Chapter 4

The town of Cacheu, a place of treasure, and the condition of its population.

After Cabo Roxo, the point at which we concluded the last chapter, the land to the East forms a bay which extends to the entrance of Rio de Cacheu. This makes the estuary as wide as it is dangerous, dangerous on account of many shallows and tight corners right across it, on which many ships have been lost. From here to the port, taking the estuary and river together, is 15 leagues. The settlement has two older names or titles. The first, Cacheu, was given by the natives and its etymology is not known to us. It may derive from the name of some king, just as the town on the (Windward) Coast is called Porto de Ale after the name of the king who used to live there, Ale. But if not, it will be no easy task to discover why it bears this first name. Its second name, Rio de S. Domingos, although it does not really describe a place on land, is more interesting, and of more profit to the land since it is, of course, the name of the patriarch of the holy and religious Order of Preachers. The third name is /f.14v/ incommo–ably and altogether superior to the others, to as great an extent as the Queen of Angels is superior to all created things. This name was given to the town by the captains and soldiers living there, in gratitude for the signal victory they won over the neighbouring heathen, when the Sacred Virgin fought here in the midst of her soldiers. The successful outcome being hers, inasmuch as she was mistress in the field of both armies, her name was taken (for the town) in the form, Our Lady of Victory, and this is the correct explanation of the third name of this port.

The whole site of the settlement is flat. It is rendered agreeable by the variety of trees surrounding it, large cotton-trees, palm-trees, and a similar sort of tree which bears an even greater resemblance to the coconut because its fruit, though smaller, is somewhat like a coconut — such trees are called cibes. But the spot is made less healthy by the lack of springs and streams, and the nearest water-supply is insalubrious, causing much sickness and being very inconvenient for the whole population. In extent it is about two musket-shots in length, including the district of St Anthony, a finer name for it and a very suitable one because of the variety of inhabitants and their devotion to the great Portuguese saint. A finer name, did I say? If its other name of Vila Quente (Hot-Town) refers to the burning charity of its inhabitants, then it is in no respect inferior to finer names, for anyone with that virtue is so incomparably of the first rank that the rest of us can only follow after.
Let us leave it as Vila Quente district. It is not fair to deprive it of its heat since we have found no-one who can explain the true derivation of this name, while the popular explanation, being in bad taste, it is better to be evasive and remain silent about than to offend by discussing. As I have said, the full extent in length is about two musket-shots; in width, it is only that of its houses. Most of these belong to Portuguese, and are square-shaped, large and well placed, some having an upper floor. The walls are of burnt brick and are roofed over with cibe leaves, which are very large and therefore very suitable, although they have to be renewed annually, on account of the heat which damages them in summer. Inside they have combetes, which are square, with walls like those of the house, but whose roofs are first covered with closely-set timber and then with earth. This design is most praiseworthy. Those who live in these parts should thank the man who first thought of it, for because of him the common loss of goods which on land is caused annually by fires is greatly reduced. Similarly (by equal forethought) they could avoid many very great losses at sea, especially on this coast, if the contractors did not so notably neglect to provide vessels for it, to comply with a specific decree of His Majesty: their lack of compliance, which is culpable as it is deliberate, deprives them of the right to large grants in compensation. In this district the houses are almost all round, although of the same material as was mentioned. Here are also living a number of Portuguese and other whites as guests (?) but others have their own houses in which tenants (?) also live. This is the district principally inhabited by common people and persons in employment, all of them free persons, who maintain themselves by their daily work and wages, being carpenters, sailors and men in other sea-going trades.

Having discussed the sort of persons who live in Vila Quente, now let us discuss those who live in Vila Fria (Cold-Town), so that there can be no discrimination to which the envious can point. Cacheu has all that is needful for a well-organised community. On the spiritual side it is in the hands of pastors of outstanding and superior wisdom; on the temporal side, in all those respects relating to the preservation of life and to good conduct it has no need to envy Europe. Since those who make their homes there have large houses and varied lines of commerce, which they conduct in the interior as well as by sea, they are not only in the main very well-off but they all follow a very glittering life-style. (a)

(a) Character of the settlers. See Chapter 5.
In liberality to themselves they are not sparing, as can be seen from the way they treat themselves to clothes. They cut up silks to provide articles of costly dress, or some use less expensive material for their different clothes, material such as damask from the Indies or China in several qualities, this material being more suitable for a land where English cloths and suchlike are intolerable. If they are particular in this matter of dress, they are no less so in equipping themselves with means of defence and attack, such apparel as breastplates, etc., and daggers, shields, swords and other weapons. When the countryside permits the use of horses there is no lack of /f.15/ enthusiasm for this exercise. One man who does this is Gaspar Carneiro, a native of Vila da Santarem: I shall not describe in detail his skill because it is widely recognised, as are his nobility and the valour of his generous heart. What shall I say of the way of life of these people? It has been much talked about, and even today the banquets and exquisite feasts they used to give and still give are the subject of talk, for they spent on each a great outpouring of money. But if they are generous to themselves they are not less so to their friends and proteges, and to anyone else, since charity by its nature cannot be selective. (b) Our Society has experienced to the full the extreme generosity displayed towards it by Captain Sebastian Fernandes Cação, who used to welcome the sons of Ignatius scattered through these parts will all the hallmarks of generosity, and so liberally and lavishly that it was easier for the padres to bear privations than to escape the importunate charity of their admirer, a charity which tried to force them to accept great gifts from his hands, though they only took the little that was necessary for life. Two years ago the same thing happened to one of our order who returned in ill-health from Sierra Leone, the generosity being that of Captain Baltasar Lopes from Setuval. He provided him with all he needed, not only while he was awaiting a passage to the Island, but also for the journey, giving him this on his departure. I could name other gentlemen whose fine reputation for similar acts of charity I prefer to conceal because my silence speaks louder than words.

