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978-1-108-01067-2 - The Expedition of Pedro de Ursua and Lope de Aguirre in Search of El Dorado and Omagua in 1560-1

Pedro Simon

Excerpt

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SIXTH HISTORICAL NOTICE
 OF THE
 CONQUEST OF TERRA FIRMA.

CHAP. I.

1. *Gives a brief account of the deeds of Pedro de Ursua, before his arrival in Peru; and of his entrance into that country.—2. Certain Brazilian Indians give information in Peru, of very rich provinces near the river Marañon.—3. The Marquis of Cañete determines to send Pedro de Ursua to explore them, and summons him to his presence.—4. Various opinions are formed in Peru respecting this expedition.*

1. THE Captain Pedro de Ursua entered the city of Santa Fé, in the New Kingdom of Granada, with his uncle the licentiate Miguel Diaz de Armendariz, the first Juez de Residencia, who arrived there after the discovery of the kingdom, and settlement of the city.¹ This Pedro de Ursua was a native of the kingdom of Navarre, and of a town called Ursua, near the noble city of Pampluna. From Santa Fé he went down to settle in the town of Pampluna, in New Granada, and thence undertook the conquest of the Musos Indians, and founded the city of Tudela amongst them. He afterwards went to Santa Martha, and there performed deeds worthy of his noble descent. From thence, having returned

¹ For a brief account of the proceedings of Armendariz and Ursua, in New Granada, see the Introduction.

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to Santa Fé, to give an account of what he had done, he descended the great river¹ to Carthagena, intending to go to Peru by way of Panamá. In the execution of this design he reached that city at a time when it was harassed by the incursions which certain negro Cimarrones² made almost every day. The people of Panamá, having heard long before of his valorous deeds, and of the conquests with which he had been charged; entrusted to him the pacification of their land, and the punishment of these revolted negroes. Having acquitted himself well in this undertaking, he continued his voyage to Peru, in search of more important work than he had yet been entrusted with; and arrived at the city of Lima in the year 1558; Don Andres Hurtado de Mendoza, Marquis of Cañete (worthy of eternal memory) being then viceroy of that city.

2. Certain rumours prevailed in those times, both in the city of Lima and throughout the provinces of Peru (which had been spread by Indians from Brazil), respecting rich provinces, which they had seen, as they said, when on their road from the coast of Brazil, whence more than 2,000 Indians had set out, with the intention of settling in other lands, which might be more agreeable to them, as their own were too crowded. Others declare that the Indians set out on this expedition to enjoy human food in those parts. At length, after travelling for ten years with two Portuguese in their company, some by the river Marañon, and some by land, they reached the provinces of the Motilonés³ in Peru, by way of a famous river⁴ which flows thence, and enters the Marañon. These Indians brought news respecting the

¹ The river Magdalena.

² Runaway negro slaves.

³ A tribe of the river Huallaga, also called Lamistas. They are settled at Lamas, Mozobamba, and Tarapoto. They are industrious, employed chiefly in agriculture and the preparation of cotton, of mild disposition and friendly manners. *Poeppig Reise*.

⁴ The Huallaga.

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provinces of the Omaguas,¹ mentioned also by Captain Francisco de Orellana, when he descended this river Marañon after deserting Gonzalo Pizarro, in the Cinnamon country.²

In these provinces, of which the Indians spoke when they reached Peru, dwelt the gilded man, at least this name was spread about in the land, taking its origin in the city of Quito. It so excited the minds of those restless spirits with whom Peru was full, and who were ever ready to credit these rumours, that the viceroy thought it prudent to seek some way by which to give employment to so large a body of turbulent men.

