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Gomes Eanes de Zurara

Excerpt

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AZURARA'S CHRONICLE
OF THE
DISCOVERY AND CONQUEST OF
GUINEA.

CHAPTER XLI.

How they took the ten Moors.



FOR that night there was no other agreement, save that each one took all the rest he could ; but on the next day they all joined together to advise what they ought to do, for it was not a suitable place in which to take prolonged repose. And the captains, falling to talk about the matter, agreed among themselves that they should enter into their boats with certain of their people, and Luis Affonso Cayado as captain (who was to go along the shore), and that he should land with some of his men, leaving with the boats another in his place. Then he was to make his way by land with those men whom he took with him, and the boats were to follow after him a short way from the beach, while the caravels came two leagues behind, so as not to be discovered. And as they marched in this order they fell in with the track of Moors who were going into the Upland, and they went in doubt whether they should

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follow that track and go after them, holding that it might be a perilous matter to enter so far into the country where they had been now discovered, as they did not know the people that might be in the land. But their will, which was now burning to accomplish the affair, left no place to bare reason ; and without more fear they went forward till they arrived at a place about three leagues further on where there were some few Moors, the which not only lacked courage to defend themselves, but even the heart to fly. And these were in all ten, counting men, women, and children.

CHAPTER XLII.

How Alvaro Vasquez took the thirty-five Moors.

WHEN those ten Moors had been brought off to the caravels, Alvaro Vasquez, like a man of noble birth, being desirous to show to all the others that he loved the service of his lord, spake with Dinis Eannes, to whom appertained the charge of the government for that day, saying that it appeared to him a good thing to order the people to go forth, since their coming from their own country was principally for that end. "How can you ask," said Dinis Eannes, "that we should again sally forth where we have been so often, insomuch that all this land has had warning of our presence? And of two things me seemeth that one would happen ; either we should not light upon any Moors to take away, or we should encounter so many that it would be to our great danger to make an attack upon them ; and so much the more as I am ill disposed for a fight by reason of weariness. Wherefore me thinketh it would not be well for us to sally forth again, as far as this land lieth, but that we should go onwards till we come to a place where we know well they could not be advised of us." And as they were going in accordance

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with that resolve, one part of the night being already passed, Alvaro Vasquez, still constant to his first design, came again to Dinis Eannes, and begged him to let him go on shore and entrust him with the charge of his captaincy, for that he knew many would go with him of right good will. "Inasmuch as this sally pleaseth you so greatly," said Dinis Eannes, "I only ask you that in your going you take good advisement that you bring no harm on yourselves nor sorrow on the rest of us." Then Alvaro Vasquez called Diego Gil, that other esquire of whom we spoke before, for he knew him for a brave man and one of his own upbringing; and they went through the other caravels in such wise that they gathered together those persons whom they thought sufficient for their safety. And all together they went on shore—there being yet some part of the night left for their march—but ere they had pressed on any farther, Alvaro Vasquez, wishful to admonish them, spake unto them thus. "Friends and Gentlemen, although I am not one of those three principal captains whom we brought with us from our kingdom, let it suffice that I am committed to you as captain by him who had the charge to command you. And because want of order is often a greater obstacle* than the multitude of the enemy, I desire first to know of you if it please you to have me for captain in this affair, that I may command you as men well pleased to receive governance; for much better were it that you should tell me now at this present, where we cannot well receive any harm, than when we are away from here, in some place where your disobedience might do hurt, not only to me, but also to every one of us in this company."

"We are all well content," said the others with one voice, "that you should be our captain, and well it pleaseth

* To victory.

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us to obey you as fully as any one of the other captains, and even better, if we can more perfectly do it.”*

“Now,” said he, “it seemeth well to me that we should go forward according to the same ordinance as on the other day, to wit, that I should go with some of you others along the land, and that the remainder should keep in the boats within call of us.” And so, setting out and following the coast a good way, they fell in with a cape, to which they gave the name of St. Anne;¹¹³ and immediately after that they lighted upon an arm of the sea which ran up into the land about four leagues, and appeared to them as though it were a river. And on reaching the entrance of the same, Alvaro Vasquez waited for the others in the boats, and when they had come up he bade them wait for him there, whilst he went along that water, for he conceived that if any people lived in that land it would be there. The others said that such an expedition would be very perilous, if only because the sun was already very high, and the heat of it was great, and they were very weary for the great lack they had had of sleep, and the toil of some in rowing, and of others in going on foot; and all the more because even if there were in that place a number of inhabitants, yet they could not make any good booty among them, because of necessity they would discern them from afar; and that if the natives perceived themselves strong enough to fight with them, they would await them, but if not, they could put themselves in safety quite easily. Alvaro Vasquez nevertheless pursued his journey as one who had determined to accomplish some great matter if his fortune were not contrary; and so, going forward about a league and a half, one of the company said to the Captain, “Me-thinks I see along this stream some rising objects like houses.” The Captain looked attentively, and right well

* Our intended action.