(b) Character of the settlers. See Chapter 5.
When in 1609 the blessed Father João Delgado of our Society the order and harmony in the settlement, the attention given to correct behaviour, and the Christian customs and Christian exercise of charity there, points to which this saintly man contributed his influence in his lifetime - and no less after his death, since he remained as outstanding in the recollections of all, as he was and still is in the eyes of God, on account of his excellent and heroic virtues - Father Delgado said, said with reason: "Gentlemen, it does not seem to me that all this for the portrait of the Little Babylon I was told about." I consider that padre's experience and his conclusion can still stand today in refutation of those who, carried away more by passion than by concern, or to express it better, drawing their information more from the shades than from the light, apply to all the settlers in Guinea the infamous names of lancados and tangos maos. These names properly apply only to those who, not content with cooperating with the idolatrous heathen in the practices as sacrifices of their false religion, erect huts and build pedestals for their infernal idols. The lancados are truly 'run-aways', and not only from the Lord's grace, a precious jewel their souls are as far from as are close to divine justice. These are truly tangos maos, for at the repast of guilt they not only snatch the dish but fill themselves like starving dogs, yet they remain famished for the Word of God. They are pursued by guilt and fear of punishment, since they are not content merely to repeat falls from grace; instead, and for the worse, they persist in sinning, so that by the bad example of their lives they discredit the preachers of the Gospel faith in the eyes of the heathen. (c) I can say more about them. They are evil itself, they are idolaters, perjurers, defiers of sacrifices, libertines, thieves who steal reputation, credit and good name from innocents as well as property, and also traitors - for they run away in order to help pirates, leading their ships to those places where our

(c) Nemo quod bonum est loquitur; nullus est qui agat poenitentiam super peccato suo dicens: quod feci? Omnes conversi sunt ad cursum suum quasi equus impetu vadens ad proelium. | They spake not aright: no man repenteth of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into battle. Jeremiah 8:6
vessels are in the habit of anchoring and trading. They are people without understanding of right and wrong, without respect for anything other than their own appetites, and are the very spawn of hell. (d) When the epithet 'infamous' is heard in this midden of the world, for a midden undoubtedly exists in this Ethiopia of ours, it is as appropriate for these people as it is far-fetched, even at the most malicious, for the noble Christian spirit of the worthy and most devoted soldiers of the Lady of Victory, her sons, a spirit which is the glory of the court of the Queen of Angels. This will suffice to indicate the character of the vassals of Mary, Our Lady.

Now let us discuss the size of the population. The settlement shelters some 1,500 persons, counting together Portuguese and natives of Santiago Island, of whom about 500 or so are fighting men. Some of these persons have truly deserved well from the point of view of this river, but no less do they deserve well from the royal munificence, because of the services which in peace and war they have performed, for God and His Majesty, in company with the slaves each possesses and with their various other retainers, including certain natives who put more trust in us than in their own parents and relatives. For reasons of self-interest (e) — the abominable idol of Ethiopia — these natives are attached to us to such an extent that at every opportunity they extend help and loyalty in such a natural fashion that it is astonishing. This has been the case when wars with their own people have occurred. In 1590 there was a very sharp war. This was in the time of that apostolic man, the Reverend Father Frei Cipriano of the order of Our Lady of Carmel, (f) who was endowed by the Lord no less with singular heroic virtues than with great zeal for the conversion

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(d) An non viae eorum viae inferni? Proverbs 7:9; Book of Wisdom 2:5 Are not their ways the ways to hell? perhaps misquotation of Proverbs 7:27.

(e) Self-interest, the encompassing idol of ignorant men.

(f) Frei Cipriano, the Visitor, a notable musician: he brought the image of Our Lady of Victory copied from that of the Carmel at Lisbon, he built the church and hospital, he adorned for everything.
of souls, and who was here on visitation on behalf of the Bishop of Santiago, D. Pedro Brandão. The cause of this warfare was the ill-treatment and the affronts continually afflicted by the king and the other heathen on those of our people who for the purpose of trading in the interior used to live there, within a gunshot of the town. Because of this they decided to move away gradually, first seeking and obtaining permission from the king, on the pretext that they were going to build combates in which to store goods from Portugal and to help the captains in making up their ledgers. These poor fellows invented all this, in order to see if they could find in the Lord 'a present help in troubles', for in those days their troubles were great, taking the form of assaults on them on the highways and various other insults from the heathen gentry who, simply because they had crushed a few stalks of their rice when this first appeared above-ground, snatched their hats and sometimes their cloaks. And when our people were incensed by this pointless behaviour and raised a complaint, they used to beat them with sticks.

