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978-1-108-08274-7 — A Report of the Kingdom of Congo and of the Surrounding Countries

Duarte Lopez, Filippo Pigafetta, Edited and translated by Margarite Hutchinson, Preface by Thomas  
Fowell Buxton

Excerpt

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## BOOK THE FIRST.

### CHAPTER I.

#### VOYAGE FROM LISBON TO THE KINGDOM OF CONGO.

IN the year 1578, when Don Sebastian, King of Portugal, set sail for the conquest of the Kingdom of Morocco, Duarte Lopez, a native of Benevento, which is twenty-four miles distant from Lisbon, near the south bank of the Tagus, also sailed in the month of April for the Port of Loanda, in the Kingdom of Congo, going in a ship called S. Antonio, belonging to an uncle of his, which was laden with various merchandise for that kingdom. It was accompanied by a patacchio (which is a small vessel), to which he gave continual help, guiding it at night with lights, in order to prevent its missing the way his ship took. He arrived at the Island of Madeira, belonging to the King of Portugal, which is about 600 miles from Lisbon, and there remained 15 days in order to furnish himself with provisions and wine and also with various sweetmeats, which are made there in great quantities and of excellent quality. There is an abundant supply of wine in this island, being perhaps the best in the world, which is shipped to various countries, but particularly to England. Leaving Madeira and passing by the Canaries, all belonging to Castile, he went into harbour in one of the Cape Verde Islands, called S. Antonio, which was not seen till they came upon it. From thence he sailed to another, called S. Giacopo (St. Iago), which bears rule

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over the reef, and is governed by the Bishop and Governor, who reside there; and here he took in provisions. It is not our intention in this history to relate the number of the Canary Islands, which are many, nor to speak of the Cape Verde Islands, nor to give their position, especially as there is no lack of records affording a full account of those regions. We aspire to reach the Kingdom of Congo, and this ship was only here for a time on its passage. I shall merely add that these Cape Verde Islands were shown by Ptolemy to be the principal ones westward in the maps of his geography, together with the Cape called by him the Hesperium Cornu, and those Macarie, or Blessed Islands, which we call the Fortunate Islands. The Portuguese traded here with various merchandize, such as coloured glass balls, and other little things much fancied by the people of those parts, besides Holland cloths, caps, and knives, and in exchange, took back with them slaves, wax, honey, and various products, as well as linen cloths of many colours. Beyond these places, and right opposite them, on the mainland, are the countries and rivers of Guinea, and Cape Verde, also Sierra Leone, or Lion Mountain, so famous for its great size.

From the above-mentioned Island of St. Iago, they directed the ship's course towards Brazil so as to catch the wind, at the same time taking note of the weather prevailing in those seasons in order to accomplish the voyage. There are two routes from the Island of St. Iago to Loanda, the port of the Kingdom of Congo; one being by the coast of Africa, the other by the high sea. Sailing with the Tramontana wind, which blows in those months, generally called North wind by the Portuguese, Spaniards, French, and all the people of the North Sea, and directing the ship's course south and south-west, leaving behind the

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Kingdom of Angola, to return there later, we attain the 27th or 29th degree beyond the equinoctial line in a direction opposite to that of our Pole, which in this history is styled Antarctic, that is to say in opposition to the Arctic, which is our north, the Antarctic on the contrary being towards the south. In this latitude of the opposite pole, navigators meet with winds known as Generali, or prevailing winds. These, blowing during nearly the whole of our summer, and called by them North-easters, are with us in Italy between North-east and East in the spring. They were known to the Venetians as Easters, and to the Greeks and Latins as Etesii, or blowing at stated seasons.

Sailing to within 29 degrees of the Antarctic, with the north wind, great advantage is gained; for, immediately the winds prevailing in those parts are felt, they turn the sails, and steer the ship in a straight course for Angola. Frequently, however, they lose the track, having failed to catch these winds. It is best to go some time before and wait for this strong wind, turning back afterwards, for in this way the longed-for haven will be gained. It is a remarkable fact that these winds blow steadily from the north to 29 degrees below the equinoctial line, and here still more furious winds may drive one back, this occurring for six months of the year.

Now, on the above voyage, the ship St. Antonio, meeting these prevailing winds, steered north and north-west towards the Kingdom of Congo, and hauling the wind arrived after 12 days and nights at the Island of S. Elena (St. Helena), not looking for or even thinking of it. This island is so called from having been first discovered by the Portuguese on the 3rd of May, the Feast of St. Helena. It is situated 16 degrees towards the Antarctic, is nine miles in circumference, being as small as it is singular, and far from the mainland. From the sea its mountains may be descried

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at thirty miles distance, and it is truly a miracle of nature, rising out of that vast and tempestuous ocean, small and alone, and affording safe anchorage to ships when they arrive disabled and short of water from India. It abounds also in provisions.

