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*The word "martyr" is used in the following pages only in the popular and general sense and is not meant to anticipate any decision of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*



The Martyrdom of Silveira  
from: *Kerkelyke Historie van de Gheheele Wereldt*  
by CORNELIUS HAZART, Antwerp, 1668

# Preface

PERHAPS never in history have people in every part of the world been thinking so much about Africa as they are in this year 1960. It is, therefore, a good moment to recall the life and death of Gonçalo da Silveira, a saintly missionary of outstanding courage who, in his search for souls, made his way up the Zambesi 300 years before Livingstone did so. He was also the first European of whom we have detailed and accurate knowledge to penetrate into the interior of Southern Africa and to enter the country we now call Rhodesia. His mission led to his death, and so he is the first of the many Europeans who gave their lives in the service of the blacks of Southern Africa. When so much is being said about the Europeans who oppressed them, it is only right to keep in respectful memory Silveira, and others like him, who uncomplainingly served and died for them.

My thanks are due to the Rhodesiana Society for undertaking the publication of the work, and to the Very Reverend Terence Gorrigan, S.J., Superior Regular of the English Jesuits in Southern Rhodesia, and to Fr. Desmond Ford, S.J., Rector of St. George's College, Salisbury, for continual support and encouragement. Fr. George Carry, S.J., of St. George's College, also supplied the excellent map of Silveira's journeys on page 52.

Mr. Manuel d'Almeida, of Lisbon, gave invaluable help over the Portuguese part of Silveira's life, while the staff of the National Archives in Salisbury were outstandingly courteous and obliging in helping with the African part. Finally I must thank Messrs. Longmans for allowing me to quote the lines on page 14 from Fr. James Brodrick's *Progress of the Jesuits*, and the Hispanic Society of America for leave to quote the lines from Mr. Leonard Bacon's translation of Camoens' *Os Lusíads* on page 9.

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May 8th, 1960.

# I. The Preparation

Gonçalo da Silveira was born on February 26, 1526, at Almeirim on the Tagus, about 40 miles north-east of Lisbon. Date and place are both significant. Almeirim was a royal residence which the kings of Portugal sometimes used when they were hunting. Five miles away, on the northern bank of the Tagus, was the more important palace of Santarem, where some of the decisions had been made 100 years earlier that had led to the capture of the Moroccan fortress of Ceuta, on the southern shore of the Straits of Gibraltar, and thence to the slow Portuguese progress down and round the African coast towards their dominion of the East. Fourteen months before Gonçalo was born, Vasco de Gama, the man who was to make that dominion a reality, and the first to reach India round the Cape of Good Hope, had died at Goa, the capital of the empire which he had built up for his king.

This Portuguese enterprise and ambition was to condition Gonçalo's missionary life. For it was the search for trade and wealth that opened the sea route to Asia, and in doing so, that to East Africa as well. It is often said that the missionary opens the way into new land, that the trader follows the missionary, and that dominion comes at the end. In East Africa this was not so. It was the traders who made settlements along the coast, and groped their way into the dark interior. Gonçalo and the missionaries followed and Portuguese rule came at the end.

The Portuguese at the time were hardy, courageous and persevering; they were also ardent Catholics whose faith had grown keen and tenacious, though harsh as well, during the centuries of war against the Mohammedans of the Iberian Peninsula. Their crusading spirit was to lead them to take eagerly and gladly to the militant Catholicism of the new Society of Jesus. At Gonçalo's birth this had yet to be founded, for in 1526, only five years had passed since St. Ignatius had been wounded at Pamplona, and had made the resolution to give himself heart and soul to God's service. At the moment when his future follower was born, he was about 600 miles away at Barcelona, on the other side of the Peninsula, where he had returned after his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and where he was laboriously setting himself to the studies which should prepare him for Alcala University. But by the time that Gonçalo was of age, the Society of Jesus was a reality, and if it was the enterprise and vigour of Portugal in her greatest age that was to condition his life, it was the spirituality of the Society of Jesus that was to mould it.

On both sides Gonçalo was of the aristocracy, and his being born at Almeirim was due to his parents accompanying the Court there during a progress from the capital. The ruler of Portugal at the time was John III, the last king of her great age, for with the death of his successor and grandson, Sebastian, when fighting against the Moors at Kasr al Kebir in Morocco, the most renowned period of Portuguese history ended. John III's father had been Manuel the Fortunate, during whose reign the main part of the Portuguese overseas empire had been built up. So Gonçalo was born at the height of his country's most splendid age.

His father, Luis da Silveira, is spoken of by Godigno, Gonçalo's first biographer, as Count of Sortela and Captain of the Royal Guard, which, he very understandably adds, the Portuguese considered a position of the very highest trust. His mother, Beatrice Coutinho, was a daughter of the Marshal of the realm. So there must have been reasonable hopes that family influence would ensure him a distinguished career, even though he was the tenth child of the marriage. But his mother died in giving him birth and his father soon afterwards. He was, however, spared the greater part of the unhappiness of an orphaned childhood by being brought up by a much older sister, who was married to the Marquis of Tavora and Lord of Mogadouro. This is in the north-east corner of the country, near the Spanish frontier. Both the Marquis and his wife seem to have been very kind to their orphaned kinsman.

The industry of Godigno searched out such stories of Gonçalo's childhood as, in his opinion, showed the first flowering of sanctity; such, for instance, of his refusal to drink wine, even when he was only seven years old! So far did this resolution go that he would not even wash out his mouth with it after losing his first teeth, when he was told that it would harden his gums. A story of his truthfulness anticipates that of another historic character, better known in English-speaking countries. He and his brother, Alvaro, were brought up before the Marquis for some offence. Gonçalo owned up to it, but Alvaro would not. So the Marquis stormed at Gonçalo that not only did he do wrong, but he impudently and unblushingly acknowledged it; to this Gonçalo answered, probably with less calmness than Godigno's account indicates, that he was sorry and ashamed for what he had done, but that he would be still more ashamed if he had tried to escape the punishment he deserved by telling a lie. The story sounds smug to us, but in essentials it rings true. As will be seen, Gonçalo had his defects, but they were at the opposite extreme to cowardice and lack of honesty. All his life he faced up to his difficulties and, as far as possible, fought his way through them. His weakness rather lay in too great readiness to hunt them out.

When he was old enough to go to school, Gonçalo was sent across the Duoro into Spain to what Godigno inaccurately calls the Franciscan monastery of Santa Margarida, where he quickly showed an inclination towards religious life. Indeed the Franciscans thought that he lived like a religious already, except- that he did not wear a habit. It is possible that they did not know that he was showing an indiscreet earnestness in his studies, of which no religious Superior would have approved, by continually working on far into the night. But his lack of discretion was accompanied by a charming and tactful act of charity. Since he was an aristocrat, he had, even while at school, been given a valet to undress him and see him into bed. Tired by his master's prolonged studies, the valet used to fall asleep. So Gonçalo, not wishing to wake him up, quietly put out the light and went to sleep, fully clothed, in an armchair, and did not go to bed at all.

When he was 17 he was thought to be old enough to go to a university and, obviously, the only one suitable to a Portuguese nobleman such as he, was Coimbra. It was only six years since King John III had moved the University there from Lisbon, and he had spent much money in drawing to it the best

scholars from all over Europe; strange to say, these included at one time the dour, rebellious Scot, George Buchanan. At the time that Gonçalo went to Coimbra there was another student there two years older than he, who was later to become immortal. This was Luis de Camoens. Their lives were to cross several times in later years, for from 1549 to 1552, Camoens was living in Lisbon, at a time when Gonçalo was one of the city's most noted preachers. In the latter year Camoens sailed for Goa, where he got to know the Governor, Francisco Barreto, who was later to be Gonçalo's penitent. Barreto sent Camoens to Macao, the Portuguese trading station near the present Hong Kong. He returned from here to Goa in 1559, just at the end of Gonçalo's tenure of office as Provincial of India. A few months later Gonçalo left for Africa, and the two men never met again. But Camoens later brought him into his *Lusiads*, and wrote a sonnet in his honour, and so the bond between the two, begun at Coimbra, was forged for all time. The theme of the sonnet is Gonçalo's death:

"Stop, passer by — who calls me? 'Tis the claim  
 Of a new memory, heard of ne'er before;  
 Of one who finite love gave o'er  
 For infinite divine and brilliant fame.  
 Who's he that sheds such lustre round his name?  
 He who shrank not to shed his blood of yore  
 In honour of the exalted flag he bore,  
 Captain of Christ, to love whom was his aim.  
 Thrice blessed end, thrice blessed sacrifice,  
 Made to his God and to the world as well.  
 So high a call I'll sing with loudest breath;  
 More canst thou teach the world his name to prize;  
 His life by brilliant tokens did foretell  
 He would be worthy of such a holy death."

