

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW THE EMPEROR BESTOWS HELP ON HIS PEOPLE, WHEN THEY ARE AFFLICTED WITH DEARTH OR MURRAIN.

Now you must know that the Emperor sends his Messengers over all his Lands and Kingdoms and Provinces, to ascertain from his officers if the people are afflicted by any dearth through unfavourable seasons, or storms or locusts, or other like calamity; and from those who have suffered in this way no taxes are exacted for that year; nay more, he causes them to be supplied with corn of his own for food and seed. Now this is undoubtedly a great bounty on his part. And when winter comes, he causes inquiry to be made as to those who have lost their cattle, whether by murrain or other mishap, and such persons not only go scot free, but get presents of cattle. And thus, as I tell you, the Lord every year helps and fosters the people subject to him.

[There is another trait of the Great Kaan I should tell you; and that is, that if a chance shot from his bow strike any herd or flock, whether belonging to one person or to many, and however big the flock may be, he takes no tithe thereof for three years. In like manner, if the arrow strike a boat full of goods, that boat-load pays no duty; for it is thought unlucky that an arrow strike any one's property; and the Great Kaan says it would be an abomination before God, were such property, that has been struck by the divine wrath, to enter into his Treasury.¹]

NOTE I.—The Chinese author already quoted as to Kúblái's character (Note 2, ch. xxiii. *supra*) says: "This Prince, at the sight of some evil prognostic, or when there was dearth, would remit taxation, and cause grain to be distributed to those who were in destitution. He would often complain that there never lacked informers if balances were due, or if *corvées* had been ordered, but when the necessities of the people required to be reported, not a word was said."