The woods are thick with ebony-trees, which are used by the sailors who come to the island. They also leave their names cut in the bark, the letters becoming larger with the growth of the trees. Very fine fruits grow without any cultivation, but the Portuguese brought the vine there. Particularly in the vicinity of the little church, and of the sailors' inns, there are groves of wild oranges, citrons, lemons, and large figs, and also of a peculiar kind of apple, which all the year round bears ripe and unripe fruit, like the orange-tree. It resembles the pomegranate, with its large red seed and juicy pulp. This gift of being ripe all the year round Homer says is shared by divers fruits in the Island of Corfu. Wild goats, kids, and wild boars abound in the island, besides other four-footed animals. There are also partridges, wild fowl, doves, and many kinds of large and small birds. Both animals and birds are so tame as to have no fear of man. Thus they are constantly caught and killed, being afterwards salted with the salt formed by the waves of the sea in natural caves in various parts of the island. In this way they are preserved as food for the sailors who land there.

The soil of this island is crumbled like red ashes, but it is rich and fertile, and as soft under the feet as sand, the trees shaking with the strength of a man. But little labour is carried on, as after rain the fruits spring up from former seed. Radishes grow wild, and as large as a man's leg, being used as food. Cauliflowers, parsley, lettuce, pumpkins, peas, beans, and various kinds of pulse abound in this fruitful spot, multiplying of them-

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elves, and needing no cultivation. Every ship brings fruits and herbs to the island, which, taking root, benignant nature gives the reward with usury, preserving them for the use of the sailors. There are small rivers of good water in this island, as well as safe anchorage for ships. Near the principal port stands a small church, where the ornaments of the altar are taken care of; also the vestments of the priests, and other things pertaining to the service of Mass. When ships pass that way the priests go down to celebrate divine service.

Here is also a retreat, where certain Portuguese almost always live, two or three, or even one only remaining there; either on account of illness or misdeeds. Some even voluntarily lead the life of a hermit in this solitary place, as penance for their sins.

Excellent fish is found in abundance, the sea seeming crowded with them, so that as soon as hooks are thrown into the water, great loads are brought out continuously.

Asking why the Portuguese had not taken care to fortify the island, it being so well placed for sailors, and as if by the Providence of God planted there for the benefit of the Portuguese navigators, which is fully told by Granata in the Symbol of Faith, written by him in Spanish and translated by myself into Italian, I was told that it would serve no purpose to do so because this island lies out of the way in going to India and is very difficult of access, but in returning it lies in the way and is easily seen; so that it was not worth while to spend time and money and keep soldiers there to no profit, none but Portuguese ships trading with it. To my reply, that the English for two centuries have, nevertheless, penetrated into these seas, one expedition being led by Drake, and the other during this year, 1588, by another pirate, also English, even more courageous than he, and named

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Cavendish, who returned laden with riches; they said that such an undertaking could not be carried into effect in such far-off seas, as everything of building material must be brought from Europe.

In fine, besides all the above-mentioned advantages, the climate of this island is temperate, and the air pure and healthy; the winds are soft, and when men reach it ill and half-dead from the toils of the sea, they speedily recover and regain their former strength.

From the Island of St. Helena they set sail with the same weather, and arrived at the Port of Loanda, in the Province of Congo, in seventeen days, the wind having moderated a little. This port is a safe and very large one, being formed by an island of the same name, of which we shall speak shortly. We have said there are two passages from Cape Verde to Loanda. One has been now described, which, though not used afterwards, was for the first time navigated by that same ship which conveyed Duarte Lopez, and guided by Francesco Martinez, the king's pilot, who knew these seas well and was the first to go by this way. The other is by the coast of the mainland. Sailing from the Island of St. Iago, and onwards to Cape delle Palme (C. Palmas), they reach the Island of St. Thomas, so called because it was discovered on the feast of that apostle. It lies under the equinoctial line, and is 180 miles from the mainland, right opposite the River Gaban or Cloak (R. Gaboon), which has that shape, and whose port is foreclosed by an island lying at the mouth of the river. The Portuguese come to this river in small boats from the Island of St. Thomas, bringing such commodities as they carry to the coast of Guinea, and taking in exchange ivory, wax, honey, palm oil, and negro slaves. Near the Island of St. Thomas, towards the north, lies another, called Il Principe (Prince's Island), 105 miles distant from the main-

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land, having the same products and trade as that of St. Thomas, but less in size. The Island of St. Thomas is somewhat round in form, being sixty miles broad, and 180 in circumference. It is very rich, carries on a large trade, and was taken possession of by the Portuguese when they commenced the conquest of the Indies. It has many ports, but the principal one and where most ships enter is close by the city.

The island produces a vast amount of sugar and nearly every kind of food. In the city are several churches, and a bishop resides here, with numerous priests and a chaplain. A castle with a garrison and artillery is near the port, to which it forms a battery, and this harbour can accommodate numerous ships. It seems strange that when the Portuguese first arrived here they found no sugar planted, yet they brought it from other parts, together with ginger, which also took root and flourished abundantly. The soil is moist and suitable to the growth of sugar-cane, which flourishes and ripens with no other watering than the dew which falls in the morning like rain, and moistens the earth. There are in the island more than seventy buildings, or rather presses, for preparing sugar; and every building has several houses round it, so forming a village, with nearly 300 persons given to this work. About forty large vessels are laden with sugar every year. It is true that since that time the worm like some plague—has destroyed the roots of the sugar-cane, so that now from forty, five or six vessels only are laden with sugar, and thus it comes to pass that it is so dear in those countries.

