Chapter 6
The port of Bichangor, its site and the fertility of the land, and the heathen of the district

This town of Bichangor is situated five leagues up-river from Cacheu, at a point where it can only be reached by water. While the Heavens have been unduly mean to it in awarding it a not very agreeable site, they have been equally generous in giving it advantages in almost every other particular. Bichangor /f.21v/ is a sampler of the favours of nature. Here the flowers smile, here little birds in woods composed of a variety of trees sing in harmony, to the sound of the clearest water running from the spring. This is especially delightful for the House of the Sacred Virgin of Jesus, a Divine Olive-tree standing in its beauty amid its surrounding meadows, or, to express it a better way, a lily planted here among thorns. It was the will of the Lord that the founder of this miraculous house should be a priest, a man of excellent example, known no less for his virtues and his zeal for the conversion of souls than for his evangelical teaching, a man who served a large part of Ethiopia as a true apostle of the Gospel, a man who was as much divorced from the temporal as he was united to the eternal, as much loosened from the ties of earth as he was wholly committed to those of heaven. Because he was such a man and because of the high opinion people held of him, he was thrice sent to the Port of Our Lady of Victory as Visitor for these parts. It was here that this man of religion(a) finished his course, here that the Lord called him, here that he took him to receive the blessed prize of his holy labours and excellent service, the most certain external signs of his gaining eternal life being demonstrated in the beauty and joy of his face, as if he had already begun to participate in that glory to which we believe he was taken. Among the legacies which he left to the Sacred Queen of Angels at Bichangor, the chief one was his own soul, an inheritance which Our Lady prizes when the soul is that of a just man, not only because it belongs to her Jesus, but because it resembles a nosegay, a varied bunch of flowers, gathered in the orchard garden of the Predestined in this lower world in order to be presented to the whole of heaven. He (also) left the house that body of his which had served it in his lifetime, and great efforts were made to fulfil the intention of the legatee on this point, but as this was not the wish of the Lady of Victory it was in her house that he was buried, with full funeral ceremony. And great was the sorrow of the sheep for the shepherd.

(a) Death of Padre Miguel Simões.
If this lily was planted among thorns, it was nevertheless surrounded by variety, as represented by the residents, for whites and half-whites live here with the blacks. The colour of the first points to purity of the Virgin; the off-white colour of the second to the labours of Our Lady's 63 years of pilgrimage here on earth; and the third /f.22/ represents the outward blackness of Mary, that Nigra sum \( \sqrt{\text{Black (and comely) am I, Song of Solomon, 1:4}} \) received from Adam. This blackness is outward only, since the paintbrush of sin never reached her, for if it approached her it did not do so fast enough not to be repelled by grace and equally by the scarlet of charity. The latter is largely reflected in the House of Our Lady, in the most ingenious and delightful decorations and pictures, a pious supporter having devoted his art to this aspect of the building. The holy House does not lack ornaments and lamps habitually burning, any more than it lacks the charitable gifts which the ministers of the holy sacrifices receive from the stewards and devotees of Our Lady, who present them with generous alms.

I cannot remain silent regarding the sincerity of the gratitude of the land to the Sacred Virgin for her singular kindness in giving them a site so convenient in all respects. Its pleasing view is of trees of different kinds, which form a fine wood in the direction of the water's edge. A river flows from the South West, emerging from a source in a bubbling spring, and it pours gracefully into the sea through sandbanks and shady woods. As well as completely overshadowing it, the woods, by their welcome view, invite thoughts that when holy and on the subject of eternal deliverance and the epoch of Glory, as were the thoughts of the Prophet in the Psalter, are well employed. Such were those of that holy religious, my beloved (friend), Padre João Delgado, \( ^{(b)} \) a man truly apostolic, of exceptional discretion and learning, to whom, in recompense for the services of her devotees, the Sacred Virgin was pleased to give a tomb in her own house. I could speak of his excellent virtues; but what can I say to enlarge on a man who has continually progressed in God's eye, who for this reason alone is undoubtedly a great man, as are all those who are raised to face the Lord? Being no more, even though here it is easy to imagine otherwise, his full portrait will be presented (?). While he was here the padre continually increased his loving care and zeal for the salvation of souls, and he drew all after him. The power of his love was such that the savages, and even their leading men, came to

\( ^{(b)} \) Padre João Delgado of the Society of Jesus.
meet him and called on him frequently, captivated by his gentle, meek nature. When the saint was entertaining one of them, and looked at him with thoughts of eternity and its joys, and then reflected how far the savage was from heavenly understanding and enlightenment, he wept. The pagan king, seeing the heartfelt tributes of love fall from the eyes of the blessed saint, was saddened /f.22v/, for he misunderstood the padre's thoughts; but when the apostle explained their meaning, he was satisfied. The Rambadim, the King of Bichangor, had come to visit our man of religion because he was very attached to him. The padre engaged him in a discussion about the conversion of his soul and he was so moved that he would have been converted to our holy faith if the Lord had not tightened the reins of life over him. One day the savage said to him: "Padre, the harmony of the Saviour's religion appeals to me; but I do not wish to offend Him further or to deceive you, since I do not feel myself yet persuaded by the heavens to give up my wives,(c) of whom I have more than 400, or abandon the superstitious ceremonies of the idols which enable me to govern my land". The padre remained patient and put the matter in God's hand. Nevertheless the king is a great friend of ours and he has a good disposition. His brothers, nephews and kinsmen have already been bathed in the sacred waters of baptism and are of service to the whites. The sacred image of the Mother of Jesus, to whom the savage is so devoted that he keeps her feast each year by offering a cow, will take care to obtain from Jesus for him her son's singular benefit.

