkey. And ye shall understand, that St. John let make his grave there in his life, and laid himself therein all quick; and therefore some men say, that he died not, but that he rests there till the Day of Judgment. And, forsooth, there is a great marvel; for men may see there the earth of the tomb many times stir and move, as there were quick things under.

And then pass men through the isles of Colcos and of Lango, of the which isles Hippocrates was lord of. And some men say, that in the isle of Lango is yet the daughter of Hippocrates, in form and likeness of a great dragon, that is a hundred fathom of length, as men say, for I have not seen her.
And they of the isles call her Lady of the Land. And she lies in an old castle, in a cave, and shows twice or thrice in the year, and she doth no harm to no man, but if men do her harm. And she was thus changed and transformed, from a fair damsel, into likeness of a dragon, by a goddess that was called Diana. And men say, that she shall so endure in that form of a dragon, unto [the] time that a knight come, that is so hardy, that dare come to her and kiss her on the mouth; and then shall she turn again to her own kind, and be a woman again, but after that she shall not live long.

And it is not long since that a knight of Rhodes, that was hardy and doughty in arms, said that he would kiss her. And when he was upon his courser, and went to the castle, and entered into the cave, the dragon lift up her head against him. And when the knight saw her in that form so hideous and so horrible he fled away. And the dragon bore the knight upon a rock, despite his struggles; and from that rock, she cast him into the sea. And so was lost both horse and man.

And also a young man, that knew not of the dragon, went out of a ship, and went through the isle till that he came to the castle, and came into the cave, and went so long, till that he found a chamber; and there he saw a damsel that combed her head and looked in a mirror; and she had much treasure about her. And he believed that she had been a common woman, that dwelled there to receive men to folly. And he abode, till the damsel saw the shadow of him in the mirror. And she turned her toward him, and asked him what he would? And he said, he would be her leman or paramour. And she asked him, if that he were a knight? And he said, nay. And then she said, that he might not be her leman; but she bade him go again unto his fellows, and make him knight, and come again upon the morrow, and she should come out of the cave before him, and then come and kiss her on the mouth and have no dread, - for I shall do thee no manner of harm, albeit that thou see me in likeness of a dragon; for though thou see me hideous and horrible to look on, I do thee to wit that it is made by enchantment; for without doubt, I am none other than thou see now, a woman, and therefore dread thee nought. And if thou kiss me, thou shalt have all this treasure, and be my lord, and lord also of all the isle.

And he departed from her and went to his fellows to ship, and let make him knight and came again upon the morrow for to kiss this damsel. And when he saw her come out of the cave in form of a dragon, so hideous and so horrible, he had so great dread, that he fled again to the ship, and she followed him. And when she saw that he turned not again, she began to cry, as a thing that had much sorrow; and then she turned again into her cave. And anon the knight died. And since hitherward might no knight see her, but that he died anon. But when a knight cometh, that is so hardy to kiss her, he shall not die; but he shall turn the damsel into her right form and kindly shape, and he shall be lord of all the countries and isles abovesaid.

And from thence men come to the isle of Rhodes, the which isle Hospitallers hold and govern; and that took they some-time from the emperor. And it was wont to be called Collos; and so call it the Turks yet. And Saint Paul in his epistle writes to them of that isle AD COLOSSE SENSES. This isle is nigh eight hundred mile long from Constantinople.

CHAPTER VII

OF THE COUNTRY OF EGYPT; OF THE BIRD PHOENIX OF ARABIA; OF THE CITY OF CAIRO; OF THE CUNNING TO KNOW BALM AND TO PROVE IT; AND OF THE GARNERS OF JOSEPH
EGYPT is a long country, but it is straight, that is to say narrow, for they may not enlarge it toward the desert for default of water. And the country is set along upon the river of Nile, by as much as that river may serve by floods or otherwise, that when it floweth it may spread abroad through the country; so is the country large of length. For there it raineth not but little in that country, and for that cause they have no water, but if it be of that flood of that river. And forasmuch as it raineth not in that country, but the air is alway pure and clear, therefore in that country be the good astronomers, for they find there no clouds to letten them. Also the city of Cairo is right great and more huge than that of Babylon the less, and it sitteth above toward the desert of Syria, a little above the river above-said.

At the deserts of Egypt was a worthy man, that was an holy hermit, and there met with him a monster (that is to say, a monster is a thing deformed against kind both of man or of beast or of anything else, and that is called a monster). And this monster, that met with this holy hermit, was as it had been a man, that had two horns trenchant on his forehead; and he had a body like a man unto the navel, and beneath he had the body like a goat. And the hermit asked him what he was. And the monster answered him, and said he was a deadly creature, such as God had formed, and dwelt in those deserts in purchasing his sustenance. And [he] besought the hermit, that he would pray God for him, the which that came from heaven for to save all mankind, and was born of a maiden and suffered passion and death (as we well know) and by whom we live and be. And yet is the head with the two horns of that monster at Alexandria for a marvel.

