

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD'S CLOTHES FOR THE POOR

HOW THE GREAT KAAH DOES GREAT CHARITY TO HIS POOR PEOPLE. Since I have told you and described how the great lord has great wealth of all things in time of dearth made for his people, because he provides himself in time of cheapness, now I shall tell you how he does great charity and provision and alms to the poor people who are in the town of Cambaluc, another work worthy of no small praise. It is true that he has many families chosen from [the] town of Cambaluc, & likewise in the suburbs and in the neighbourhood, who are poor and who have nothing to eat & cannot buy; and such a family will be six in one house and such a one eight and such a one ten and such a one more and such a one less, as they are, so that altogether it is a great number of people. The great lord has wheat and other corn given them from his granaries, to each family so much that they may have what to eat for the whole year. And he has this done to very great numbers always every year. When he hears that some family of people honourable and of substance has become poor through some misfortune, or cannot work through some illness, and have no means of reaping any kind of grain; he causes to be given to such families as these enough for them to be able to pay their expenses for the whole year. And the said families go at the usual time to the officials who are appointed over all the expenditures which are made by the great Kaan, who stay in a palace set apart for that office, and each shows a note of how much was given them in the past year for living, and according to that they provide them that year. They provide them also with their clothes, because the great Kaan has the tenth of all the wool, and silk, and hemp, of which clothes can be made; and he makes them weave such things as these and make cloth in a house set apart for this, where they are stored. And because all crafts are obliged by bond to work for him one day a week, the great Kaan has clothes made of these stuffs, which he has given to the aforesaid families of poor people, according as is required in winter time and in summer time. He provides also clothing for his armies, and in every city he has woollen cloth woven, which is paid out of the tithe of that. And it is to be known that the Tartars according to their first customs, before they knew the idol law, did no alms. But when some poor man went to them they drove him away with abuse, saying to him, Go with the bad year which God give thee; for if he had loved thee as he loves me he would have done thee some good. But because the wise men of the idolaters, and specially the aforesaid bacsi, suggested to the great Kaan that the provision for the poor was a good work for him, and that their idols would greatly rejoice at it, he thereupon provides like this for the poor, as is said above. And [47c] again I tell you that all those who wish to go to the court for the lord's bread daily can have a hot loaf; it is refused to none, but some is given to all those who go, and it is sold to none. And you may know that I believe I tell no lie, I believe that the poor men and women, more than thirty thousand of them go there every day for bread; and there is not a day when there are not distributed and given away twenty thousand bowls