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Gomes Eanes de Zurara

Excerpt

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

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.



HERE beginneth the Chronicle in which are set down all the notable deeds that were achieved in the Conquest of Guinea, written by command of the most high and reverend Prince and most virtuous Lord the Infant Don Henry, Duke of Viseu and Lord of Covilham, Ruler and Governor of the Chivalry of the Order of Jesus Christ. The which Chronicle was collected into this volume by command of the most high and excellent Prince, and most powerful Lord the King Don Affonso the Fifth of Portugal.

CHAPTER I.

Which is the Prologue, wherein the Author sheweth what will be his purpose in this Work.

WE are commonly taught by experience, that all well-doing requireth gratitude. And even though the benefactor doth not covet it for himself, yet he should desire it, that

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the recipient may not suffer dishonour where the giver hath acquired virtuous merit. And such a special communion is there between these two acts, to wit, giving and thanking, that the first requireth the second by way of obligation. And did not the former* exist, it would not be possible for there to be gratitude in the world. Wherefore, Saint Thomas,† who was the most clear teacher¹ among the Doctors of Theology, saith in the second book of the second part of his work, in the 108th section, that every action returneth by nature to the cause from which it first proceeded. Therefore, since the giver is the chief cause of the benefit received by the other, it is requisite, by the ordinance of Nature, that the good he doth should come back to him in the shape of a fitting gratitude. And by this return we are enabled to understand the natural likeness between the works of Nature and those that give moral aid, for all things bring about a proper return, starting from a commencement and progressing till in the end they accomplish the recompence we speak of. And, in proof of this, Solomon saith in the book of Ecclesiastes, that the sun riseth over the earth, and, having encircled all things, returneth to where it first appeared. The rivers also proceed from the sea, and ceasing not their course, are continually returning to it. A like thing happeneth in the moral order, for all good that cometh from a generous will, doth run a straight course until it arrive at the fitting recipient, and then afterwards it returneth naturally to the place where the generosity allowed it to begin; and such a return bringeth about that sweet union between those that do good and those that receive it, of which Tully speaketh when he saith that no service is more necessary than

* *I.e.*, conferring of favours.

† *I.e.*, Aquinas. See note I, in vol. ii. Throughout the present volume the numbers inserted in the text refer to historical and other notes which will be appended to vol. ii.

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gratitude, in order that the good may return to him who gave it.

And in that the most high and excellent Prince and most mighty Lord, the King Don Affonso the Vth (who at the time of the writing of this book reigned in Portugal, by the grace of God, whose reign may God in his mercy increase in length and in virtues), in that he, I say, saw and knew the great and very notable deeds of the Lord Infant Don Henry, Duke of Viseu and Lord of Covilham, who was his highly-valued and beloved uncle, and in that the said deeds appeared to him so noteworthy among the many actions of Christian princes in this world—it seemed to him a wrong thing not to have some authentic memorial of the same before the minds of men. And this most of all because of the great services which the said Lord had ever rendered to past kings, and the great benefits which by his efforts the Prince's countrymen had received.

For these reasons the King bade me engage in this work with all diligence, for although great part of his other actions are scattered through the Chronicles of the Kings of his day, as, for instance, what he did when the King Don John, his father, went to take Ceuta,² and when on his own account he went with his brothers and many other great lords to raise the siege of the aforesaid town, and afterwards when in the reign and by the command of the King Don Edward of glorious memory, he attacked Tangier, where were done many very notable deeds, which are mentioned in his history, yet all that followeth was done by his ordinance* and mandate, not without great expense and trouble, all which is truly to be set down to his account. For though in all kingdoms men compile general Chronicles of their Kings, they do not fail

* *I.e.*, all that follows in this book was done by Henry's ordinance, etc.

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also to write separately of the deeds of some of those Kings' vassals, wherever the greatness of the same is notable enough to warrant such especial mention—as was done in France in the case of Duke John, Lord of Lançam,³ and in Castille in the matter of the deeds of the Cid Ruy Diaz,⁴ and in our own kingdom in the story of the Count Nunalvarez Pereira.⁵ And with this Royal Princes ought to be not a little contented, for so much the more is their honour exalted as they have seigniory over greater and more excellent persons; for no Prince can be great, unless he rule over great men; nor rich, unless he rule over the wealthy. For this cause said the virtuous Roman Fabricius, that he would rather be lord over those who had gold, than have gold himself.