In Egypt is the city of Heliopolis, that is to say, the city of the Sun. In that city there is a temple, made round after the shape of the Temple of Jerusalem. The priests of that temple have all their writings, under the date of the fowl that is called phoenix; and there is none but one in all the world. And he cometh to burn himself upon the altar of that temple at the end of five hundred year; for so long he liveth. And at the five hundred years' end, the priests array their altar honestly, and put thereupon spices and sulphur vif and other things that will burn lightly; and then the bird phoenix comes and burns himself to ashes. And the first day next after, men find in the ashes a worm; and the second day next after, men find a bird quick and perfect; and the third day next after, he flies his way. And so there is no more birds of that kind in all the world, but it alone, and truly that is a great miracle of God. And men may well liken that bird unto God, because that there ne is no God but one; and also, that our Lord arose from death to life the third day. This bird men see often—time fly in those countries; and he is not mickle more than an eagle. And he hath a crest of feathers upon his head more great than the peacock hath; and is neck his yellow after colour of an oriel that is a stone well shining, and his beak is coloured blue as ind; and his wings be of purple colour, and his tail is barred overthwart with green and yellow and red. And he is a full fair bird to look upon, against the sun, for he shines full gloriously and nobly.

Also in Egypt be gardens, that have trees and herbs, the which bear fruits seven times in the year. And in that land men find many fair emeralds and enough; and therefore they be greater cheap. Also when it raines once in the summer in the land of Egypt, then is all the country full of great mires. Also at Cairo, that I spake of before, sell men commonly both men and women of other laws as we do here beasts in the market. And there is a common house in that city that is all full of small furnaces, and thither bring women of the town their eyren of hens, of geese, and or ducks for to be put into those furnaces. And they that keep that house cover them with heat of horse dung, without hen, goose or duck or any other fowl. And at the end of three weeks or of a month they come again
and take their chickens and flourish them and bring them forth, so that all the country is full of them. And so men do there both winter and summer.

Also beside Cairo, without that city, is the field where balm growes; and it comes out on small trees, that be none higher than to a man’s breeks' girdle, and they seem as wood that is of the wild vine. And in that field be seven wells, that our Lord Jesu Christ made with one of his feet, when he went to play with other children. That field is not so well closed, but that men may enter at their own list; but in that season that the balm is growing, men put thereto good keeping, that no man dare be hardy to enter.

This balm groweth in no place, but only there. And though that men bring of the plants, for to plant in other countries, they grow well and fair; but they bring forth no fructuous thing, and the leaves of balm fall not. And men cut the branches with a sharp flintstone, or with a sharp bone, when men will go to cut them; for whoso cut them with iron, it would destroy his virtue and his nature.

And wit ye well, that a man ought to take good keep for to buy balm, but if he con know it right well, for he may right lightly be deceived. For men sell a gum, that men call turpentine, instead of balm, and they put thereto a little balm for to give good odour. And some put wax in oil of the wood of the fruit of balm, and say that it is balm. And some distil cloves of gilofre and of spikenard of Spain and of other spices, that be well smelling; and the liquor that goeth out thereof they call it balm, and they think that they have balm, and they have none. For the Saracens counterfeit it by subtlety of craft for to deceive the Christian men, as I have seen full many a time; and after them the merchants and the apothecaries counterfeit it, and then it is less worth, and a great deal worse.

CHAPTER XV

OF THE CUSTOMS OF SARACENS, AND OF THEIR LAW. AND HOW THE SOLDAN REASONED ME, AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK; AND OF THE BEGINNING OF MOHAMMET

NOW, because that I have spoken of Saracens and of their country - now, if ye will know a part of their law and of their belief, I shall tell you after that their book that is called KORAN telleth. And some men call that book MESHAF. And some men call it HARME, after the diverse languages of the country. The which book Mohammet took them. In the which book, among other things, is written, as I have often-time seen and read, that the good shall go to paradise, and the evil to hell; and that believe all Saracens. And if a man ask them what paradise they mean, they say, to paradise that is a place of delights where men shall find all manner of fruits in all sea-sons, and rivers running of milk and honey, and of wine and of sweet water; and that they shall have fair houses and noble, every man after his desert, made of precious stones and of gold and of silver; and that every man shall have four score wives all maidens, and he shall have ado every day with them, and yet he shall find them always maidens.

Also they believe and speak gladly of the Virgin Mary and of the Incarnation. And they say that Mary was taught of the angel; and that Gabriel said to her, that she was for-chosen from the beginning of the world and that he shewed to her the Incarnation of Jesu Christ and that she conceived and bare child maiden; and that witnesseth their book.
And they say also, that Jesu Christ spake as soon as he was born; and that he was an holy prophet and a true in word and deed, and meek and piteous and rightful and without any vice.