The Island of St. Thomas trades with the people of the mainland, who frequent the mouths of the rivers. The first of these rivers is that called after Fernando di Poo, who first discovered it, and lies 5 degrees towards our pole. Over against its mouth rises an island of the same name, 36

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miles off. The second river is Bora, or Dregs, the next, del Campo, the fourth, S. Benedetto, the fifth, the River Angra, at the mouth of which is an island called Corisco, that is to say, thunder; and all these traffic in the same kind of merchandize as those already mentioned.

But to return to the voyage from St. Thomas. Sailing south from thence we find Cape lupo Gonzale (Cape Lopez), which is 1 degree beyond the equinoctial line, towards the Antarctic Pole, and 105 miles from the above-mentioned island. From thence ships sail with winds off land, and constantly hugging the coast, and casting anchor every day in a sheltered place, or behind some point, or in some port, they at last reach the mouths of the greatest river in Congo, called Zaire in that tongue, but which signifies I know, that is Sapi in Latin. From this point to the Port of Loanda is a distance of 180 miles. These are the two passages by sea from the Island of St. Iago (which is one of those Cape Verde Islands already mentioned), the first having but a little while ago begun to be frequented.

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## CHAPTER II.

### OF THE KINGDOM OF CONGO, AND ITS INHABITANTS.

It is now time to speak of the Kingdom of Congo, and of all that relates to it. The centre of the Kingdom of Congo is situated 7 degrees and two-thirds from the equinoctial line, towards the Antarctic pole, at the point where the City of Congo lies; so that it is in the region considered uninhabitable by the ancients, and known as the Torrid Zone; that is, the girdle of the earth, burnt by the heat of the sun.

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This, however, is a mistake, for the situation is good, the climate temperate beyond belief, and the winter much like the autumn season in Rome. The inhabitants do not wear furs, nor change their apparel, neither have they fires, nor is it colder on the mountains than in the plains. The winter is generally warmer than summer, on account of continual rainfall; and especially about two hours before and after midday the heat is almost insupportable.

The men and women are black, some approaching olive colour, with black curly hair, and others with red. The men are of middle height, and, excepting the black skin, are like the Portuguese. The pupils of the eyes are of various shades, some black, others of the colour of the sea. Their lips are not large like the negroes, and their countenances vary, like those of people in our countries, for some are stout, others thin, and they are quite unlike the negroes of Nubia and Guinea, who are hideous. The days and nights there are nearly equal, only varying a quarter of an hour all the year round. The winter in that country, speaking generally, commences at the same time as our spring, that is to say, when the sun enters the northern signs, in the month of March; and when our winter commences, and the sun enters the southern signs in the month of September, then their summer begins. During their winter the rain falls for five months almost continually, that is in April, May, June, July, and August, with few days of intermission from tremendous showers, for even the drops are so large as to be extraordinary; and by this means the earth is refreshed after the dry season, when no rain falls for six months. And when the earth is soaked with moisture, then the rivers become filled again beyond all belief, and their streams run through all the land.

The winds which blow in those regions during the above-

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named months are the same which Cæsar calls by the Greek word Etefii, that is, occurring annually. These winds are marked in the compass as blowing from north to west and also south-west. They drive the clouds to the tops of the high mountains, where, being hurled together with great force, they naturally are resolved again into water, from which it is seen that clouds settle on the loftiest heights at the time when it usually rains. Hence occurs the overflow of those rivers which rise in Ethiopia, especially that of the Nile and others, which run into the eastern and western oceans. And in the Kingdoms of Congo and Guinea, through which the Niger flows (so called by the ancients, but known in modern times as the Senegal), this river overflows at the same time as the Nile, and pours its waters towards the west, to the right of the Cape Verde Islands. The Nile flows northward from the Island of Meroe, in Egypt, watering those regions where barrenness and solitude prevail. Now as it only rains in Congo and Ethiopia at certain seasons of the year, the overflow of the rivers is not extraordinary, being no new event. But in the far off and dry countries, like Egypt, where (excepting Alexandria and that region), it never rains, it is considered marvellous that such an enormous quantity of turbid water should come from distant regions, at a set time, and without fail; thus refreshing the earth, and giving food to man and beast. On this account the ancients sacrificed to the Nile, calling it, as is told in the 4th Book of Ptolemy, ἀγαθὸς δαίμωνιος, or the good god. Even to this day certain Christians consider it a miracle, since without these waters the people would perish from hunger, as (says St. John Chrysostom) their lives depend on the rising of the river.

So that these Etesian winds, known to the Portuguese as Generali, and which blow during our summer and in those