Divine justice comes slowly but surely. The Lord recollected the affliction of His people, who are scattered over these parts more because of their hatred of material poverty and other limitations on an honourable existence than by any desire for the abominable company of the heathen. All of them recognise the Saviour's name and fight under the royal standard of the Cross. They are not lançados: this epithet of the backwoods does not apply to them. The Good Jesus shed His blood for them and He inspired His soldiers against the army of the enemy when it came marching against them on the orders of the king. Pagan soldiers to the number of 1,200 or even 1,500, followed their general, Sampassão, who today is the king. The battle had already begun in the hearts of the savages, for they had been incited to war solely by the greed of the king and the claims he made. This was demonstrated by the embassy he sent to the Portuguese, whose only point of discussion was that they should return to the customary trading places further inland. A heart insulted will to nothing defer. Remembering what they had suffered, our men, 50 whites with 200 servants, prepared for battle and struck at the enemy. They fought so valiantly over the space of six hours that little by little they got the better of the savages, putting some of them to flight while others were severely wounded and 20

(g) Frei Cipriano encouraged the soldiers in this battle, and it is said that he fired a gun, and that with his skill as a captain of both church and state he was of great assistance.

(h) One night our men made a fire as they broke the defences, and by its light they were able to strike all the enemy with their arrows.
left for dead. Of our men, only one was killed and only 4 were wounded,
compared with 80 of them (?). The captain, Gaspar de Setuval, who at the
present time is serving as factor, was outstanding for his skill and the
wisdom of his counsel. (i) Nor must I forget the courage of Diogo Serrão,
a native of Santiago Island. Not having time to load his gun in order to
drive off an enemy soldier who was trying to slice his head off with a
cutlass, he seized it by the point of the barrel and struck the savage
a blow which laid him dead at his feet. No less distinguished in the
battle were other residents of the port not here named. A Christian army
whose Flower in the Field/patron is the Mother of God can expect no less
success, she alone being the reason for the victory, she through whose
hands the Lord wholly dispenses His favours to His own. It was His will
that there should be built a temple in which there would be invocation of
Our Lady of Victory, so that, as well as preserving to eternity the name
of His most holy Mother in this the leading and busiest port of Ethiopia
Minor, through the name there should be perpetuated among future generations
the remembrance of His singular goodness.

Although the victory was gained, we were henceforth apprehensive
of heathen rebellion. This is why the moat was made which runs around and
protects the settlement. From then on watch was kept, and for some time
the inhabitants remained secure. Then followed a reconciliation on the part
of the heathen with our people, self-interest being dominant with them.
This reconciliation was confirmed by an oath, for which they killed a white
puppy and a cock with the superstitious ceremonies they employ on solemn
occasions. Our people also took an oath and promised to respect it utterly
as long as the /f.17v/ savages did not fail in theirs. Once the agreement
had been accepted and approved by both parties, musical instruments such
as drums and flutes began to be played. To these harmonious sounds, and
with other festive demonstrations, everyone went marching to the factor's
house, where they were received with all the tokens of goodwill. Until

(i) António Rodrigues, brother of Luís Lopes Rebelo, knocked down
two with the butt of his musket.
that period there had been no capitão de guerra (military commander) and no need for one, but immediately after (these events) Captain Brás Soares then the commander in Santiago Island, recommended for the post Diogo Serrão. This man, nine or ten years later, was killed when lending assistance against the Falupos, in support of D. Bernardo, the Christian king of the natives, (j) dying gloriously together with 20 of his companions and some slaves. Death buried him but could not bury the memory of his heroic deeds (which lingered) in the traditions of those who came after.

Although peace was for a time agreed on and established, it did not last long. The heathen retained a capacity to behave unjustly and the liberties of our people suffered greatly. The nobles continued their assaults, and they invented new chais (excuses for extortion) and sought opportunities to start up wars again. The settlers hid their feelings as temporised as much as they could. The heathen renewed their attacks on the highways and they tied up their (our) slaves, until our people could longer put up with such unreasonable treatment and went to war again, which led to the heathen starting great fires. Yet though fire is feared by an unthinking creation it showed respect and reverence for the house of the Sacred Virgin, which was not scorched in the least. It was also, and still is, a matter of intense admiration that not a single white man was killed in military operations within the settlement, and only a few were killed outside it. Gain and favour are always dispensed as generously by a kindly protector, such as that of Our Lady of Victory. /f.18/

(j) D. Bernardo discouraged Serrão from going, because he considered that the chances of failure were high: he did not give way to him for reasons of self-interest, but those who know the history best say that Serrão won (permission) and stopped the argument (?)