And they say also, that when the angel shewed the Incarnation of Christ unto Mary, she was young and had great dread. For there was then an enchanter in the country that dealt with witchcraft, that men called Taknia, that by his enchantments could make him in likeness of an angel, and went often-times and lay with maidens. And therefore Mary dreaded lest it had been Taknia, that came for to deceive the maidens. And therefore she conjured the angel, that he should tell her if it were he or no. And the angel answered and said that she should have no dread of him, for he was very messenger of Jesu Christ. Also their book saith, that when that she had childed under a palm tree she had great shame, that she had a child; and she greet and said that she would that she had been dead. And anon the child spake to her and comforted her, and said, "Mother, ne dismay thee nought, for God hath hid in thee his privities for the salvation of the world." And in other many places saith their KORAN, that Jesu Christ spake as soon as he was born. And that book saith also that Jesu was sent from God Almighty for to be mirror and example and token to all men.

And the KORAN saith also of the day of doom how God shall come to doom all manner of folk. And the good he shall draw on his side and put them into bliss, and the wicked he shall condemn to the pains of hell. And among all prophets Jesu was the most excellent and the most worthy next God, and that he made the gospels in the which is good doctrine and healthful, full of clarity and soothfastness and true preaching to them that believe in God. And that he was a very prophet and more than a prophet, and lived without sin, and gave sight to the blind, and healed the lepers, and raised dead men, and styed to heaven.

They fast an whole month in the year and eat nought but by night. And they keep them from their wives all that month. But the sick men be not constrained to that fast.

And also they say, that they know well by the prophecies that the law of Mahomet shall fail, as the law of the Jews did; and that the law of Christian people shall last to the day of doom. And if any man ask them what is their belief, they answer thus, and in this form: "We believe God, former of heaven and of earth, and of all other things that he made. And without him is nothing made. And we believe of the day of doom, and that every man shall have his merit, after he hath deserved. And, we believe it for sooth, all that God hath said by the mouths of his prophets."

Also Mahomet commanded in his KORAN, that every man should have two wives, or three or four; but now they take unto nine, and of lemans as many as he may sustain. And if any of their wives mis- bear them against their husband, he may cast her out of his house, and depart from her and take another; but he shall depart with her his goods.

Also, when men speak to them of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, they say, that they be three persons, but not one God; for their KORAN speaketh not of the Trinity. But they say well, that God hath speech, and else were he dumb. And God hath also a spirit they know well, for else they say, he were not alive. And when men speak to them of the Incarnation how that by the word of the angel God sent his wisdom in to earth and enombred him in the Virgin Mary, and by the word of God shall the dead be raised at the day of doom, they say, that it is sooth and that the word of God hath great strength. And they say that whoso knew not the word of God he should
not know God. And they say also that Jesu Christ is the word of God: and so saith their KORAN, where it saith that the angel spake to Mary and said: "Mary, God shall preach thee the gospel by the

And ye shall understand, that Mahomet was born in Arabia, that was first a poor knave that kept camels, that went with merchants for merchandise. And so befell, that he went with the merchants into Egypt; and they were then Christian in those parts. And at the deserts of Arabia, he went into a chapel where a hermit dwelt. And when he entered into the chapel that was but a little and a low thing and had but a little door and a low, then the entry began to wax so great, and so large and so high as though it had been of a great minster or the gate of a palace. And this was the first miracle, the Saracens say, that Mahomet did in his youth.

And also Mahomet loved well a good hermit that dwelled in the deserts a mile from Mount Sinai, in the way that men go from Arabia toward Chaldea and toward Ind, one day's journey from the sea, where the merchants of Venice come often for merchandise. And so often went Mahomet to this hermit, that all his men were wroth; for he would gladly hear this hermit preach and make his men wake all night. And therefore his men thought to put the hermit to death. And so it befell upon a night, that Mahomet was drunken of good wine, and he fell on sleep. And his men took Mahomet's sword out of his sheath, whiles he slept, and therewith they slew this hermit, and put his sword all bloody in his sheath again. And at morrow, when he found the hermit dead, he was full sorry and wroth, and would have done his men to death. But they all, with one accord, said that he himself had slain him, when he was drunken, and shewed him his sword all bloody. And he trowed that they had said sooth. And then he cursed the wine and all those that drink it. And therefore Saracens that be devout drink never no wine. But some drink it privily; for if they drunk it openly, they should be reproved. But they drink good beverage and sweet and nourishing that is made of gallamelle and that is that men make sugar of; that is of right good savour, and it is good for the breast.

CHAPTER XXI


BESIDE that isle that I have spoken of, there is another isle that is called Sumobor. That is a great isle, and the king thereof is right mighty. The folk of that isle make them always to be marked in the visage with an hot iron, both men and women, for great noblesse, for to be known from other folk; for they hold themselves most noble and most worthy of all the world. And they have war always with the folk that go all naked.