In the lines in the *Lusiads*, Thetis is speaking to Vasco de Gama about the Monomotapa's empire in which Gonçalo will one day be martyred and says:

Benomotapa's vast realm see appear  
 Where the black savages all naked go.  
 Gonçalo death and hateful insult here  
 For the glory of his Holy Faith must know.<sup>1</sup>

But Gonçalo can only have remained at the University for a very short time, for we read of his entering the Society of Jesus on June 9, 1543<sup>2</sup> He was one of the first recruits which the Society received directly from Portugal, for it was only three years since it had first come to the country. But the Portuguese Province was blessed in its foundation, for the first Jesuits to go there were two of St. Ignatius' earliest companions, St. Francis Xavier, and Fr. Simon Rodriguez. King John III had asked for some to be sent to help in spreading the Faith in Portugal's eastern possessions, and this had been St. Ignatius' generous answer. On April 7, 1541, Xavier sailed for India, but King John had taken so strong a fancy to Fr. Rodriguez that he refused to let him go. So he stayed on at Lisbon, and the Portuguese Province of the Society grew up around him. It did so very vast indeed, and within 12 years

it had 318 members, a third of all the Jesuits then in existence.<sup>3</sup> In 1543, three of them were sent to start a house at Coimbra, and at first they were laughed at as foreign, poverty-stricken and eccentric; but success came quickly and one of the first to be fired by the words and example of these new religious was Gonçalo.

Fr. Diogo Miron, who was Rector of the Coimbra house and who was to follow Simon Rodriguez as Provincial of Portugal, anticipated trouble. The Marquis of Tavora would not be pleased that his young brother-in-law should connect himself with an order which was still new, untried and of doubtful respectability. But Gonçalo was determined, and so, with the approval of Fr. Miron, he left the monastery of Santa Cruz at Coimbra, where he had hitherto lived, and vanished to a distant place, where he made a long and fervent retreat. He wanted to make up his mind about the life he was going to lead, and also to get courage to serve God faithfully whatever the choice might be. The retreat decided him; on his return to Coimbra he went straight to the Jesuit noviciate. Fr. Godigno has kept the names of three other Portuguese nobles who joined about the same time, Rodrigo Manerio, Leao Enriquez and Luis Gonçalo da Camera.

But the Marquis of Tavora was not to submit to defeat so easily. Godigno describes graphically how he and a supporting band of relatives and sympathetic religious presented themselves at the noviciate and demanded to see Gonçalo. As he had got a letter from the king to reinforce his demand, Fr. Miron could make little resistance. Gonçalo was summoned and exposed to a barrage of blandishments and scoldings, ending with the advice that if he had to join a religious order, he should at least choose one more suited to the nobility of his family.

But Gonçalo, ardent and enthusiastic at all times, and now fired by the Spiritual Exercises, received in these words just the cue he needed. Nobility, he said, was the last thing he wanted. He was not entering religious life for the sake of worldly reputation; nothing would please him better than to live in the Society of Jesus, despised and unknown.

In face of resistance at least as determined as his own, the Count of Tavora could do no more; he and his supporters went away and allowed Gonçalo to spend the rest of his noviciate without their interference.

Gonçalo lived for 13 years as a Jesuit in Portugal before going to India, and this was the time in which his character as a religious was formed, and in which he went through his professional studies. The first years of the Portuguese Province of the Society witnessed some violent contrasts. The many who entered it had all the enthusiasm and relentless determination of their race, the kind of determination that had driven Vasco de Gama and Albuquerque to build up an empire in the East, but which at the same time made them such terrible and unrelenting foes to all who stood in their way.

To Gonçalo and others like him, the most immediate obstacle to their fuller service of God and to bringing others to Him was their human weakness, and so they fought a merciless war against themselves. The mortifications by which they tried to overcome their weakness almost surpassed what is credible and certainly what was prudent. The Provincial, Fr. Simon Rodriguez, was



hardly likely to restrain them. He was the most wayward of all St. Ignatius's companions, a man of sudden enthusiasms, now burning to work in Brazil, now in India and now wanting to stay in Lisbon and work in the court of the king of Portugal. He was loved by his subjects but was more notable for devotion than for obedience. He understood little of this himself and had difficulty in teaching it to his subjects. It was the waywardness of his Portuguese followers which consequently, two years after Gonçalo left Coimbra, led St. Ignatius to send to the scholastics there one of the most famous documents he ever wrote, his *Letter on Obedience*.

It is hard to resist the impression that Simon Rodriguez's indiscreet government left some traces on Gonçalo which he was to keep for the rest of his life. Though his novice master was the wise Fr. Miron, we read of Gonçalo during this period of his life appearing among the Community one morning with his eyebrows shaved off, and at another pretending to be mad so as to bring down on himself the general contempt which he thought he deserved. The taking of his first vows does not seem to have cured him of his eccentricities. Three years later he was lending a hand in building a new college which the Society was putting up at Coimbra, and at times he had to go about his work looking more like a labourer than a cleric, or a gentleman of the aristocracy. On occasions he became a carrier of bricks, stone, or mortar, and at others he took charge of a crude mule-cart. Such work would cause little or no embarrassment today, but it was very different in sixteenth-century Portugal. Once, when he was cheerfully driving his cart, he came across his brother Alvaro, who years before had been his companion in trouble with the Marquis of Tavora. Alvaro shamefacedly looked the other way. But Gonçalo enthusiastically added to his embarrassment by shouting out and driving his mule onward with his stick, thus calling general attention to himself. Such lack of consideration for those nearest to him is hard for us to understand today. Once, he told another brother, whom high lineage may well have made very self-complacent, and who was certainly repelled by the squalor in which Gonçalo then lived, that he would rather be verminous than be a count. Also when his sister, Philippa, who had been a mother to him when he was an orphaned infant, asked him to come and stay with her, he refused and it took an order from his Rector to make him give way.

We must allow much for a Portuguese of the Renaissance, who spoke and acted with a spontaneity and a frankness which is foreign to an Anglo-Saxon of the twentieth. This was even true of the sixteenth-century Englishman, as is well known to any who have had much occasion to study their letters, and much more so of the men of the South. Moreover the hagiographical style of the past tended to single out and cherish what was out of the ordinary, in the belief that it showed high sanctity. But when all allowance is made, it does seem that Gonçalo acquired during these years — if he had not already possessed it — a certain hardness which he was never entirely to lose. Had Fr. Simon Rodriguez given more enlightened direction to his subjects, Gonçalo might have mellowed and shown more humanity and gentleness. For he was ready enough to accept and obey authority himself, however shy many of his Portuguese brethren might be in doing so. His novice master wrote to St.

Ignatius about him: "We have with us here one of the nobility, Gonçalo da Silveira by name . . . a young man of sound and sober judgment, born to do great things. He has come to realise the truths of eternity, and has been stirred by such thoughts. He seems to have them stamped on his heart. He is strong and robust in body and needs to be watched and restrained in his excessive austerities. But he is very tractable and responsive when corrected. He possesses remarkable gifts."<sup>4</sup> Later Gonçalo showed veneration for Fr. Jerome Nadal, one of St. Ignatius's most loved and trusted companions, who entered so much into his spirit that he is called by Fr. Brodrick his *alter ego*.<sup>5</sup> When speaking about him, Gonçalo shows a most respectful and humble reverence. "When I look upon this sweetest Father and Master, Jerome Nadal," he wrote, "I see him always the self-same, fixed and immovable in the composure of holiness, in wise charity, in prudent activity, in purest kindness, in humblest liberty of heart, in devoted and provident longanimity, in heroic and simple sanctity."<sup>6</sup>

t But though Gonçalo does not seem to have had that mellowness which more prudent government and direction might have given him, there can be no doubt about his fortitude and, indeed, his heroism. A few months before he took his last vows as a Jesuit at Lisbon, St. Francis Xavier had died on the island of Chang Chwen off the Chinese coast. Since he had left for India, 11 years before, one Portuguese after another had followed him, burning with zeal to bring knowledge of Christ to the infidels, and glad if needs be, to give their lives for His sake. The first Jesuit martyr, Fr. Antonio Criminale, had been put to death in 1549 on the Fishery Coast of India, and this increased the desire to go to the Indies. But those who thus volunteered did not underestimate the hardships that lay before them. Gonçalo shared the hopes of those who were around him and his frightening austerities were in part meant to harden him for the sufferings and death which he anticipated. Indeed he seems to have been given some supernatural knowledge that he would die a martyr. He told his former fellow-novice, Fr. Leao Enriquez, that it had been revealed to him that this would be his end. He said the same again in public when preaching in Lisbon. Once when he was elevating the host during Mass, his hands appeared to the congregation to be covered with blood, which they took as a sign of his future martyrdom.