But because the said deeds were written by many and various persons, so the record of them is variously written, in many parts. And our Lord the King, considering that it was not convenient for the process of one only Conquest* that it should be recounted in many ways, although they all contribute to one result, ordered me to work at the writing and ordering of the history in this volume so that those who read might have the more perfect knowledge. And that we may return the benefit he conferred on us by gratitude to him from whom we received it, as I began to set forth at the commencement of this chapter, we will follow the example of that holy Prophet Moses, who, desiring not to let the people of Israel forget the good that God had shewn them, often commanded the receivers to write them upon their hearts, as in a book that should display to those who considered it what was written therein. Further, seeing that the remembrance of injuries is tender, and that the good deed is soon forgotten, those that came after† set up signs that should be lasting, on which

* Such as that of Guinea.

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people might look and remember the benefits they had received in time past. And so likewise it is written of Joshua, that God bade him take twelve great stones from the midst of the river Jordan, and carry them to where the camp was pitched, after all had crossed. For this was done in order that they should be in remembrance of the wonderful miracle which God had wrought in presence of the people, when he parted the waters, so that those which came from above stood up in a heap and did not flow out towards the sides, while those which were below flowed on until the river was dry. But some, considering that even by such signs it was not always perfectly well known what had been done (just as we see that the Pillars of Hercules⁶ do not signify clearly to all who see them that they were placed there as a memorial of his Conquest of Spain), began the custom of writing what could not otherwise be long remembered. And in proof of this it is related in the book of Queen Esther, that King Ahasuerus kept a record of all the notable services that had been rendered to him, and that at certain times he caused this record to be read, that he might reward the authors of those services. So, too, the King Don Ramiro, desiring that the men of Spain should not allow themselves to forget the great aid that the blessed apostle Saint James had given them, when he delivered them from the power of the Moors, and promised to be our helper in all our battles with the Infidel, caused to be written the story of that event in the privileges that he granted the Church of Santiago,⁷ that is to say, in providing for the entertainment of the poor,—privileges which that Church now receives from every part of Spain where Christians then lived.

Now this care that the ancients showed ought to be a custom of to-day, and inasmuch as our memory is weaker than theirs was, and less mindful of the good that it receiveth, so much the more careful should we be to keep

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ever before us the benefits bestowed on us by others, since we cannot afford to forget them without manifest injury to ourselves. And because we received of God great benefit in the deeds hereinafter recorded, in three ways—firstly, by the many souls that have been already saved, and yet will be saved, of the lineage of our captives; secondly, by the great benefits we all of us receive from the said actions; thirdly, by the great honour that our realm is now gaining in many parts by subjecting to itself so great a power of enemies, and so far from our own land—for all these reasons we will put this history in remembrance to the praise of God; and to the glorious memory of our aforesaid Lord, and to the honour of many good servants of his, and other worthy persons of our country who toiled manfully in the doing of the aforesaid actions. Finally, because our said Chronicle is especially dedicated to this Lord,* let us begin at once to speak of his habits and of his virtues, and of his appearance also, in accordance with the custom of various authors of credit whose chronicles we have seen.

CHAPTER II.

The Author's invocation.

O THOU Prince little less than divine! I beseech thy sacred virtues to bear with all patience the shortcomings of my too daring pen, that would attempt so lofty a subject as is the recounting of thy virtuous deeds, worthy of so much glory. For the eternal duration of these thy actions, if the end of my attempt be profitable, will exalt thy fame and bring great honour to thy memory, giving a

* "This Lord," the "aforesaid Lord," and so on, is of course Henry.

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useful lesson to all those princes that shall follow thine example. For of a certainty it is not without cause that I ask pardon of thy virtues, knowing my insufficiency to compass such a task, and that I have more just reason to expect blame for doing less than I ought, than for saying over much. Thy glory, thy praises, thy fame, so fill my ears and employ my eyes that I know not well where to begin. I hear the prayers of the innocent souls of those barbarous peoples, almost infinite in number, whose ancient race since the beginning of the world hath never seen the divine light, but who are now by thy genius, by thy infinite expense, and by thy great labours, brought into the true path of salvation, washed in the waters of baptism, anointed with the holy oil, and freed from that wretched abode of theirs, knowing at this present what darkness lay concealed under the semblance of light in the days of their ancestors. I will not say with what filial piety, as they contemplate the divine power, they are ever praying for a reward to thy great merits—for that is a matter which cannot be denied by him who hath well considered the sentences of St. Thomas and St. Gregory⁸ on the knowledge possessed by spirits concerning those who have been, or are, profitable to them in this world. I see those Garamantes,⁹ those Ethiopians, who live under the shadow of Mount Caucasus, black in colour, because of living just opposite to the full height of the sun's rays—for he, being in the head of Capricorn, shineth on them with wondrous heat, as is shown by his movements from the centre of his eccentric, or, in another way, by the nearness of these people to the torrid zone,—I see the Indians of the greater and the lesser India,¹⁰ all alike in colour, who call upon me to write of thy gifts of money and of raiment, of the passing of thy ships, and of thy hospitality—which those received who, either to visit the Apostle,¹¹ or to see the beauty of the world, came to the ends of our Spain. And those dwellers on