But fast beside that isle, for to pass by sea, is a great isle and a great country that men call Java. And it is nigh two thousand mile in circuit. And the king of that country is a full great lord and a rich and a mighty, and hath under him seven other kings of seven other isles about him. This isle is full well inhabited, and full well manned. There grow all manner of spicery, more plenteously than in any other country, as of ginger, cloves- golofre, canell, seedwall, nutmegs and maces. And wit well, that the nutmeg beareth the maces; for right as the nut of the hazel hath an husk without, that the nut is closed in till it be ripe and that after falleth out, right so it is of the nutmeg and of the maces. Many other spices and many other goods grow in that isle. For of all things is there plenty, save only of wine. But there is gold and silver, great plenty.
And the king of that country hath a palace full noble and full marvellous, and more rich than any in the world. For all the degrees to go up into halls and chambers be, one of gold, another of silver. And also, the pavements of halls and chambers be all square, of gold one, and another of silver. All the walls within be covered with gold and silver in fine plates, and in those plates be stories and battles of knights enleved, and the crowns and the circles about their heads be made of precious stones and rich pearls and great. And the halls and the chambers of the palace be all covered within with gold and silver, so that no man would trow the riches of that palace but he had seen it. And wit well, that the king of that isle is so mighty, that he hath many times overcome the great Chan of Cathay in battle, that is the most great emperor that is under the firmament either beyond the sea or on this half. For they have had often-time war between them, because that the great Chan would constrain him to hold his land of him; but that other at all times defendeth him well against him.

After that isle, in going by sea, men find another isle, good and great, that men call Pathen, that is a great kingdom full of fair cities and full of towns. In that land grow trees that bear meal, whereof men make good bread and white and of good savour; and it seemeth as it were of wheat, but it is not allinges of such savour. And there be other trees that bear honey good and sweet, and other trees that bear venom, against which there is no medicine but [one]; and that is to take their proper leaves and stamp them and temper them with water and then drink it, and else he shall die; for triacle will not avail, ne none other medicine. Of this venom the Jews had let seek of one of their friends for to empoison all Christianity, as I have heard them say in their confession before their dying: but thanked be Almighty God! they failed of their purpose; but always they make great mortality of people. And other trees there be also that bear wine of noble sentiment. And if you like to hear how the meal cometh out of the trees I shall say you. Men hew the trees with an hatchet, all about the foot of the tree, till that the bark be parted in many parts, and then cometh out thereof a thick liquor, the which they receive in vessels, and dry it at the heat of the sun; and then they have it to a mill to grind and it becometh fair meal and white. And the honey and the wine and the venom be drawn out of other trees in the same manner, and put in vessels for to keep.

In that isle is a dead sea, that is a lake that hath no ground; and if anything fall into that lake it shall never come up again. In that lake grow reeds, that be canes, that they call Thaby, that be thirty fathoms long; and of these canes men make fair houses. And there be other canes that be not so long, that grow near the land and have so long roots that endure well a four quarters of a furlong or more; and at the knots of those roots men find precious stones that have great virtues. And he that bærith any of them upon him, iron ne steel may not hurt him, ne draw no blood upon him; and therefore, they that have those stones upon them fight full hardily both on sea and land, for men may not harm [them] on no part. And therefore, they that know the manner, and shall fight with them, they shoot to them arrows and quarrels without iron or steel, and so they hurt them and slay them. And also of those canes they make houses and ships and other things, as we have here, making houses and ships of oak or of any other trees. And deem no man that I say it but for a trifle, for I have seen of the canes with mine own eyes, full many times, lying upon the river of that lake, of the which twenty of our fellows ne might not lift up ne bear one to the earth.

After this isle men go by sea to another isle that is called Calonak. And it is a fair land and a plenteous of goods. And the king of that country hath as many wives as he will. For he maketh search all the country to get him the fairest maidens that may be found, and maketh them to be brought before him. And he taketh one one night, and another another night, and so forth continually suing; so that he hath a thousand wives or more. And he lieth never but one night with
one of them, and another night with another; but if that one happen to be more lusty to his pleasance than another. And therefore the king getteth full many children, some-time an hundred, some-time a two-hundred, and some-time more. And he hath also into a 14,000 elephants or more that he maketh for to be brought up amongst his villains by all his towns. For in case that he had any war against any other king about him, then [he] maketh certain men of arms for to go up into the castles of tree made for the war, that craftily be set upon the elephants' backs, for to fight against their enemies. And do other kings there-about. For the manner of war is not there as it is here or in other countries, ne the ordinance of war neither. And men call the elephants WARKES.

There be also in that country a kind of snails that be so great, that many persons may lodge them in their shells, as men would do in a little house. And other snails there be that be full great but not so huge as the other. And of these snails, and of great white worms that have black heads that be as great as a man's thigh, and some less as great worms that men find there in woods, men make viand royal for the king and for other great lords. And if a man that is married die in that country, men bury his wife with him all quick; for men say there, that it is reason that she make him company in that other world as she did in this.