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perceived that it was a village, and so it appeared to all the others who were there. "Now," said Alvaro Vasquez, "our booty is before our eyes, but it is so clearly discovered that of necessity we shall be seen before we can arrive at it; and because it doth not appear to me to be so great a settlement as that it can hold a people with whom we cannot cope, still, in order that we may achieve some sort of success, let each one run as fast as he can, and so let us stoutly fall upon them, and if we are not able to make captives of the young men, yet let us seize upon the old men, the women, and the little children, and let us take such advisement that whosoever putteth himself on his defence shall be slain without pity; and as to the others, let us seize them as best we can." And before he had quite finished these reasons, many of them began to increase their pace, while others were running as fast as they could; and the Moors,¹¹⁴ like unwary people, little recking of such a danger, when their enemies came upon them, were all thrown into that confusion which the fortune of the case required. And when they saw men coming upon them so suddenly and so boldly, and armed with weapons quite strange to them, they were altogether amazed. Whereat our men took so much the greater boldness, seeing their timorous disorder, and at once began to seize upon as many of them as they could, and seeing that some sought to put themselves on their defence, they slew them without mercy. But the affair lasted not long at that time, for that the enemy soon began to fly. And there were many amongst them who then looked on their wives and children for the last time, and in a short space the booty would have been much larger if that arm of the sea had not been so near that many of them escaped into it, inasmuch as for the most part, not only the men but also the women and the children, all knew how to swim. And others who were bold and light-footed, trusting in their fleetness,

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escaped through all ; though some were deceived in it, for they found others of our men who followed and captured them in spite of their lightness of foot, so that in all there were taken captive thirty-five, besides some that perished. Of a surety that Esquire who, as we have said, was their captain, found no little praise for that deed of his, since for a great space they discoursed of his energy and diligence, giving him thanks for the great toil he had undergone, as well for the service of the Infant as for the profit of them all in that journey. And, moreover, those who had stayed in the caravels were not a little glad at the coming of their partners with so good a profit, and this joy of theirs was much increased when they had heard in full measure the particulars of the adventure which the others had had.

CHAPTER XLIII.

How they returned on shore, and of the Moor that they took.

NOW the others who had remained in the caravels, seeing the toil of their partners, conceived that it would be to their great loss if they did not dispose themselves to some other matter as great, so that in future they should not receive dishonour. And so some of them joined together on the following night, and entering into their boats, they travelled two days and two nights and landed, but with all their great toil they were not able to capture more than one Moor ; and with his guidance they set out to search for some three villages, which were a good way in the Upland. But they did not find in them anything that they could carry off, for they were already emptied of people, since the Moors who had fled had warned the whole country as far as their news could reach. And so they turned back to their ships, ill satisfied with the toil they had taken.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

How they sailed to the Land of the Negroes.

AND now, perceiving that they could win no further profit in that land by reason of the advisement that the Moors had already received, the captains began to consult with the chief men of their ships concerning the manner of the action they should take.

“We,” said some, “are not able, nor ought we to wait longer in this land, since we know that our stay brings no profit with it, but rather manifest loss, for we are wasting our provisions and wearying our bodies without hope of success. Wherefore it would be a counsel profitable for us, since God hath given us enough, that we should turn back to our country, contenting ourselves with the booty we have taken, the which is not so small that it will not be of value sufficient to compensate for our toils, and to save us from shame in the presence of our neighbours.”

“Of a surety,” replied others, “such a return would be shameful for such men as we are, for if we were to turn back in this wise it would be indeed an abatement of our honour; but let us go to the land of the negroes, where Dinis Diaz with one only ship went last year to make his capture; and even if we do nothing more than see the land, and afterwards give a relation thereof to the lord Infant, this would be to our honour.* Let us reach it, then, since we are so near, and though we accomplish but little, a great profit will be ours.” All agreed that it was very well that they should go to that land, for it might be that God would then give them a greater success than they expected.