, There are indications during this period of his abilities and of the high opinion which was formed of him. When he had only been in the Society five years he was given charge of the novices, with all the responsibility which that involved.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime he had been continuing with his studies and, in 1549, he took his Doctorate of Theology at the University of Gandia<sup>8</sup> For the next four years he travelled energetically from one part of Portugal to another, preaching with a fervour and sincerity which brought him a great reputation, hearing confessions without number and never relaxing the severe life which was his preparation for martyrdom. We hear of him at Tomar, a city between Coimbra and Lisbon, at Oporto, Evora, Braga and, of course, at Lisbon itself. At Tomar he was particularly successful. He was sent there to preach, instruct and hear confessions, and did so much good that the civic authorities sent a petition to the king asking him to persuade his Superiors

not to remove him. As a consequence, four months were added to Gonçalo's stay.<sup>9</sup>

Then, in 1553, he was given an office which he must have thought would tie him down in Portugal for many years, and end all chance of that missionary life in India for which he longed. He was made Superior of the Church of San Roque at Lisbon. The Society of Jesus had been about 10 years in Portugal, and already had in Lisbon the Church of Sant' Antonio. But another church was thought necessary and so, on September 30, 1553, after negotiations with King John III, it was given this Church of San Roque. The next day a tremendous ceremony was held at which some members of the Society took their last vows. These included Gonçalo, and also Fr. Antonio de Quadros, who was later to succeed him as Provincial of India. The king and court attended, St. Francis Borgia preached, and Fr. Jerome Nadal received the last vows in the name of the Society. Some time afterwards, St. Ignatius himself took the opportunity of a letter he was sending Gonçalo, covering a communication he was to make to the Archbishop of Lisbon, to congratulate him and his fellow *voventes*, and to encourage him in his work as Superior of San Roque.<sup>10</sup>

For immediately after his last vows Gonçalo was nominated Rector of the new church. Lisbon, at this time, had the privilege of having future martyrs as Rectors of both its Jesuit churches, for the Rector of Sant' Antonio was Fr. Ignatius Azevedo, a friend of Gonçalo. He was two years Gonçalo's junior, had only been in the Society five years and was only 25 when he was made Superior of this important church. He was to be martyred at sea off Las Palmas in 1570, nine years after Gonçalo's own death.

When Rector of San Roque, Gonçalo preached every Sunday morning, and often at other times, both there and elsewhere. His reputation continued to grow and he often filled the church, which had to be enlarged within three years. The sixteenth century was an age of long sermons, but Gonçalo's were long even for those days, lasting for two to three hours. His biographers say that once, at Tomar, he even held a congregation for twelve hours! When Rector he seems to have overcome his somewhat hard disposition, and to have been a kindly Father to the Community, who came to have great affection for him. The people of Lisbon also venerated and admired him, and it was thought that his departure for India would be a tremendous blow to San Roque. However, despite the regret of the Community and of the citizens of the capital, the order at last came which Gonçalo longed for, but which all in Lisbon who knew him dreaded. He was to get ready to leave for India. The Superiors of the Portuguese Province took the extreme step of asking St. Francis Borgia, at that time commissary-general of the Society in Spain, to plead with St. Ignatius that Gonçalo might be left. But it was all fruitless. Happy though he was to go to India, Gonçalo was almost certainly less so on learning that when he got there he was to be Provincial. It was probably early in 1556 that the letters came. Six months later St. Ignatius was dead, so this was one of his last appointments. On March 30, 1556, Gonçalo sailed from Lisbon. He was 30 years old and had five more years to live.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Camoens. *Soneto XXXVII*. Translated by J. J. Aubertin in *Seventy Sonnets of Camoens* (1881). *Lusiads* X 93. Translated by Leonard Bacon (1950).
- <sup>2</sup> H. Chadwick, S.J. *Gonçalo da Silveira*, p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> James Brodrick, S.J. *Origin of the Jesuits*, p. 242.
- <sup>4</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.* p. 10.
- <sup>5</sup> James Brodrick, S.J. *Progress of the Jesuits*, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> Brodrick. *Progress of the Jesuits*, p. 206.
- <sup>7</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.* p. 15.
- <sup>8</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- <sup>9</sup> Nicolaus Godigno, S.J. *Vita Patris Gonzali Sylveriae*, p. 41.
- <sup>10</sup> *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu. Monumenta Ignatiana*, Series 1a, Vol. VII, pp. 314-6.

## II Asia and Africa

As voyages to India went, Gonçalo's must be reckoned fairly prosperous. He left on March 28, 1556, and reached Goa on September 6, so the journey took five months and nine days. This compares with the 12 months and 12 days taken by Vasco de Gama when he first went to India, the eight months and 20 days of his second voyage, and the 12 months and 29 days of St. Francis Xavier's journey. Nevertheless, life in the cramped, reeking and verminous carracks of 400 to 500 tons, supported by mouldy food and brackish water, amid continual sickness, and with death never far away, was too awful to be described. Contemporaries spoke of it as "without doubt the greatest and most arduous of any that are known in the world."<sup>1</sup> They spoke, too, of the low character of most of those on board, both sailors and of the soldiers, who formed a large proportion of the passengers.<sup>2</sup> Even Gonçalo, who in looking for hardship and mortification could barely be kept on the right side of discretion, and at times could not, was appalled. "As death cannot well be described," he wrote, "except by one who has attended a death bed, so the voyage from Portugal to India can only be related or even believed by one who has had that experience."<sup>3</sup>

When St. Francis Xavier was sailing for Goa, the fleet stopped, as was usual, at Mozambique, where the sick were landed. During the stay here alone 41 died. The doctor of the ship on which Xavier sailed, the *Santiago*, was astounded that the number was so small, and attributed it to Xavier's charity and careful nursing.<sup>4</sup> Besides those who died at Mozambique, there were others who died at sea, either on the journey there or on the crossing to India. Of those who sailed with Vasco da Gama only half returned, and this proportion of deaths remained common.<sup>5</sup>

We have not the same knowledge of Gonçalo's journey that we have of Xavier's or of Vasco da Gama's. Conditions may not have been so bad because it was shorter, but they must have been beyond all expectations to have forced a man so indifferent to bodily sufferings to use the words that have already been quoted. Like Francis, he looked after the sick and the dying, and at whatever cost to himself, did all he could to help everyone on board. Like Francis, he also stopped at Mozambique, and so for the first time trod the continent for which he was afterwards to give his life. The day he reached it he visited the shrine of Our Lady of the Ramparts, and preached a rousing sermon. This was the first of several which he gave during his stay there. On August 10, the ship left for the crossing to India, which they seem to have reached without incident, and Gonçalo's ordeal by water was over.

But neither sickness, storms nor under-nourishment could subdue the terrific zeal of Gonçalo. It was night when the fleet reached Goa. But he would not wait for day. By morning he had landed, had interviewed the Provincial whose place he was taking, Fr. Antonio de Quadros, who three years before had taken his last vows by his side in the Church of San Roque, and who was later to succeed him, and he had even begun a course of sermons in Goa Cathedral. Nothing shows better Gonçalo's white hot zeal in the service of

his Lord. Undismayed by the ordeals of the last six months, and without waiting to get experience of the new country and of its people, and still less to get acclimatised, he started without delay to carry out the mission for which he had come so far, teaching India about Christ, His Master. His journey had not spoiled his powers as a preacher. These were only the first of many sermons by which he was to pack the churches of Goa as he had done those of Lisbon, and by which he impressed on the erring, expatriated Portuguese those Christian duties of which they had so frequently and so urgently to be reminded.

Gonçalo was Provincial for exactly three years, during which he had to travel very much. He had 200 Jesuits under him. Of these about 70 were in Goa, and the others were scattered from Bassein fifty miles north of Bombay to Cochin and the Fishery Coast in India's extreme south, and thence to the Moluccas and Japan. He spent his first two months at Goa, where he came to know intimately the Viceroy, Francisco Barreto, one of the most attractive of Portugal's representatives in the Far East. Seventeen years later he was to lead a military expedition into the north-east of the present Southern Rhodesia, the first European armed force to enter the country, and he was to die at Sena on the Zambesi about 300 miles away from where Gonçalo had been martyred in 1561. Barreto's high opinion of the Jesuit Provincial must have been in part due to the rousing appeal which he made to the Portuguese of Goa, imploring them to rush to the help of the fortress of Chaul, some 25 miles to the south, which was under siege at the time. The appeal was much talked about, and 500 words of it were reported, apparently *verbatim*, over 40 years later by Godigno. It had such effect that the Portuguese stormed out of Goa to the rescue and Chaul was saved.

One of the first things Gonçalo did at Goa was to set up a formal novitiate house, and then he left for Bassein, where he stayed six weeks, preaching, instructing and settling the business of the Society. Thence he had to go right down south to Cochin, 700 miles away. He was there seven months till reports of plague at Goa brought him back to headquarters. He got there in September, 1557. In spite of the plague he must have found much reason for thanksgiving. Converts to Christianity were increasing. This year there were to be 1,080, which was more than had been anticipated; in the next year the number was to rise to 1,916, and in 1559, Gonçalo's last year in India, to 3,233.