From that country men go by the sea ocean by an isle that is called Caffolos. Men of that country when their friends be sick they hang them upon trees, and say that it is better that birds, that be angels of God, eat them, than the foul worms of the earth.

From that isle men go to another isle, where the folk be of full cursed kind. For they nourish great dogs and teach them to strangle their friends when they be sick. For they will not that they die of kindly death. For they say, that they should suffer too great pain if they abide to die by themselves, as nature would. And, when they be thus enstrangled, they eat their flesh instead of venison.

Afterward men go by many isles by sea unto an isle that men call Milke. And there is a full cursed people. For they delight in nothing more than for to fight and to slay men. And they drink gladliest man's blood, the which they call Dieu. And the more men that a man may slay, the more worship he hath amongst them. And if two persons be at debate and, peradventure, be accorded by their friends or by some of their alliance, it behoveth that every of them that shall be accorded drink of other's blood: and else the accord ne the alliance is nought worth: ne it shall not be no reproof to him to break the alliance and the accord, but if every of them drink of others' blood.

And from that isle men go by sea, from isle to isle, unto an isle that is called Tracoda, where the folk of that country be as beasts, and unreasonable, and dwell in caves that they make in the earth; for they have no wit to make them houses. And when they see any man passing through their countries they hide them in their caves. And they eat flesh of serpents, and they eat but little. And they speak nought, but they hiss as serpents do. And they set no price by no avoir ne riches, but only of a precious stone, that is amongst them, that is of sixty colours. And for the name of the isle, they call it Tracodon. And they love more that stone than anything else; and yet they know not the virtue thereof, but they covet it and love it only for the beauty.

After that isle men go by the sea ocean, by many isles, unto an isle that is called Nacumera, that is a great isle and good and fair. And it is in compass about, more than a thousand mile. And all the men and women of that isle have hounds' heads, and they be called Cynocephales. And they be full reasonable and of good understanding, save that they worship an ox for their God. And also every
one of them beareth an ox of gold or of silver in his forehead, in token that they love well their God. And they go all naked save a little clout, that they cover with their knees and their members. They be great folk and well-fighting. And they have a great targe that covereth all the body, and a spear in their hand to fight with. And if they take any man in battle, anon they eat him.

From this land men go to another isle that is called Silha. And it is well a 800 miles about. In that land is full much waste, for it is full of serpents, of dragons and of cockodrills, that no man dare dwell there. These cockodrills be serpents, yellow and rayed above, and have four feet and short thighs, and great nails as claws or talons. And there be some that have five fathoms in length, and some of six and of eight and of ten. And when they go by places that be gravelly, it seemeth as though men had drawn a great tree through the gravelly place. And there be also many wild beasts, and namely of elephants.

In that isle is a great mountain. And in mid place of the mount is a great lake in a full fair plain; and there is great plenty of water. And they of the country say, that Adam and Eve wept upon that mount an hundred year, when they were driven out of Paradise, and that water, they say, is of their tears; for so much water they wept, that made the foresaid lake. And in the bottom of that lake men find many precious stones and great pearls. In that lake grow many reeds and great canes; and there within be many cocodrills and serpents and great water-leeches. And the king of that country, once every year, giveth leave to poor men to go into the lake to gather them precious stones and pearls, by way of alms, for the love of God that made Adam. And all the year men find enough. And for the vermin that is within, they anoint their arms and their thighs and legs with an ointment made of a thing that is called lemons, that is a manner of fruit like small peas; and then have they no dread of no cockodrills, ne of none other venomous vermin. This water runneth, flowing and ebbing, by a side of the mountain, and in that river men find precious stones and pearls, great plenty. And men of that isle say commonly, that the serpents and the wild beasts of that country will not do no harm ne touch with evil no strange man that entereth into that country, but only to men that be born of the same country.

In that country and others thereabout there be wild geese that have two heads. And there be lions, all white and as great as oxen, and many other diverse beasts and fowls also that be not seen amongst us.

CHAPTER XXX

OF THE ROYAL ESTATE OF PRESTER JOHN, EMPEROR OF INDIA. AND OF A RICH MAN THAT MADE A MARVELLOUS CASTLE AND CALLED IT PARADISE; AND OF HIS SUBTLETY

This emperor, Prester John, holds full great land, and hath many full noble cities and good towns in his realm, and many great diverse isles and large. For all the country of Ind is devised in isles for the great floods that come from Paradise, that depart all the land in many parts. And also in the sea he hath full many isles. And the best city in the Isle of Pentexoire is Nyse, that is a full royal city and a noble, and full rich.

This Prester John hath under him many kings and many isles and many diverse folk of diverse conditions. And this land is full good and rich, but not so rich as is the land of the great Khan. For
the merchants come not thither so commonly for to buy merchandises, as they do in the land of the great Khan, for it is too far to travel to. And on that other part, in the Isle of Cathay, men find all manner thing that is need to man - cloths of gold, of silk, of spicery and all manner avoidupois. And therefore, albeit that men have greater cheap in the Isle of Prester John, natheles, men dread the long way and the great perils in the sea in those parts.