3. Being aware of the talent of Pedro de Ursua, the Marquis thought he had found the proper man to command the contemplated expedition, which he intended to send on this discovery, and thus Ursua might add to the services which he had performed for his Majesty, especially in the pacification of the Negroes. The Marquis also hoped to relieve the provinces of Peru of much corrupt blood, by sending forth many idle people, who might otherwise cause some fresh insurrection, like those which had already placed this famous kingdom in danger; an object which ought always to be kept in view by those who govern, if they would avoid the lamentable occurrences which had formerly taken place. The Viceroy, being determined to give the command of this expedition to Pedro de Ursua, gave him the title of Governor of the Provinces which he might discover and conquer, with power to appoint officers, and to reward his companions according to their merits, recommending him to have a care of the conquered Indians, to form settlements consisting of such Spaniards as he might think proper, and to do this for the good of the church and the crown of Spain.

¹ Formerly a very extensive nation, particularly on the Marañon.

² See the voyage of Orellana, in the *Expeditions into the valley of the Amazons*, printed for the Hakluyt Society, p. 27.

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He was promised, after having founded such settlements, that he should be rewarded as the kings of Spain were accustomed to reward those who had discovered and settled new lands.

4. The voice of fame soon spread the news of this expedition throughout Peru, and many offered themselves; but there were others unfavourable to it, of low as well as of high degree, who questioned the propriety of the conduct of the Marquis in patronizing it, as well as in entrusting Pedro de Ursua with the command; some hoping to stop the expedition for particular ends of their own, others on account of their envious spirit and idle disposition, wishing to prevent the accomplishment of great undertakings. They said that this was not the moment for the Viceroy to enter upon so large an affair, the result of which would not be seen during his period of office, as there was information that he was soon to have a successor in Don Diego de Azuedo, (and it was said that the Marquis was in no way pleased that the King was about to remove him, in anticipation of his period of service). Such being the case, Azuedo would find it most inconvenient, when he came to discover that the Marquis had taken a large sum of money from the treasury to defray the expense of the expedition, and in the hope also of benefiting himself. To these remarks others were added, having no foundation, but which, coming to the ears of the Viceroy, were expected to have the effect of cooling, in some degree, his ardour in favouring Pedro de Ursua. These observations had some weight with the Viceroy, until news arrived that Don Diego de Azuedo had died in Seville. The Marquis then became anxious for the departure of the expedition, and also to reanimate Pedro de Ursua, who began to fear whether he could successfully conduct so important an enterprise, for his most intimate friends had represented to him the great difficulties that would arise. These were so many presages of the unfortunate end of the expedition.

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PEDRO DE URSUA.

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CHAP. II.

1. *Pedro de Ursua builds the brigantines for the expedition, and makes Pedro Ramiro his lieutenant-general.—2. Ursua leaves Lima with his people—he arrives at the town of Moyobamba.*¹—3. *How he contrived to obtain two thousand dollars from the cura or priest of this place.—4. Ursua sends part of his people from the Motilonces to other provinces, where they provide for themselves.*

1. While captains were sent to hunt up people for the expedition in the vicinity of Lima, early in 1559, so that they might not be detained for want of means to navigate the rivers, Ursua proposed to construct vessels. For this purpose he looked out for ship-builders, and found twenty-five, also ten negro carpenters; and, having manufactured tools and other requisites, he went to the country of the Motilonces, whence, as we have already said, the Brazilians had come, who had given the information which had been the cause of the expedition.

In this province there was a Spanish town called Santa Cruz de Capacoba,² lately founded by Captain Pedro Ramiro, who was governing there in the name of the king.

Pedro de Ursua arrived here with his people, and having ascertained on which part of the banks he could cut good timber, he went down the river some twenty leagues, and reached the desired spot; and having given orders to his officers, among whom was Juan Corzo, his principal shipwright, to build the number of vessels he required, and named Pedro Ramiro as his Lieutenant-General, Ursua returned to Lima, from which place he could dispatch the people and soldiers collected by his captains.

2. The funds of Pedro de Ursua were very scanty; and although the Viceroy had assisted him from the royal trea-

¹ Or Lamas, on the river Moyobamba, which runs into the Huallaga.