It was probably about this time that Gonçalo again became associated with a Portuguese military enterprise, namely, that sent against Daman, about 50 miles north of Bassein. This should have been handed over to the Portuguese, but the promise had not been kept, and so an armed force, which Gonçalo accompanied, was sent to take it. When it got to Daman the town surrendered without fighting. Gonçalo said the first Mass and preached the first sermon in the city. But further gratitude had to be shown to God for the bloodless victory and, so after returning to Goa, Gonçalo, with generous support from the Viceroy, had a new church built in honour of St. Thomas the Apostle, to which his relics were to be transferred. The capture of Daman was a lasting victory because, through the four centuries since, which have seen the rise and

fall of British India, it has always remained a Portuguese city and it is Portuguese to this day.

The Viceroy who encouraged Gonçalo to build the Church of St. Thomas was not Francisco Barreto. He had been removed in the spring of 1558. His successor was Constantine de Braganca, with whom Gonçalo soon became equally friendly. But Gonçalo's term of office, too, came to an end. He had not been entirely successful as Provincial. Himself possessing irresistible drive and zeal, he lacked sympathy with those who were weaker than himself, and so, after three years, Fr. Antonio de Quadros, whom he had superseded, was himself appointed to supersede him. Normally a Provincial could expect a longer term of office than three years, and being thus taken off may well have been a severe blow to Gonçalo. For the moment we hear no more of missionary journeys and preaching. He retired to the noviciate, which he himself had founded, to meditate and live a more penitential life than ever, and it was here that he received the call to leave for his last mission, on which he was to sacrifice his life.

A request for missionaries had recently been received from an African chief named Gamba. His tribe lived in the south of what is now Portuguese East Africa and, like other tribes, traded with the Portuguese, exchanging ivory, or whatever other wealth they could find, for the goods which the new arrivals brought. One of Gamba's sons had accompanied a consignment of ivory to Inhambane on the coast, which was a centre for much of this trade. Here he became friendly with the Portuguese and was persuaded to visit Mozambique, where he became a Christian. When he went back to his own country he suggested to his father that he might ask for Christian missionaries.

From Mozambique the request was passed back to Goa, where the Viceroy asked the new Jesuit Provincial to spare some men for what promised to be a vitally important mission. Gonçalo was an obvious choice. He had not yet been appointed to other work since ceasing to be Provincial. He was full of zeal and vigour, and had a spiritual and physical hardiness which could endure privation and suffering. It was hoped that his rigour would be tempered in the more unconventional life he would have to lead in a new mission, and in an almost unexplored country. So he was told that he had been put in charge of the enterprise, and that he would have two companions, and he was instructed to prepare himself to sail for Mozambique.

It was on January 2, 1560, that they sailed from Chaul. Both of Gonçalo's companions had once been soldiers. Brother Andre da Costa had been in the Society for only two years. The almost incredible hardships he had now to face were to be too much for him; one bout of sickness followed on another and, after being several times near death, he was, in about a year's time, sent back from the African interior to the coast, presumably *en route* for Goa, and so he passes out of our story. The other was Fr. Andre Fernandes, and to him we owe much of our knowledge of the mission. Physically he seems to have been the hardest and most resilient of the three missionaries. He was 10 years older than Gonçalo, though he had not been in the Society so long, having joined it at Ormuz, in 1550, after serving some time in the Portuguese armed forces in the East. He quickly attracted the notice of St. Francis Xavier, who





used to call him "a true Israelite",<sup>6</sup> and who sent him to Europe as his personal representative.<sup>7</sup> Years afterwards he became known to Diogo do Couto, joint author with Joao de Barros of the *Decadas*, a narrative of Portuguese enterprise in the East that is one of the great historical works of the century. Do Couto described him with affectionate admiration, calling him a truly apostolic man of great learning and sanctity, who might, with justice, be called a saint on account of the innocence of his life. Do Couto went on, "He afterwards lived in this city of Goa for many years, giving a rare example of virtue, and died here at the age of 90. He was among those who entered the Company of Jesus in the time of the Blessed Father Ignatius, its founder. Much might be said of his virtues, life and death, for we were familiar with him for many years, and were very devoted to him."<sup>8</sup>

Fernandes' courage, like Gonçalo's, was lion-like; he had also sound common sense, and was a shrewd and humorous observer of people and things. Fortunately, he was a letter-writer and a good one; at least seven of his letters have survived and were published by Theal, either in whole or in part. At Chaul the three missionaries found the new Governor of Mozambique, Pantaleao de Sa, a relative of Silveira, and it was in his company that they set sail.

Ever since Vasco da Gama's rounding of the Cape the Portuguese had been feeling their way up the east coast of Africa, and 55 years before Silveira's mission they had made their first permanent settlement, by occupying Sofala, near the present port of Beira. Two years later they took Mozambique, and in 1531 they got their first hold in the interior with the foundation of Sena, 120 miles up the Zambesi. From here they later spread to Tete, about 150 miles further on. Quelimane, about 150 miles north of the Zambesi delta, followed 10 years later. By the time Gonçalo came to Africa the Portuguese, as we have seen, used also to send regular trading expeditions to Inhambane, on the coast much further south.

So Portuguese occupation at this time was confined to a hold on about three stations along the coast, and of two on the Zambesi, with the military and naval forces which were thought sufficient to defend them. All were under the authority of a Governor who was dependent on the Viceroy at Goa. The moral and physical condition of these Portuguese in East Africa was wretched. There were few white women and most men associated indiscriminately with the Africans. They were enervated by heat and malaria, and though Christianity could tell so splendid a story of what it had done in India, the East Indies and Japan, its influence on these East African outposts was very slight. As a result the Makalanga and Batonga tribes of the interior had experienced little except the worst side of contemporary European life.

Such was the country in which Gonçalo and his companions were going to try to spread Christianity when, on February 4, 1560, they reached Mozambique, where Gonçalo's first act was with characteristic ardour to go barefoot to the shrine of Our Lady of the Ramparts to beg for a blessing on the mission. But as soon as he had landed he wanted to press on. He was the guest of his relative, the Governor, who offered him a passage to Sofala in one of his own ships. But Gonçalo would not wait. A *zambuco*, a small native craft, was avail-

able in eight days and he decided that they should sail in that. "For the season in which we leave and for this navigation", as he later wrote to Fr. Antonio de Quadros, at Goa, "it is a better conveyance than a large ship and just as safe, or even more so."<sup>9</sup>

Fernandes, the more practical ex-soldier, thought the suggestion foolhardy and told Gonçalo so, but could not quench his Superior's enthusiasm. His fears were fully justified. The *zambuco* was so small that there was not enough room to sit, stand or lie down. Fernandes wrote later that he did not think that a worse craft could be found upon the sea. A storm almost capsized it before it left Mozambique. Two days of fine weather followed, and then they were struck by winds, heavy seas and rain. There was no shelter except, as Fernandes said, "in such a place as I thought it preferable to get wet."<sup>10</sup> It was Lent, and as they did not consider themselves exempt from fasting, they ate no meat. They had a little fish with them and lived on rice, beans, butter and honey. Brother da Costa suffered most, and at last had to tell Fernandes that he could endure no more. Fernandes told Gonçalo, who ordered him to eat meat. The 500 miles journey to Sofala took them 27 days. Fernandes tersely remarked that the Governor's ship, the carrack for which they had refused to wait, did it in 10.

But at Sofala over 300 miles of sea journey still lay in front of them. They remained there five days, during which Brother da Costa got much better. In the second part of the journey it was Gonçalo who suffered most. Two or three days after leaving he became seriously ill; it could not very well be otherwise, Fernandes thought, considering the hardships and the lack of food. He thought, too, that, had the passage lasted longer than eight days, Gonçalo would have died. But they reached Inhambane in time to save his life.

Here they found five Portuguese traders and, as best they could, they all looked after Gonçalo who, for some days, remained in danger of death. For the moment any further progress towards Gamba's kraal, Otongue, as it was called, was out of the question. But as soon as he felt himself out of danger, Gonçalo ordered Fernandes to go there by himself; he would follow, he said, with da Costa as soon as he was strong enough.