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the Nile, whose multitudes possess the lands of that ancient and venerable city of Thebes,¹² they, too, astonish me, for I see them clothed in thy livery, and their bodies, that had never known a covering, now carrying robes of varied colours, while the necks of their women are adorned with jewels of gold and silver in rich workmanship. But what has caused this save the munificence of thine expenses and the labours of thy servitors, set in motion by thy beneficent will, by the which thou hast transported to the ends of the East things created in the West? Yet not even the prayers and the cries of these peoples, though they were many, were of such price as the acclamations I heard from the greatness of the Germans, from the courtesy of the French, from the valour of the English, and from the wisdom of the Italians,¹³ cries that were accompanied by others of divers nations and languages, all renowned by lineage and virtues. Oh thou, say these, who enterest the labyrinth of such great glory, why dost thou busy thyself only with the nations of the East? Speak to us, for we traverse the lands and encircle the circumference of the Earth, and know the Courts of Princes and the houses of great lords. Know that thou wilt not find another that can equal the excellency of the fame of this man, if thou judgest by a just weight of all that pertains to a great prince. With reason mayst thou call him a temple of all the virtues. But how plaintive do I find the people of our nation because I place the testimonies of some other race before theirs. For here in Portugal I meet with great lords, prelates, nobles, widowed ladies, Knights of the Orders of Chivalry, Masters and Doctors of the holy faith, with many graduates of every science, young scholars, companies of esquires, and men of noble breeding, with mechanics and an untold multitude of the people. And some of these shew me towns and castles; others villages and fields; others rich benefices; others great and wealthy farms; others

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country houses and estates and liberties; others charters for pensions and for marriages; others gold and silver, money and cloth; others health in their bodies and deliverance from perils which they have gained by means of thee; others countless servants both male and female; while others there are that tell me of monasteries and churches that thou didst repair and rebuild, and of the great and rich ornaments that thou didst offer in many holy places. Others, again, pointed out to me the marks of the chains they bore in the captivity from which thou didst rescue them. What shall I say of the needy beggars that I see before me laden with alms? And of the great multitude of friars of every order that shew me the garments with which thou didst clothe their bodies, and the abundance of food with which thou didst satisfy their necessities? I had already made an end of this chapter, had I not descried the approach of a multitude of ships with tall sails laden from the islands thou didst people in the great Ocean Sea,¹⁴ which called on me to wait for them, as they longed to prove that they ought not to be omitted from this register. And they displayed before me their great cattle-stalls, the valleys full of sugar cane from which they carried store to distribute throughout the world: they brought also as witnesses to their great prosperity all the dwellers in the kingdom of the Algarve.¹⁵ Ask, said they, whether these people ever knew what it was to have abundance of bread until our Prince peopled the uninhabited isles, where no dwelling existed save that of wild beasts. Next they shewed me great rows of beehives full of swarms of bees, from which great cargoes of wax and honey are carried to our realm; and besides these, lofty houses towering to the sky, which have been and are being built with wood from those parts. But why should I mention the multitude of things that were told me in thy praise, though all of them were things that I could write

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without injuring the truth? Let me tell how there now sounded in my ears some other voices very contrary to these I have recounted hitherto: voices for which I should have felt great compassion had I not discovered them to be the cries of those outside our law. For there addressed me countless souls of Moors, both on this side the Straits, and also beyond,¹⁶ of whom many had died by thy lance in the cruel war thou hast ever waged against them. And others presented themselves before me loaded with chains, their countenances pitiable to behold, men who were captured by thy ships through the strength of the bodies of thy vassals; but in these I noticed that they complained not so much of the ill fortune that overtook them at the end as of their fate in earlier life, that is, of the seductive error in which that false schismatic Mohammed¹⁷ left them. And so I conclude my preface, begging that if thy great virtues, if the excellence of thy great and noble deeds, suffer any loss by my ignorance and rudeness, thy magnanimous greatness may vouchsafe to look on my fault with a propitious countenance.

CHAPTER III.

In which we recount the descent of the Infant Don Henry.

TWO reasons move me to speak in this chapter of the descent of this noble prince. First of all, because the long course of ages driveth out of the memory the very knowledge of past things, which would be altogether dimmed and hidden from our eyes were they not to be represented before us in writing. And since I have determined to write for the representing of this present time to those that come after, I ought not to pass by in silence the glory of so noble a descent as our Prince's, since this book must indeed be a work placed