

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD'S SPEED OF THE POSTMEN
to the size of the hamlets, in which live foot-men who also do this message work of the great lord, and I shall tell you how. They wear a great and broad girdle all full round [46a] about of great balls, that is of sounding¹ bells, so that when they go they may be heard from quite far; which balls we call sonagloscula. And when the king wishes to send a letter by courier, the letter is given to one of these runners and these go always running at great speed, and they go not more than three miles, that is from their post to another. And the other who is at the end of the three miles who hears him clearly by the bells coming from afar, prepares himself immediately & stays all ready prepared before his arrival, furnished like him with bells; and as soon as that one is come he goes to meet him and takes the thing which he carries and takes a little ticket which the writer of the place, who is always ready to do this, gives him and sets himself running and goes as far as to the second three miles, until he too has reached another post, where he too finds another ready, and does just as the other had done, and so from place to place they change at each three miles, in every place where there are kings letters to be carried, till he has reached the place to which the great lord sent him with the letter. And so I tell you that in this way a great space is covered in a short time, and from these foot-men whom he has appointed in great numbers the great lord has news from ten days journeys in one day and in one night,² for they go running by night as well as by day. For you may know that these foot-men go ten days journeys in one day and in one night, and in two days and two nights they bring news from twenty days marches; and thus when there is need he would have news in ten days and in ten nights from a hundred days marches, which is a great feat. Moreover I tell you that men like these often bring such things as fruit or other rare things to the lord in one day and night from ten days marches. And at the season of fruits, many times fruits are gathered in the city of Cambaluc in the morning and the next day towards evening they are brought to the great Kaan in the city of Ciandu, which is ten days journeys distant. In each of these posts at three miles a clerk is appointed who notes the day and the hour that the runner arrives, and likewise the day and the hour that the other departs; and so it is done in all the posts. And there are some who have this charge, to go every month to examine all these posts, and to see those runners that have not used diligence, and they punish them. And the great lord takes no tax from men like these runners and from those who stay at the posts, but has them well provided with many things, both horses and other things, from his own, and moreover they are very well paid by the court for their labour. And about the horses of which I have told you that there are so many for the posts to carry the messengers, I tell you quite truly

¹ grossis bullis id est sonaliis sonantibus

² R: due giorni, & due notti VA: dentro in vno di e una note P: inter diem et noctem