So Fernandes, on the afternoon before Palm Sunday, set out on his first journey into the interior of Africa. Both he and Gonçalo described Otongue as 30 leagues from Inhambane.<sup>11</sup> Godigno, writing 60 years later, gave an infrequent reference to latitude, and said it was about 33 degrees south of the equator.<sup>12</sup> But, unfortunately, Godigno was wrong. Twenty-four-and-a-half degrees would have been more accurate. Godigno himself gives the information that corrects his own error, for he says that Otongue was by the banks of a great river whose waters were, however, unfit for drinking, because it was tidal. This suggests that the river was the Inharrime, which, in a direct line, is about 50 miles south of Inhambane. In view of the detours of native paths, which always followed the easiest course, this is not inconsistent with the 30 leagues mentioned both by Fernandes and Gonçalo. That Otongue was, indeed, by the banks of the Inharrime is made certain by Diogo do Couto's account of the journey of the shipwrecked survivors of the *Sao Thome*, which foundered off the coast of northern Natal in 1589. They made their miserable and famished

way up the coast to Inhambane and, in latitude 24 1/2, found a river, described as being as large as the Limpopo, which formed the boundary of Gamba's kingdom. Gamba's chief kraal was four to five miles from the river. All this agrees with the situation of the Inharrime. Though 30 years had passed, Gamba was still ruling.<sup>13</sup>

Fernandes' journey to Otongue was an epic of endurance, perhaps in its way as gruelling as anything the three missionaries had to endure later. The Africans were accustomed to make the journey in two days and a night without a stop. Even if the league of which the missionaries speak is not three full miles, it is certain that hour after hour Fernandes had to travel at swift African pace over unfamiliar and rough country. Gonçalo had suggested that he might take African bearers to carry him, as the Portuguese usually did, but he thought that the appearance of weakness would lower him too much in the eyes of the Africans who were with him. So he had to suffer the hardships of the journey on foot. Before he had gone far his shoes began to hurt him, and he had to take them off and walk in his bare feet. Next day he cut the shoes at the places where they were troubling him and he was then able to wear them again. He had injured his knee, which caused him great pain, and as it was still Lent he was fasting. Many rivers, too, had to be crossed. And never for a moment could he slacken or show signs of weakness, for his African guides might then think him helpless and turn against him. In his distress he asked God for help and his prayer was heard. As he wrote later to the Jesuit Community at Goa, ". . . in my affliction I called upon the Lord to help me. And he certainly assisted me, for considering my condition, and the haste of my companions, without His help I could never have kept up with them, but I was careful not to let them see any sign of weakness in me, for I knew that if they did they would treat me according to their usual custom, when they see anyone ill or overcome with fatigue, which is to demand whatever he has, either beads or cloth, according to their pleasure, or else they threaten to leave him."<sup>14</sup>

In spite of his sufferings and of the continual strain he tried, with fidelity and great humility, to think about God. When describing their progress during the first afternoon — during part of which he was travelling barefooted — he afterwards wrote: "On the way I endeavoured to bear in mind the preparation for the next day's feast, but I confess myself in fault therein, for it was not possible to attend to it properly while travelling hard, and taking care where I put my feet."<sup>15</sup>

At last, on the Wednesday in Holy Week, at eight or ten in the morning, Otongue was reached. The journey had been done in three days and a night. This was a day more than usual, but they had stopped at least one full night on the route. It was arranged that Fernandes should see Gamba next day. But the strain on him broke for the moment even his tough constitution and, before he had the interview, he was laid low by a chill and a fever. He was staying at the time in the hut of a certain Joao Raposo, who had been born in Sofala of a Portuguese father and an African mother. So with him Central Africa's coloured population enters missionary history. He treated Fernandes well, bleeding him and looking after him as best he could. He was very shortly

to act as his interpreter, for, fever or no fever, Fernandes was determined that he was going to see Gamba.

When he did so, he was well received. His purpose in coming, Fernandes told the chief, was to instruct him about God, who created both him and everything else. He had been sent by another Father who remained at the coast waiting for the chief's permission to come too. Gamba was most gracious. Fernandes was told that he should consider Otongue as his own country; meanwhile some of the chief's own men would be sent to fetch Gonçalo.

Gamba was surprised at what he thought was Fernandes' great age, and still more that so old a man should have made such a journey so quickly on foot. This prevalent notion of Fernandes' age was to stand him in good stead in later and more difficult days, but it was really due to nothing more than his fine, white hair. For, as he wrote over two years later in a letter to the Jesuits in Portugal, in which he described his African experiences, "among them men do not grow grey until they are a hundred or more, an age to which few attain, the climate being so unhealthy." He went on, "seeing my hair so white they thought that I must be extremely old, and kept myself alive by witchcraft, being still strong enough to keep pace even with the youngest of them in walking all day in the midst of the great heat, and the most simple among the people said that if I was so strong in my old age, what must I have been in my youth?"<sup>16</sup>

In spite of his chill and fever Fernandes had two interviews with Gamba on the same day. After the second one he was graciously presented with two elephant tusks which, with the chief's permission, he passed on the Joao Raposo. He was also given Gamba's full leave to teach Christianity and to baptize.

After about a week, Fernandes' fever began to subside, and as he gradually got over his weakness he was able to take fuller notice of the people he had come to convert. Gamba had made a good impression on him. He was, he wrote, "a very good man for a Kaffir".<sup>17</sup> It sounds rather condescending, but the word Kaffir had not the derogatory sense it later acquired. He was, he continued, "well inclined and of great discretion, a great man and very well known and loved by his neighbours and even by those at a great distance." He also thought well of Gamba's four sons. Two of them came to see him during his illness, and he instructed them in Christianity. They, and others, asked for baptism, but Fernandes said he would not baptize anyone until Gonçalo arrived. Seventeen days thus passed and then Gonçalo and da Costa joined him again, having come up from the coast. They had, all three, after their storms, sickness and hardships, reached their destination. It was about three and a half months since they had sailed from India.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C. R. Boxer, *The Tragic History of the Sea*, p. 1. In the introductory chapter of this book, the "*Carreira da India*", Professor Boxer gives a scholarly and fascinating account of conditions on the journey from Lisbon to Goa, and so of the ordeal of the first missionaries who went to India and East Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Boxer, *op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> James Brodrick, S.J., *St. Francis Xavier*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> H. H. Hart, *Sea Road to the Indies*, p. 197. See Boxer, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

- <sup>6</sup> Theal, *Records of South Eastern Africa, II*, p. 218.
- <sup>7</sup> Boxer, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
- <sup>8</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 218.
- <sup>9</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 55.
- <sup>10</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 84.
- <sup>11</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, pp. 67, 95.
- <sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 78.
- <sup>13</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 218.
- <sup>14</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 86.
- <sup>15</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 85.
- <sup>16</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 149.
- <sup>17</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 74.

### III. The First Mission to Southern Africa

The arrival of Gonçalo and da Costa did not at first add much to the strength of the mission, for their journey from Inhambane had been a terrible one. and when Fernandes met them they seemed at the point of death. Gonçalo was lying helplessly on the sand, too weak even to raise his head. He had started from the coast before he had fully recovered, and so he did not travel on foot but was carried by African bearers. Thereby, however, he experienced what Fernandes had feared. Seeing how helpless he was, his bearers put him down in the middle of the bush, and refused to carry him any further, unless he gave them all they wanted. So he reached Otongue destitute as well as ill. Gradually he got stronger, but he never fully recovered during the seven weeks he spent there. Da Costa was even worse and, as he grew no better, Gongalo sent him to recuperate at Inhambane, whence he returned before long.

Now that Gonçalo had come, a policy could be decided upon. Both Fathers were optimistic. Polygamy, which was not only practised, but held in great honour, would certainly be a great impediment; so would superstition and sorcery which, in many forms, some fantastic and repulsive, riddled African life. As against this, the Makalangas, or the Mocarangas, as the missionaries called them, believed in a supreme God whom they called Umbe. and in life after death in which man would be rewarded or punished. They did not worship idols, and Gonçalo did not think that Mohommedanism was a serious obstacle in this part of Africa. The favourable conditions so far outweighed the others that Gonçalo had great hopes that the conversion of Otongue would only be the beginning of the conversion of vast tracts far in the interior. "All the lands beyond Tongue (i.e. Otongue)", he wrote, "are ready to enter the Divine fold."<sup>1</sup>

Fernandes was equally hopeful. Many of the Makalangas, he said, liked to hear and understand Christian teaching, and they were easily reclaimed from their errors. "All the women", he continued, "show great devotion to the picture of Our Lady, and many visit the church to see it. These things which appeal to their eyes make a great impression on them, and it pleases them very much to have the meaning of the pictures explained to them, for which reason I have sent to ask for a picture of the judgement, which seems to me the most suitable for them, as we give beginners the Exercises of the First Week."<sup>2</sup> The last words are, of course, a reference to the first "Week" of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Fernandes, too, anticipated the Faith spreading far beyond Otongue. "Not only people of this kingdom", he wrote to the Community of the College of Goa, "want to be Christians, but also those of neighbouring kingdoms, and therefore, beloved brethren, prepare and know that here is a great harvest for many labourers."<sup>3</sup> A Portuguese who passed through a kraal some distance away heard people asking, "Will not the old man who makes Christians come and baptize us?"<sup>4</sup>

So, brimful of confidence, both Fathers soon began to baptize. Gamba himself was one of the first to receive the sacrament. Godigno says that he was given the name of Constantine,<sup>5</sup> and certainly this accords with the sanguine hopes of the missionaries at this time. Actually, however, like the Monomotapa

a few months later, he seems to have been called Sebastian, after the reigning king of Portugal.<sup>6</sup> "The king soon became a Christian", Fernandes wrote enthusiastically, "with all his household, his children and the whole of the people: they come to us, we do not need to go to them. In short, during the seven weeks that the Father (i.e. Gonçalo) stayed here, nearly 400 persons were baptized and, as I am informed, he continues baptizing as he proceeds on his journey (i.e. back to Inhambane). In the kraals of this king I have also baptized some since he left."<sup>7</sup>

This mass baptism, after so little instruction, causes any modern reader misgivings, especially in view of the disaster which, in so short a time, came upon the Otongue mission. It is certain that the two Fathers made a mistake. They were the first to come into intimate, day-by-day contact with the Bantu; they misunderstood them as many other Europeans have done, and future generations of missionaries were to learn from the mistakes of these pioneers. They read too much into the cheerfulness, eagerness and politeness of the Africans, and saw resolutions and clear understanding where nothing existed except good-natured and tolerant agreement. The Makalangas would willingly fall in with all that was said to them rather than cause pain to the strangers, but they would not allow the strangers' teaching to cause pain to themselves. Both polygamy and sorcery were more ingrained in them than the missionaries realised, and there was no serious prospect of their breaking away from either. But for seven happy, but we must sadly own, misdirected weeks, they thus worked together.