For in many places of the sea be great rocks of stones of the adamant, that of his proper nature draweth iron to him. And therefore there pass no ships that have either bonds or nails of iron within them. And if there do, anon the rocks of the adamant draw them to them, that never they may go thence. I myself have seen afar in that sea, as though it had been a great isle full of tree, and buscaylle, full of thorns and briars, great plenty. And the shipmen told us, that all that was of ships that were drawn thither by the adamant, for the iron that was in them. And of the rotten-ness, and other thing that was within the ships, grew such buscaylle, and thorns and briars and green grass, and such manner of thing; and of the masts and the sail-yards; it seemed a great wood or a grove. And such rocks be in many places thereabout. And therefore dare not the merchants pass there, but if they know well the passages, or else that they have good lodesmen.

And also they dread the long way. And therefore they go to Cathay, for it is more nigh. And yet it is not so nigh, but that men must be travelling by sea and land, eleven months or twelve, from Genoa or from Venice, or he come to Cathay. And yet is the land of Prester John more far by many dreadful journeys.

And the merchants pass by the kingdom of Persia, and go to a city that is Called Hermes, for Hermes the philosopher founded it. And after that they pass an arm of the sea, and then they go to another city that is called Golbache. And there they find merchandises, and of popinjays, as great plenty as men find here of geese. And if they will pass further, they may go sikerly enough. In that country is but little wheat or barley, and therefore they eat rice and honey and milk and cheese and fruit.

This Emperor Prester John taketh always to his wife the daughter of the great Khan; and the great Khan also, in the same wise, the daughter of Prester John. For these two be the greatest lords under the firmament.

In the land of Prester John be many diverse things and many precious stones, so great and so large, that men make of them vessels, as platters, dishes and cups. And many other marvels be there, that it were too cumbrous and too long to put it in scripture of books; but of the principal isles and of his estate and of his law, I shall tell you some part.

This Emperor Prester John is Christian, and a great part of his country also. But yet, they have not all the articles of our faith as we have. They believe well in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Ghost. And they be full devout and right true one to another. And they set not by no barretts, ne by cautels, nor of no deceits.

For in his country is the sea that men call the Gravelly Sea, that is all gravel and sand, without any drop of water, and it ebbeth and floweth in great waves as other seas do, and it is never still ne in peace, in no manner season. And no man may pass that sea by navy, ne by no manner of craft, and therefore may no man know what land is beyond that sea. And albeit that it have no water, yet men
find therein and on the banks full good fish of other manner of kind and shape, than men find in any other sea, and they be of right good taste and delicious to man's meat.

And a three journeys long from that sea be great mountains, out of the which goeth out a great flood that cometh out of Paradise. And it is full of precious stones, without any drop of water, and it runneth through the desert on that one side, so that it maketh the sea gravelly; and it beareth into that sea, and there it endeth. And that flome runneth, also, three days in the week and bringeth with him great stones and the rocks also therewith, and that great plenty. And anon, as they be entered into the Gravelly Sea, they be seen no more, but lost for evermore. And in those three days that that river runneth, no man dare enter into it; but in the other days men dare enter well enough.

In that desert be many wild men, that be hideous to look on; for they be horned, and they speak nought, but they grunt, as pigs. And there is also great plenty of wild hounds. And there be many popinjays, that they call psittakes their language. And they speak of their proper nature, and salute men that go through the deserts, and speak to them as aperly as though it were a man. And they that speak well have a large tongue, and have five toes upon a foot. And there be also of another manner, that have but three toes upon a foot, and they speak not, or but little, for they cannot but cry.

Beside the isle of Pentexoire, that is the land of Prester John, is a eat isle, long and broad, that men call Mistorak; and it is in the lordship of Prester John. In that isle is great plenty of goods.

There was dwelling, sometime, a rich man; and it is not long since; and men called him Gatholonabes. And he was full of cautels and of subtle deceits. And he had a full fair castle and a strong in a mountain, so strong and so noble, that no man could devise a fairer ne stronger. And he had let mure all the mountain about with a strong wall and a fair. And within those walls he had the fairest garden that any man might behold. And therein were trees bearing all manner of fruits, that any man could devise. And therein were also all manner virtuous herbs of good smell, and all other herbs also that bear fair flowers. And he had also in that garden many fair wells; and beside those wells he had let make fair halls and fair chambers, depainted all with gold and azure; and there were in that place many diverse things, and many diverse stories: and of beasts, and of birds that sung full delectably and moved by craft, that it seemed that they were quick. And he had also in his garden all manner of fowls and of beasts that any man might think on, for to have play or sport to behold them.

