

3. *Concerning the state and condition of the realm of Cathay.*

The realm of Cathay is peopled passing well; and it hath no few cities that be greater than Paris or Florence; and a great multitude of places full of inhabitants, and smaller cities past counting. It hath likewise store of fine meadows and pastures, and of sweet-smelling herbs. And there be many great rivers, and great sheets of water throughout the empire; insomuch that a good half of the realm and its territory is water. And on these waters dwell great multitudes of people because of the vast population that there is in the said realm. They build wooden houses upon boats, and so their houses go up and down upon the waters; and the people go trafficking in their houses from one province to another, whilst they dwell in these houses with all their families, with their wives and children, and all their household utensils and necessities. And so they live upon the waters all the days of their life.¹ And there the women be brought to bed, and do everything else just as people do who dwell upon dry land. And if you ask of those folk where were they born? they can reply nought else than that they were born upon the waters, as I have told you. And seeing that there be these great multitudes dwelling thus both on water and on land, the folk are in such great numbers that the cattle of the country suffice not for them, wherefore they have to bring them from other countries and for that reason flesh-meat is dear there. But in this country there is great store of wheat, rice, barley, and other kinds of corn. And so the Great Caan year by year collecteth of this great plenty, and storeth it in his garners, as hath been told above. And they have a rice harvest twice in the year.

There groweth not any oil olive in that country, nor wine of the vine, and they have none except what is brought from abroad, and for that reason the price thereof is high. But

¹ See John Marignolli, *infra*.