It must, however, be remembered in their favour that they were following the only missionary method they knew. When Gonçalo landed as Provincial at Goa, the great St. Francis Xavier had only been dead four years. He had made himself the greatest missionary since St. Paul, and he was the model of the missionaries of the day. Yet Xavier had acted as they were doing, often thinking a sermon or two sufficient preparation for baptism; and in regions where he had thus baptized hurriedly, and apparently almost indiscriminately, round Goa, Tuticorin and Cape Comorin, his work had endured as it still endures.<sup>8</sup> Had they cared to go further back into the Church's past, they could have read that the apostles of the English, St. Augustine of Canterbury and St. Aidan acted in the same way. And in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles they could have read, too, how at the first Pentecost 3,000 people were baptized with no more instruction than a sermon from St. Peter. Six chapters later they could find that Philip the Deacon had baptized the Ethiopian after only a few hours instruction! This would have been an especially telling precedent, for Fernandes, with the easy latitude with which the name was then used, referred to himself in his letters as instructing the Africans in *Ethiopia*. Taking everything into consideration it is hard to see how the two missionaries could have acted other than they did. Even in a rudimentary form, the science of missiology was well in the future.

But from the start Gonçalo had probably not intended to remain long at Otongue. He had dreams of the conversion of all southern and central Africa, and he thought that the best way to achieve this was to convert the most powerful king he could find. It was the instinctive European way of

thinking of the age, that of *cujus regio, ejus religio*. Before he left Europe, Gonçalo had seen that when Henry of England became schismatic, his kingdom followed; when his little Protestant son succeeded, England became Protestant. On his death it became Catholic again, under the rule of the Catholic Mary. Rumour pointed quickly enough to the ruler who was supposed to be the strongest in Southern Africa, the mysterious Monomotapa, whose capital lay far up the Zambesi, whence he was thought to reign over an empire stretching far into the interior. Within eight days of his first landing at Mozambique, Gonçalo had written to the Jesuit Provincial at Goa about the Monomotapa.<sup>9</sup> Through his kingdom, it must have seemed, lay the way to a Christian Africa.

So it is difficult to resist the impression that, in spite of the apparent success at Otongue, Gonçalo was anxious to get away from it. Fernandes seems to have been puzzled by his attitude, and rather hurt. "I cannot understand the motive of Father Dom Gonçalo", he wrote to his Provincial at Goa, "for I could never get anything from him, except that a Brother and myself are sufficient here, and another Father and Brother on the shore."<sup>10</sup>

Had Gonçalo really meant that a Father and a Brother were sufficient for Otongue, he would have been giving the lie to his hopes of its being the centre of great conversions. But probably he only meant to make clear that he, as Superior, would send no more men there. His eyes were on the kingdom of the Monomotapa, further north, and it was there he would send every man he could get. It would be hard on Fernandes, but he would have to manage as best he could.

So, after seven weeks at Otongue, Gonçalo set out for the coast, from which da Costa had returned. Gonçalo had fears about the Brother's health but hoped for the best, and left him as a companion to Fernandes. He was as confident as he had been from the start. Fernandes and da Costa, he wrote to the College at Goa, were beginning to build a house and a church, which was to be dedicated to the Assumption.<sup>11</sup> Gonçalo's return to the coast was very different from his first journey. There is no mention of hardships. On the road he baptized some chiefs, who, as he explained, were Botongas, and not Mocarangas, like the people round Otongue. He must have left some time in June. By August he was back at Mozambique, making preparations for his mission to the Monomotapa.

With Gonçalo's departure two years of Purgatory began for Fernandes. Da Costa, before long, became so ill that he had to return to Inhambane, and Fernandes was left alone. A year passed and, in a letter written on June 3, 1561, to a Brother Mario in Portugal, he shows quiet heroism, but also a sadness which contrasts with his earlier enthusiastic confidence.<sup>12</sup> Yet his greatest trials were still to come. The Christian moral law demanded too much of the Makalangas and, before long, they were living just as badly as they had ever done as pagans. Fernandes tried to prevent it, but they only became furious with him. In spite of increasing dangers he was indefatigable. Once Gamba sent to tell him that he wanted to put him to death, because he had said that if he did not keep the Christian law he would go to Hell and burn in flames for ever. "I think", Fernandes wrote afterwards, "I was then sufficiently prepared with will and courage to suffer for Christ."<sup>13</sup>



But he was to come nearer to death than this. To give his own words: "Another time they surrounded me with their arms, which they put near to my eyes, but no farther; others cried aloud, 'Kill him with arrows, or let us burn him in his house', and all this with great fury, but it seems that I was not then to share the fate of Father Dom Gonçalo, who is in glory. Nevertheless I do not think I was ever overcome with terror by their threats, so as to desist from boldly reprehending them for their superstitions, and even the king himself, in such a manner that his people were alarmed at what I said, and feared to be present at the time."<sup>11</sup>

What saved him was his white hair, and the impression it gave of tremendous age. This, associated with Fernandes' vigour and strength, so impressed the Makalangas that they thought he must have some tremendous magical powers, and they were afraid to touch him. But though they did not attack him directly, he found it increasingly difficult to get food and, of all his sufferings, hunger was the worst. "Though other hardships were felt", he afterwards wrote, "hunger was the worst, especially for six months or more, during which I wanted for everything, or had so little that if one day I had a little meat, which sometimes was only every 15 or 20 days, I ate only once that day and very little."<sup>15</sup>

But the Old Testament story of God's messenger being fed by ravens was almost literally repeated. For, when he was in such straits, some hens began laying eggs in his hut, and two of Gamba's nephews, to whom the hens belonged, allowed him to keep the eggs, provided he paid for them when he could. Someone else, at times, brought him milk. So he kept up his confidence in God's protection, and it was fully rewarded. As he wrote afterwards: "I consoled myself, having confidence that though the king of earth failed me, the king of glory would sustain me, as He did by His goodness, and succoured me with all things necessary at a fitting time, bringing thither one of my friends, who paid my debts for the eggs and milk."<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless Gamba would not allow Christianity to be taught, and it was clear that the mission had failed. Fernandes was growing weaker. He could now only walk about a mile and a half a day; in old days it had been 30 or more. He had already dug his grave. To have remained would only have been to sacrifice himself to no purpose. Fortunately, a letter from India told him that he might return if he had no prospect of success. This saved his life. Gamba wanted to keep him, thinking he might still be useful. But, as Fernandes told him, since he had forbidden Christianity, it would be pointless for him to remain. So he left for Inhambane, whence he sailed for Mozambique. This he reached on August 2, 1562. By September 4 he was at Goa again. It was two years and eight months since he had left it.

He said that, as a result of what he had gone through, he had lost all or part of his faculties, but there is no sign of this in the long and cheerful letter which he wrote on December 5, 1562, when on the point of starting on another mission. It was sent to the Jesuits in Portugal and described the country and his experiences there. It gives lively and detailed accounts of native elephant hunts and of their superstitions, their dress, music, dancing and food. He speaks sadly about his own mission, but without any rancour. He was great

souled to have gone through such experiences and to have come out with undaunted courage at the end; worthy to have been one of Africa's first missionaries, courageous, hardy, long-suffering, humane and humorous; he wins our hearts to himself by his letters as he did the hearts of those who knew him personally. Since he did not die for the Faith, he has not caught the spotlight of history. Indeed, except for his letters we would hardly have known that he existed. In this he can, perhaps, be considered a representative of the many missionary heroes who, during the four centuries since he landed at Mozambique, have worked and suffered, unheard and unseen for the conversion of Africa. He lived on for 36 years after leaving Africa and finally died at Goa.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, pp. 94-6.

<sup>2</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Boxer, *Tragic History of the Sea*, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> St. Francis Xavier's custom of baptizing after what seems to us ludicrously incomplete instruction is discussed by Fr. Brodrick in his *Saint Francis Xavier*, pp. 136-8.

<sup>9</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>13</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 148.

<sup>14</sup> Theal, *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 151.

## IV. Into Rhodesia

As will have been realised from what Fernandes said about Dom Gonçalo being in glory, by the time that the Otongue mission was abandoned, Silveira was dead. He had found the Monomotapa, though he had found, too, that he was very different from expectations. He had baptized him, but then his convert had turned against him and had had him put to death.