* Lit., “would be a part of,” etc.

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And so they hoisted their sails forthwith and pursued their voyage, and sailing on their course a space of 80 leagues they came near to the coast of Guinea,¹¹⁵ where they made them ready with their boats to land, but when the black men caught sight of them they ran down to the shore with their shields and assegais, as men who sought to make themselves ready for battle ; but although they showed so fierce a countenance, yet our men would have gone on shore if the roughness of the sea had consented thereto ; and, far as they were from the shore, our men did yet perceive that it was a land very green, peopled by human folk and tame cattle, which the inhabitants of the land had with them for their use. And they would have gone further on still, but the storm increased upon them with much disturbance of the weather, so that they were forced to turn back without remedy.

CHAPTER XLV.

How they forced their way upon shore.

Now that tempest lasted for the space of three days, and they were kept continually running backwards before a contrary wind, but after those three days were ended, that great tempest abated, and the weather became serene, when they had now come to the point where¹¹⁶ they had previously captured the seven Moors ; and on that day the captaincy happened to be with Mafaldo, and he waited for the other caravels to come up. And when they were all assembled in full day light, he came upon the deck of his ship and spake thus to the other captains: " You see right well that we are near to the place where we took the seven Moors, and you know that according to the track of those men which we lighted on, and the nets of their fishery, the land ought in reason to be peopled. Wherefore, if you

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think it well, I desire to go on shore and see if I can obtain any booty." And as you see that among many men there are always divers purposes, some began at first to say that such a sally appeared to them useless, since they had got enough wherewith to make their return to their own land, as they had already said before they set out for the land of the Negroes. Others again said that, forasmuch as the expedition was perilous, they ought to go by night and not by day.

"Now," said Mafaldo, "I am your captain to-day, and you are one and all bound to obey me as fully as you would obey the Infant our lord if he were present, and you may suppose that I do not love my life less than each one of you loveth his. Wherefore, my purpose is, notwithstanding your reasonings, to sally forth, for even supposing that the land be peopled it is not to be presumed that the Moors will be even now on the shore waiting for us. And if we go by day we shall have reason to see the country better, and know in what direction we have to go."

The others replied that it sufficed he was captain, for though the contrary opinion might be in favour with some of the company, it was necessary they should obey him; but they begged him to consider well the affair, for they would not turn back, no, not for any mishap that might befall them. The boats were at once lowered, and those who were to go forth were accoutred ready for starting, and, in fact, set out at once. They were in all about thirty-five men-at-arms, and as they went on their way towards the land, one of the men in the boats said to the captain, "I know not if you see what I do?" "And what do you see," said the captain, "that we do not?" "I see," said he, "as me thinketh, that those black things that are upon those banks of sand are the heads of men, and the more closely I look at them, the more it seemeth to me that I am right, and if you look narrowly you will see that

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they are moving." And the captain ordered the boats to stop still a little, whereat the Moors concluded that they were discovered, and forthwith they discovered themselves to the number of fifty men, apparelled for fighting, though with no other arms than lances. And when all had thus come forth, Mafaldo made his boats approach near to the shore, at which the Moors showed great pleasure, some wading into the water as high as their necks, and others lower, all of them desirous to get at the Christians. And when Mafaldo saw them thus on the beach, displaying a countenance of such hardihood, he signed to the other boats to draw near to him ; and when they were all together he made them stop rowing, and began to speak to them in this wise : " Friends, you know the end for which we came forth from our country ; how it was for the service of God, and of the Infant our lord, and for the honour and profit of ourselves, wherein by the grace of that great Lord who created all things, we have had a good enough profit of our booty without any danger to ourselves ; yet all our honour is in being 500 leagues from our country in unknown lands, increasing our past victories with new adventures. And since God knoweth our good wills, He hath appointed us a place and time in the which we may gain an honourable victory ; for you see before you those Moors with such pride, as if they held us in siege with great advantage to themselves and without hope of succour, provoking us, like men secure of victory over things already vanquished. And although they are more in number than we by a third, yet they are but Moors, and we are Christians, one of whom ought to suffice for two of them. For God is He in whose power lieth victory, and He knoweth our good wills in His holy service. But if we do not join battle with them it would be to our great dishonour, and we should make them full of courage against any others of our Law.

Wherefore my counsel is, that the boats should all three