² Probably near to the town of Moyobamba.

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sury, and money had been obtained from other sources, he had not sufficient for his expenses. This caused nearly a year's delay, which would have continued longer, if the people of Lima, and others favourable to Ursua's views, had not supplied him with more money for the equipment of his soldiers, purchase of powder, rope, muskets, horses, arms and munitions, cattle, ship-provisions, and other things.

At last Ursua left Lima, having sent on the greater number of his people, as a vanguard, and to watch that none deserted. He arrived at Moyobamba, where Pedro Portillo, the priest, had hoarded five or six thousand dollars. Portillo, hearing flattering accounts of Ursua's expedition, and seeing the great number of gallant followers, anxious also to increase his fortune and dignity, by becoming a bishop in the new lands to be discovered, offered to lend Ursua two thousand dollars, on condition that he would promise to appoint him cura and vicar of the expedition. Ursua gladly accepted the cura's proposal, and felt no difficulty in acceding to Portillo's wishes for ecclesiastical preferment.

3. But the priest soon repented his offer, and began to feel but little faith in the success of the expedition. He intimated that the loan of the two thousand dollars would be inconvenient to him; but Ursua could not do without money, for he had ordered many articles for which it was necessary to pay. Ursua, finding himself in an awkward position, called into his councils Juan de Vargas, who was afterwards his lieutenant, Fernando de Guzman, Juan Alonso de la Vandra, Pedro Alonzo Casco, and Pedro de Miranda, a mulatto, all fighting men and of elastic consciences; telling them his present trouble, and that he was most desirous that the money should be obtained from the priest. His friends saw no difficulty about the matter, even if a little violence was resorted to;—so one night they reported that Juan de Vargas (who was then quartered in the church on account of two wounds), was dying, and one of them went

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for the cura Portillo, urging him to lose no time in going to confess Vargas. On leaving his house the cura was seized by Ursua's friends, and was forced to sign an order for two thousand dollars on a merchant of the town, who was the keeper of the cura's wealth. The cura went to Vargas, who was in an apartment of the church. On his arrival fire-arms were pointed at his breast, and, without waiting for the morrow, they took him to the town of Santa Cruz de Capacoba. Here the greater portion of the expedition was encamped. At this place they forced from him the other three or four thousand dollars of his fortune. This system of things did not stop here; for during the progress of the expedition there was much disturbance, and the turbulent paid for their misdeeds by terrible deaths, as we shall see further on.

4. The chief part of the expedition had reached the town of the Mutilones of Santa Cruz, when the Governor Pedro de Ursua arrived, (he already took this title, without knowing where the country lay that he was to be governor of), and although this province was fertile, and aided much in the support of the people, yet as they were many, the governor found it necessary to send a portion of his followers to a province called Tubalosas, not far distant, to remain and provide for themselves there until he was ready to embark; assigning to them as chiefs two of his most intimate friends, Francisco Diaz de Arles, who had been with him in all his actions since they left Navarre; and Diego de Frias, an attendant of the Viceroy's, one who had been highly recommended to him, and who was treasurer to the expedition. These two had not been friendly to the Corregidor Pedro Ramiro, since the time when Ursua made Ramiro his lieutenant-general, because they had pretensions to the same post, as they gave him to understand to his cost. Although the governor felt satisfied with the two chiefs and soldiers, he also sent Pedro Ramiro, who knew the country well, and

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was feared by the natives. Ramiro was to go onwards to the said province, to make the officers and men friends with the chiefs and people, after which he was to return to Santa Cruz.

CHAP. III.

