

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD^s THE TWO GREAT COURTS

HERE HE TELLS OF TWELVE BARONS WHO ARE OVER ALL DOINGS OF THE GREAT KAAH. Now you may know truly that the great lord has chosen twelve very great and powerful wise men and barons (as is said above) over whatever questions may arise about the armies, that is to change them from the place where they are and to change the officers, or to send them where they see it is necessary, and what number of people the need requires, and more and less, according to the importance of the war. Besides this they have to make the distinction of the valiant and manly fighters from those who are mean and abject, promoting them to greater rank, and on the other hand degrading those who are of little use and cowardly. And if anyone is a captain of a thousand and has behaved meanly in any action, the aforesaid barons, considering him unworthy of that command, degrade him and put him down to the command of a hundred. But if he shall have borne himself nobly and manfully, counting him fit and worthy of higher rank, they make him captain of ten thousand; doing everything however with the knowledge of the great lord. For when they wish to degrade and put anyone down they say to the lord, Such a one is unworthy of such an honour, and then he answers, Let him be degraded and made of lower rank; and so it is done. But if they wish to promote anyone, thus distinguishing his merits, they say, Such a captain of a thousand is fit and able to be captain of ten thousand; and the lord confirms it and gives him the tablet of appointment proper to such an office, as is said above; and then he has very great presents given to him to inspire the others to make themselves valiant.

The government then of the said twelve barons is called Thai, which is as much as to say Greater Court, because they have not any lord over them except the great Kaan. And besides the aforesaid there are appointed twelve other barons who are always with him, to whom it is committed that they be over all the necessary things which are needed in thirty-four¹ great provinces; and I shall tell you their way and their appointment. I tell you quite truly first of all that these twelve barons live together continually in a palace inside the aforesaid town of Cambaluc, which is very large and beautiful and rich, and there are many rooms and halls and houses for them and the officers & servants, and these barons have for each province which is under his rule a judge and very many writers or notaries under him, who all stay in this palace each in his house by himself. And this judge and these writers do there all the things which are needed for the province to which they are deputed, and they do it by the wish and by the command of the twelve barons of whom I have told you. Moreover when a complaint is made these twelve barons must report it to the lord, and then he does what seems to him best about it; but you may know quite truly that these twelve barons have so great authority as I shall tell you. For they choose the lords and rulers and officers of all those thirty-four

¹ LT (margin): 24 V: vintiquatro milia L: totum imperium Others "thirty-four".