And he had also, in that place, the fairest damsels that might be found, under the age of fifteen years, and the fairest young striplings that men might get, of that same age. And all they were clothed in cloths of gold, full richly. And he said that those were angels.

And he had also let make three wells, fair and noble and all environed with stone of jasper, of crystal, diapered with gold, and set with precious stones and great orient pearls. And he had made a conduit under earth, so that the three wells, at his list, one should run milk, another wine and another honey. And that place he called Paradise.

And when that any good knight, that was hardy and noble, came to see this royalty, he would lead him into his paradise, and show him these wonderful things to his disport, and the marvellous and delicious song of diverse birds, and the fair damsels, and the fair wells of milk, of wine and of honey,
plenteously running. And he would let make divers instruments of music to sound in an high tower, so merrily, that it was joy for to hear; and no man should see the craft thereof. And those, he said, were angels of God, and that place was Paradise, that God had behight to his friends, saying, “I shall give to you a land flowing with milk and honey.” And then would he make them to drink of certain drink, whereof anon they should be drunk. And then would them think greater delight than they had before. And then would he say to them, that if they would die for him and for his love, that after their death they should come to his paradise; and they should be of the age of those damsels, and they should play with them, and yet be maidens. And after that yet should he put them in a fairer paradise, where that they should see God of nature visibly, in his majesty and in his bliss. And then would he show them his intent, and say them, that if they would go slay such a lord, or such a man that was his enemy or contrarious to his list, that they should not dread to do it and for to be slain therefore themselves. For after their death, he would put them into another paradise, that was an hundred-fold fairer than any of the other; and there should they dwell with the most fairest damsels that might be, and play with them ever-more.

And thus went many diverse lusty bachelors for to slay great lords in diverse countries, that were his enemies, and made themselves to be slain, in hope to have that paradise. And thus, often-time, he was revenged of his enemies by his subtle deceits and false cautels.

And when the worthy men of the country had perceived this subtle falsehood of this Gatholonabes, they assembled them with force, and assailed his castle, and slew him, and destroyed all the fair places and all the nobilities of that paradise. The place of the wells and of the walls and of many other things be yet apertly seen, but the riches is voided clean. And it is not long gone, since that place was destroyed.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF THE DEVIL’S HEAD IN THE VALLEY PERILOUS. AND OF THE CUSTOMS OF FOLK IN DIVERSE ISLES THAT BE ABOUT IN THE LORDSHIP OF PRESTER JOHN

BESIDE that Isle of Mistorak upon the left side nigh to the river of Pison is a marvellous thing. There is a vale between the mountains, that dureth nigh a four mile. And some men call it the Vale Enchanted, some call it the Vale of Devils, and some call it the Vale Perilous. In that vale hear men often-time great tempests and thunders, and great murmurs and noises, all days and nights, and great noise, as it were sound of tabors and of nakers and of trumps, as though it were of a great feast. This vale is all full of devils, and hath been always. And men say there, that it is one of the entries of hell. In that vale is great plenty of gold and silver. Wherefore many misbelieving men, and many Christian men also, go in oftentime for to have of the treasure that there is; but few come again, and namely of the misbelieving men, ne of the Christian men neither, for anon they be strangled of devils.

And in mid place of that vale, under a rock, is an head and the visage of a devil bodily, full horrible and dreadful to see, and it sheweth not but the head, to the shoulders. But there is no man in the world so hardly, Christian man ne other, but that he would be adread to behold it, and that it would seem him to die for dread, so is it hideous for to behold. For he beholdeth every man so sharply with dreadful eyen, that be evermore moving and sparkling as fire, and changeth and stirreth so often in diverse manner, with so horrible countenance, that no man dare not neighen towards him.
And from him cometh out smoke and stinking fire and so much abomination, that unnethe no man may there endure.

But the good Christian men, that be stable in the faith, enter well without peril. For they will first shrive them and mark them with the token of the holy cross, so that the fiends ne have no power over them. But albeit that they be without peril, yet, natheles, ne be they not without dread, when that they see the devils visibly and bodily all about them, that make full many diverse assaults and menaces, in air and in earth, and aghast them with strokes of thunder-blasts and of tempests. And the most dread is, that God will take vengeance then of that that men have misdone against his will.

And thus we passed that perilous vale, and found therein gold and silver, and precious stones and rich jewels, great plenty, both here and there, as us seemed. But whether that it was, as us seemed, I wot never. For I touched none, because that the devils be so subtle to make a thing to seem otherwise than it is, for to deceive mankind. And therefore I touched none, and also because that I would not be put out of my devotion; for I was more devout then, than ever I was before or after, and all for the dread of fiends that I saw in diverse figures, and also for the great multitude of dead bodies, that I saw there lying by the way, by all the vale, as though there had been a battle between two kings, and the mightiest of the country, and that the greater part had been discomfited and slain. And I trow, that unnethe should any country have so much people within him, as lay slain in that vale as us thought, the which was an hideous sight to see. And I marvelled much, that there were so many, and the bodies all whole without rotting. But that might not be to mine advice that so many should have entered so newly, ne so many newly slain, with out stinking and rotting. And many of them were in habit of Christian men, but I trow well, that it were of such that went in for covetise of the treasure that was there, and had overmuch feebleness in the faith; so that their hearts ne might not endure in the belief for dread. And therefore were we the more devout a great deal. And yet we were cast down, and beaten down many times to the hard earth by winds and thunders and tempests. But evermore God of his grace holp us. And so we passed that perilous vale without peril and without encumbrance, thanked be Almighty God.