As we have already discussed the settlers, let us now discuss the regular trade of the port. Apart from the great quantity of foodstuffs, the chief trade there is in slaves, who are bought from the king and gentry of the land. Otherwise merchants of another kind have permission to make their way through all the lands, their merchandise being in my view more circumspect.(d) The heathen closest at hand have by now been corrupted by regular trade with us, as I stated in the previous chapter.

(c) His machanju did not recognise them in a group, they being so many.

(d) Jewish merchants. Category of free heathen. Being Jewish, live only by trading. Our people here have a good opinion of them in that they sell slaves only by day and openly, after buying them at various fairs. They argue that the legal position is better because by trading with these men it becomes a matter of purchased goods. But who will relieve us of every point of scruple, since the limited veracity and the covetousness of these heathen give a criminal aspect to everything(?). Muddy waters.
They are Banhus. In general those in the interior are always the better disposed. They are excellent farmers. Their country is about 20 leagues long and 12 wide, and it has a chief every 4-5 leagues. All these chiefs recognise and pay tribute to the sons of Massatamba who today possess the kingdom of Casamansa, the kings of this house being of the family of the emperor. The king with most power and authority over these (Banhu) heathen is the king of Bichangor, a town which lies two leagues from Buguendo, in the land of the same people. Although they are excellent farmers and raise stock of various kinds, cows, goats and so on, they nevertheless use make good use of the verbs 'grab' and 'steal'. In other words, they are great thieves, so much so that if those watching the stock become covert, they take the animals as they graze. They undermine the combetes belonging to the Portuguese, carrying off all they can, and not only clothes and other goods, for sometimes they seduce away the more 'bush' slaves and give them shelter. However the kings are punctilious in punishing crime, for if the offence is proved and the criminal known, then he becomes the slave for life of the victim; and if he is caught red-handed and killed, no more is said. At this point it is appropriate to explain how Our Lady of Jesus has acquired the epithet 'miracle-worker'.

The House of Our Lady

Passing over those other benefits which individuals devoted to the house receive, I will relate a miracle which happened in it. When Father Miguel Simões, with the help of charitable gifts from all, founded this House, he sought the goodwill and permission of the king, his sons and the gentry. In this the devout initiator of the institution behaved with great prudence, since he was a man with experience of how important it is to have the favours of the great and how necessary to obtain their goodwill. For with these people it is certain that what brings a matter to a successful conclusion is, after the divine grace, the grace they find in those who approach them. The padre endeavoured greatly to achieve this, and so he completed the task to the great satisfaction of the king. The Banhus are aggressive, and they become deeply involved when the matter concerns the commerce of their own salvation. One of these Banhu entered the House of Our Lady with ill intent, not seeking that remedy of grace which Our Lady, because she is His mother, is privileged also to dispense. The wretched heathen had nothing worthy to do there, his perverse intent being to become a sacrilegious thief. His secret was God's, and only He knew it. Next morning the faithful came to greet the Virgin. All of them were taken aback by a novel sight, the Banhu so helpless that he could do nothing
for himself. There he was, though free (from bonds) yet as if a captive. His prison was merely the House of Our Lady, his bonds only her eyes, which had only needed to take note of the Bahu for him to become her prisoner. And so it happened that when the matter was reported to the king, he treated the man as a thief, stating that he believed that he had gone to the church in that capacity(e) and he then presented the holy house with ornaments./f.23v/ When the man would not publicly admit it, sufficient clear evidence was found in the damage he had done to the railings of the church, cutting through one of them in order to carry out his scheme, which was nothing else than the sacrilegious plunder of the objects dedicated to the Sacred Virgin, and some say that he had already parcelled them up. The sacrilegious Bahu would doubtless have carried them away if Our Lady, when she captured him with her eyes, had not closed his with a sleep so deep that it was seen as a marvel, not only by the youth who at this period was paid to light the lamp and care for the holy House and who came there in the morning to carry out his duties, but also by the rest of the faithful. As I said above, the king was much enraged and wanted to kill his Bahu subject, in view of his ingratitude to Our Lady. For his part, the king, though a heathen showed much respect for her. On her solemn festival, to the sound of trumpets and drums, he arrived with his brothers and kinsmen. The king was mounted on a horse, since he always owned between 6 and 10 of these which the Portuguese had brought either from (Santiago) Island or from the (Windward) Coast and had sold to him. The king would have (killed the Bahu) if the merchants of the port and those devoted to Our Lady had not successfully interceded for him; and they persuaded the king that he could not serve the House better than by giving it possession of the sacrilegious Bahu. Since the man was already a captive of Our Lady, it would not be right to take him away from her. The savage was much impressed by these arguments which he considered very powerful ones, and he found in them such opportunity for grace that he granted the man his life, and also did Our Lady some small service, by giving her as her prize the man who had intended to make a prize of her goods. As a result of this miracle, the king gained a high opinion of the great merits of Our Lady, to whom he increasingly showed affection and respect. In this holy House are buried several of the Christian sons and kinsmen of this king, who was himself such a sincere friend of the Portuguese and the whites.

(e) A capacity which at that time was held in more esteem, when it was acquired without a sense of guilt (?) .