1. *Arles and Frias are displeased at having Ramiro with them—they determine to kill him.—2. They kill Ramiro.—3. The governor Ursua goes in person to arrest the delinquents.—4. He sends them to Santa-Cruz, where they are beheaded.*

1. Arles and Frias were very much displeased that Ramiro had been named as their leader, for they hated him in consequence of his appointment, as already stated; but it was necessary that Ramiro should lead the way for a few days on their journey, after which they determined to turn against him, and to carry their scheme into effect, when resting for the night. The devil instigated the act (for no other could have been the author). The assassins conferred with each other, and the evil genius who had inspired them gave the means also. They thought that on account of the great friendship both had with Ursua, he would defend them, or look over any guilty action they might commit. They vacillated only respecting the manner of committing an act which they had decided on. In this state of uncertainty, two soldiers, great friends of theirs, joined them. These men had separated from those who had gone onwards, and having missed Arles and Frias, had returned to look after them. One was named Grijota, the other Alonso Martin. They asked their officers why they had left the lieutenant, who replied that Ramiro had dismissed them, he remaining with the others, and intending to rebel, in order to enter certain lands of which he had information, and settle them.

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They added that if Grijota and Martin would join them, they would be doing a good service to the king and the governor, by seizing Ramiro, and so stopping the progress of his rebellion.

The soldiers did not then see through the intentions of Arles and Frias, which were well cloaked with explanations, apparently true. They agreed to join them, and the four continued on the track of Ramiro with the intention of putting their design into execution on the first opportunity.

2. Having journeyed a few leagues, they saw Pedro Ramiro on the banks of a rapid river, over which it had been necessary (there being only one small canoe for the passage of the river, which was not fordable) to pass the rest of the soldiers first. Ramiro, who had only one companion, the rest having passed the river, saw the four approach him. The four, taking advantage of the occasion, saluted him with bland words, very different from the character of their intentions, and he felt assured that they were friendly; but they laid hands upon him suddenly and disarmed him, while Pedro de Frias ordered a slave he had with him to strangle him, which was done, and then he cut his head off. The youth who was with Ramiro made his escape, returning as quickly as possible to the town of the Motilones, and giving notice of what had happened to Pedro de Ursua, who was much distressed at the news. The four murderers looked upon themselves as victors, and the canoe returning to the landing place to fetch Pedro Ramiro, they entered into it and crossed to the other side, persuading the people that they had executed Ramiro by order of the Governor Ursua, in consequence of his being informed that Ramiro designed to rebel and take the people with him. This explanation sufficed. The murderers sent one of their friends to Ursua to say that Captain Pedro Ramiro had been arrested by their orders on the ground that he wished to rebel and lead the people with him, but that they, as faithful

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servants of the king and his governor, had made him prisoner, and would detain him until they were instructed how to act further in the case.

But the truth had already come to the ears of the governor, through the young man who had been with Ramiro, and he disbelieved the second messenger; but he dissembled, and gave no indication that he suspected Arles and Frias.

There were not wanting men, who, reasoning seriously on this murder of Ramiro, recommended Ursua to get all his people together and return to Peru, particularly as Arles and Frias had stated such to be their desire.

3. The Governor was grieved, indeed, at what had occurred; he had fears and suspicions that worse would succeed, even a mutiny amongst the soldiers against the four murderers of Ramiro. He felt ill at ease until he decided upon going himself with a few attendants, thus making no show of power. He trusted also to the confidence Arles and Frias had in him; for if they saw him come with a large force (fearing the punishment their crime merited) they might mutiny, and instead of depending on their safety by reason of old friendships, there might occur most serious tumults; thus in the King's name, who was so justly beloved by the good, and dreaded by the evil, Ursua unexpectedly arrived amongst the people and the murderers, so that the latter had no time to tamper with the soldiers against the Governor. The four assassins hurriedly collected together what they could, escaping from the presence of the Governor, on account of the shame they felt for their great crimes.

Ursua made no show of disappointment at not finding the murderers; his plan was to remain most tranquil. He sent to tell them that they were unjust to themselves, being men of such qualities and gifts, in making themselves culpable by flight, when it was notorious that they had ever