After this, beyond the vale, is a great isle, where the folk be great giants of twenty-eight foot long, or of thirty foot long. And they have no clothing but of skins of beasts that they hang upon them. And they eat no bread, but all raw flesh; and they drink milk of beasts, for they have plenty of all bestial. And they have no houses to lie in. And they eat more gladly man’s flesh than any other flesh. Into that isle dare no man gladly enter. And if they see a ship and men therein, anon they enter into the sea for to take them.

And men said us, that in an isle beyond that were giants of greater stature, some of forty-five foot, or of fifty foot long, and, as some men say, some of fifty cubits long. But I saw none of those, for I had no lust to go to those parts, because that no man cometh neither into that isle ne into the other, but if he be devoured anon. And among those giants be sheep as great as oxen here, and they bear great wool and rough. Of the sheep I have seen many times. And men have seen, many times, those giants take men in the sea out of their ships, and brought them to land, two in one hand and two in another, eating them going, all raw and all quick.
Another isle is there toward the north, in the sea Ocean, where that be full cruel and full evil women of nature. And they have precious stones in their eyen. And they be of that kind, that if they behold any man with wrath, they slay him anon with the beholding, as doth the basilisk.

Another isle is there, full fair and good and great, and full of people, where the custom is such, that the first night that they be married, they make another man to lie by their wives for to have their maidenhead: and therefore they take great hire and great thank. And there be certain men in every town that serve of none other thing; and they call them cadeberiz, that is to say, the fools of wanhope. For they of the country hold it so great a thing and so perilous for to have the maidenhead of a woman, that them seemeth that they that have first the maidenhead putteth him in adventure of his life. And if the husband find his wife maiden that other next night after that she should have been lain by of the man that is assigned therefore, peradventure for drunkenness or for some other cause, the husband shall plain upon him that he hath not done his devoir, in such cruel wise as though the officers would have slain him. But after the first night that they be lain by, they keep them so straitly that they be not so hardy to speak with no man. And I asked them the cause why that they held such custom: and they said me, that of old time men had been dead for deflowering of maidens, that had serpents in their bodies that stung men upon their yards, that they died anon: and therefore they held that customs to make other men ordained therefore to lie by their wives, for dread of death, and to assay the passage by another [rather] than for to put them in that adventure.

After that is another isle where that women make great sorrow when their children be born. And when they die, they make great feast and great joy and revel, and then they cast them into a great fire burning. And those that love well their husbands, if their husbands be dead, they cast them also in the fire with their children, and burn them. And they say that the fire shall cleanse them of all filths and of all vices, and they shall go pured and clean into another world to their husbands, and they shall lead their children with them. And the cause why that they weep, when their children be born is this; for when they come into this world, they come to labour, sorrow and heaviness. And why they make joy and gladness at their dying is because that, as they say, then they go to Paradise where the rivers run milk and honey, where that men see them in joy and in abundance of goods, without sorrow and labour.

In that isle men make their king evermore by election, and they ne choose him not for no noblesse nor for no riches, but such one as is of good manners and of good conditions, and therewithal rightfull, and also that he be of great age, and that he have no children. In that isle men be full rightfull and they do rightfull judgments in every cause both of rich and poor, small and great, after the quantity of the trespass that is mis-done. And the king may not doom no man to death without assent of his barons and other men wise of counsel, and that all the court accord thereto. And if the king himself do any homicide or any crime, as to slay a man, or any such case, he shall die there for. But he shall not be slain as another man; but men shall defend, in pain of death, that no man be so hardy to make him company ne to speak with him, ne that no man give him, ne sell him, ne serve him, neither of meat ne of drink; and so shall he die in mischief. They spare no man that hath trespassed, neither for love, ne for favour ne for riches, ne for noblesse; but that he shall have after that he hath done.

In that country and by all Ind be great plenty of cockodrills, that is a manner of a long serpent, as I have said before. And in the night they dwell in the water, and on the day upon the land, in rocks
and in caves. And they eat no meat in all the winter, but they lie as in a dream, as do the serpents. These serpents slay men, and they eat them weeping; and when they eat they move the over jaw, and not the nether jaw, and they have no tongue.

And many other diverse beasts be in those countries, and elsewhere there-about, and many diverse birds also, of the which it were too long for to tell you. And therefore, I pass over at this time.