We last heard of Silveira at Mozambique in August, 1560, preparing for his mission. He set out on September 18. Five or six Portuguese were with him during the first part of his journey but, unfortunately, he had no Fernandes to write lively accounts of their experiences. His own letters are far less vivid and, in any case, the only one which he certainly wrote at this period never reached its destination. It was sent to the Provincial at Goa a few days before his death, but the ship carrying it was one of the many lost at sea.

We can form some idea of what Gonçalo expected the Monomotapa and his empire to be like from accounts that contemporaries gave of them. One is given by Godigno, in his life of Silveira, and though 50 years had then passed since Silveira's death, ideas about it had not changed much except in one respect. The most striking facts that he records about the "Empire" are its vast extent, the size of its army and its richness in gold and silver. He says that it is shaped in a rough circle, which is 700 to 800 miles across.<sup>1</sup> Had this been true, the "Empire" would have included part of Portuguese East Africa, the whole of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the Transvaal, Bechuanaland, part of the extreme east of Angola, and the south-east of the Congo. An Italian map published 12 years later curtails these territories to the north, but in recompense pushes them further to the south, including in them the Orange Free State and much of the Cape Province.<sup>2</sup> Godigno also says that the Monomotapa can put 100,000 men into the field. The amount of gold in the country, he claims, surpasses all belief. It was at Fura, which since the time of Selous Europeans have called Mount Darwin, that the Queen of Sheba had loaded her camels with gold. The chief trading stations where it is obtained are, he says, at Bucoto and Masapa.<sup>3</sup>

But in one respect Godigno probably knew more about the Monomotapa's "Empire" than Silveira could have done. He was quite certain that both the ruler and his subjects were crude and primitive savages, notwithstanding the "Empire's" wide extent, its great army and abundant gold. "Nothing can be imagined more rude and uncivilised than the Kaffirs", he wrote; "through the centuries they have invented nothing for themselves and they have made no use of the inventions of other people."<sup>4</sup> If anyone, he says, gets better crops than his neighbours by cleverness and hard work, or gets finer cattle, they attribute it to witchcraft, turn against him and sometimes try to kill him. Godigno speaks of this beggarly stagnation as prevailing throughout the whole "Empire".

But this was an aspect of the Monomotapa's Empire that Gonçalo probably knew nothing about until he reached it. Indeed it was, perhaps, his own experiences that first made it known to his fellow-Europeans. For him the

fabulous "Empire" was golden in every sense, and governed by a highly-civilised ruler of great power and wisdom, whose conversion would bring Christianity through the heart of this unknown continent. To achieve this was the goal to which he directed the six months of life which, little though he knew it then, were all that remained to him.

Though we have no letters of Gonçalo to tell the story of these last few weeks, and there was no Fernandes to tell it for him, we have a fairly detailed account written by an *ex professo* historian, namely, Fr. Luiz Froes.<sup>5</sup> Fr. Froes was a Portuguese Jesuit and was then at the College at Goa. Twenty-seven years later he was to write one of the earliest histories of Japan.<sup>6</sup> The Provincial in Goa at the time, finding that many stories were being spread about the last months of Gonçalo's life, ordered Froes to find out and publish the truth. This he did, depending for his account on a letter written by Antonio Caiado, to which reference will be made later, and on the information given to him by the captain of the boat on which Gonçalo went from Mocambique to Sena. The letter from Caiado has come down to us independently and is especially valuable, since he was with Gonçalo until a few hours before he died.<sup>7</sup>

Froes says that Gonçalo left Mocambique in a small pinnace. Godigno calls it a *myoparo*,<sup>8</sup> one suspects more from a desire to use a Ciceronian word than out of a care for strict accuracy; for if used in its correct sense *myoparo* would mean a privateer or small warship. The pinnace was probably what contemporaries would have called a *pangaio*, or a *luzio*.<sup>9</sup> Gonçalo's experience in the *zambuco*, of which Fr. Fernandes had disapproved so strongly, was not enough to make him sail in a large boat. However, the *pangaio* had the advantage of drawing little water, and so was able to take him right up the Zambesi. But the bad fortune which he had met on his first journey down the African coast was with him still, and he had much to endure before he even saw the Zambesi delta. He had to sail some 450 miles before he reached it, and the captain seems to have intended to break the journey at Quelimane, which was about 100 miles short of the Zambesi. But, when they had covered half the distance, and were near a river which was then called the Mafute, they were struck and nearly overwhelmed by a storm. The boat was filling with water and all had given up hope; all, that is, except Gonçalo, who climbed to the poop — if such a word can be used about so small a craft — knelt down and, with hands stretched to heaven, begged God's mercy for all of them. The sea became calm and they were able to sail up the Mafute and land. Gonçalo said Mass at a portable altar. It was September 30, the feast of St. Jerome, so that so far their journey of less than 200 miles had taken them 12 days.

After spending three days in the Mafute, they sailed for Quelimane. The voyage was rather a repetition of the previous one for, just as they were entering the Quelimane river, they were again almost drowned in a storm. However they made port successfully. Here Gonçalo met a chief named Mingoxane, a well-known friend of the Portuguese who begged for baptism for himself and his people. Gonçalo may well have thought Mingoxane more single-minded than he really was. He himself would probably have kept quiet about his being the relative of Pantaleao de Sa, the Governor of Mocambique, but his companions had no reason for the same restraint, nor for concealing the fact that

part of the rich gifts which Gonçalo was bringing him had actually been given to him by the Governor. Mingoxane had material as well as spiritual reasons for showing respect for what the Father said. Though they became very friendly, Gonçalo nevertheless refused to baptize him. All his hopes were now centred on the Monomotapa. He thought that he was now on the frontiers of his empire. Let the Monomotapa himself be converted, he thought, and all these less important chiefs would follow him. But if one of them became a Christian without the Monomotapa being consulted, the great Emperor might feel affronted, and the conversion of his own vast dominions might be jeopardised.

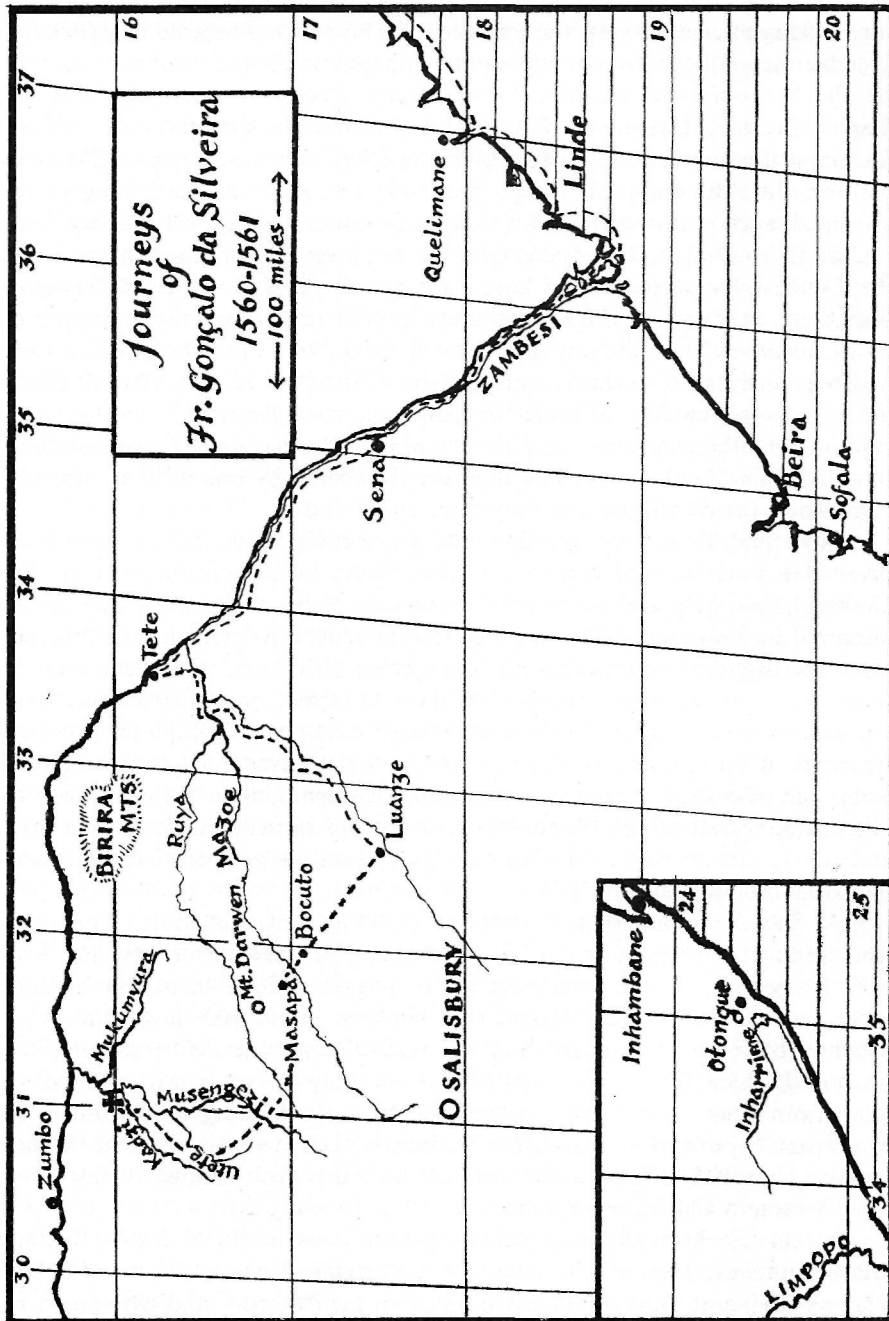
So they sailed on from Quelimane, but not even yet were they able to reach the Zambesi, for off the Bay of Linde, 40 miles short of it, a third storm broke over them, and they were forced to shelter. While in the bay they were joined by a *zambuco* which, the day after leaving them, met the fate by which they had been threatened so often, and was lost. After 13 days in the Bay of Linde the *pangaio* ventured to sea again, and this time managed to sail without interruption into the more sheltered waters of the Cuama, one of the northerly mouths of the Zambesi. For two days they anchored by one of its banks, and their storm-tossed sea journey thus came to an end.

Now that he was on the point of penetrating alone into the unknown on so dangerous but important a mission, Gonçalo felt that he must ask for God's especial help and protection. So he begged his companions not to feel affronted by his unsociability, but said that he must now make a retreat before his work began. Awnings were put up on the little boat, which cut him off from the other travellers, and behind these Gonçalo, on the first missionary journey ever made up the Zambesi, spent eight days going through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. By the time the days were over they were in sight of Sena, and after asking each of his travelling companions to beg Our Lady to take the kingdom of the Monomotapa under her protection, he left the boat and settled down to wait for about six weeks until he got permission to enter the Monomotapa's territories.

At Sena he found 10 or 15 Portuguese and a number of Indian Christians who were, of course, quite cut off from Mass and the Sacraments, and who were living in much the same way as the pagans around them. He brought them back to the Sacraments and also baptized about 400 slaves and other dependents of the Portuguese. But, as at Quelimane, he deliberately limited his priestly work. Though he went nearly every day to visit a chief living three miles from Sena, whom Froes rather grandly calls the king of Inhamior, he would not baptize him. It would be better, he said, to wait until the Monomotapa himself had been converted, for he might feel insulted if any other chief became a Christian before him.

Meanwhile he made what further preparations he could for his further journey into the interior. He heard of a Portuguese named Gomes Coelho, who was living at Tete, another 150 miles up the Zambesi, and who could be of great help to him, for he could speak the native language and was a personal friend of the Monomotapa. He managed to send him a request to come and see him.

Coelho duly came down from Tete, but before he reached Sena, Gonçalo



The Journeys of Gonçalo da Silveira  
in Portuguese East Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

had received the permission he was waiting for from the Monomotapa. So they were able to proceed together. From this point Gonçalo made his whole journey on foot, and in the course of about five weeks he must have walked over nearly 500 miles of country, some mountainous, some thickly wooded, and some cut up by streams. Froes tells us very little about the journey to Tete. Neither the account of the Portuguese captain of the *pangaio*, nor that of Antonio Caiado could now help him. But Godigno seems to have got hold of some additional authority. He speaks about the number of livers which Gonçalo had to cross on the way to Tete. This thoroughly accords with the character of the country, whichever bank of the river they followed. Gonçalo took tremendous trouble to ensure that the chalice, altar-stone and vestments were nevertheless kept dry. If the river had to be swum, they were all put together into a large earthenware pot and pushed across by Coelho, or one of the African bearers. Gonçalo, himself, could not swim.

When they got to Tete they were at the furthest extremity of civilisation. Here again, as at Sena, Gonçalo brought back the few Portuguese to a proper observance of their religious and moral obligations. Also, departing from what had been his custom, he baptized the royal representative there, whom Godigno refers to as the *Fumus*, his Latin rendering of the Bantu word *infumo*.<sup>10</sup> After a few days he left Coelho behind him and set out with some Africans into what was very nearly the unknown.

More can now be said than ever before about the route which Gonçalo took from Tete to the *guta*<sup>11</sup> of the Monomotapa, owing to the work of missionaries who, for the last 10 years, have been at Marymount, a few miles away from Gonçalo's route as he travelled from the Nyadire river to the Mazoe. By close contact with the Africans of the neighbourhood and patient investigation, they have gained thorough knowledge of their customs and of centuries-old traditions. They have also been able to retrace the whole route which they think Silveira must have followed.

The distance from Tete to the Monomotapa's *guta*, in a straight line, is about 170 miles, almost due west. On a modern map the most obvious route would appear to be up the Zambesi, first north-westwards and then west. This would have taken him past where Chicoa now stands, and he would then have reached the Musengezi, which flows into the Zambesi from the south. He could have gone along this as far as the *guta*, which is on its bank. However, this route was not known at the time.

But a more southerly route was possible, which led south-westwards from Tete, past the Birira Mountains to the river Ruya, across it, and then down the Mkumvura river to the *guta*. This would have been comparatively short, but at the time of year at which he was travelling, namely, November and December, it would have been a hot and thirsty journey, through semi-desert country, with few villages and no trading posts to break it. Moreover Froes describes Gonçalo crossing many rivers.

There remains a third possibility, a route much more to the south, which would have meant a journey of rather over 300 miles. But this was probably the way Gonçalo went. From Tete he would have gone 20 miles southwards to the Ruenya river; he would have crossed this near its confluence with the

Mazoe, which he would have ascended for about 25 miles, till it met the Ruya. He would cross to the Mazoe's south bank here. In December there might have been two or three feet of water. South of this his way was barred by high, flat-topped mountains, so he would have turned south-west, and would again have come within two miles of the Ruenya, when he reached the trading station of Luanze. He was now within the borders of what is today Southern Rhodesia, and in the neighbourhood of the present Makaha. All this would have taken him five days of fast travelling, and his carriers probably demanded a rest. In spite of his mortification, and of his desire to hurry on, he must have been glad of one himself.

When he set out again it was to go north-west along the high bald-headed kopjes of Mtoko, towards the Nyadire river, about breast deep at this time of year. This brought him to the trading station of Bocuto, in the present Fungwe Reserve. This stretch would have taken only three days, but it was rough, tiring marching and climbing. From Bocuto the way led through the open *mopani* forest, which was more extensive then than now, and the going was easier. This led to another crossing of the Mazoe. It is here that there probably took place an incident which Froes relates. Since it was impossible to wade across the river, and since Gonçalo could not swim, he had to suffer the indignity of being put into a great earthenware pot, similar to the one he had used for getting his Mass equipment across rivers, but bigger. Clinging to the inside of the rim he was pushed across by the Africans. It was now not far to the trading post of Masapa, to the south-east of the dominating height of Fura.

At some time during this journey, says Godigno, Gonçalo entered a kraal called Mabete, where he was given an exceptionally kind welcome. He instructed the entire population in Christianity, baptized them, and prophesied that Mabete would never lose the Faith. Unfortunately, Godigno says nothing about the source of the story, but he does say that, at the time he was writing, the prophecy was still being fulfilled.

After leaving Masapa, Gonçalo was still faced with another 100 miles. Leaving Fura on his right, he would cross the present main road from Bindura to Mount Darwin, and he would then pass the Mufuri river and the upper Ruya to the valley of the Musengezi. Downstream lay the Monomotapa's *guta*, and at last he could feel that he was nearing the end of his tramp.

There has, in the past, been great uncertainty about the whereabouts of this *guta*. Almost certainly it was near the banks of the Musengezi, for Antonio Caiado and Froes agree that it was into this river that Gonçalo's body was thrown after his death.<sup>12</sup> Caiado calls it the Monsengense, Froes the Mon-sengece, while Godigno speaks of it as the Monsengesse, but adds that some people in the neighbourhood call it the Motete.<sup>13</sup>

But, apart from what we can learn from literary sources, there is evidence in the oral traditions of the nearby tribes. These have been examined by Mr. D. P. Abraham,<sup>14</sup> by Fathers from Marymount, and by Fr. F. E. Kotski, S.J., of the neighbouring St. Bernadette Mission, Sipolilo. Mr. Abraham, in discussions with the Monomotapa's descendant, the Mhondoro of Mutota, was told that the Monomotapa who put Silveira to death used to live at Chitako. This was claimed to be the burial place of the ancestor of the Monomotapa



who, in the middle of the fifteenth century, first led his people into this part of Africa. Since then his descendants had been buried there. It is situated on the left bank of the Utete river, which flows into the Musengezi from the west. The name of the Monomotapa whom Silveira went to convert was Chisamharu, and he had also been given the nickname of Nogomo, precisely because he liked to live right on the hill of Chitako.<sup>15</sup>

It has been suggested that Chitako was the *guta* to which Gongalo came, and where he was killed. It can be said in its favour that, according to the evidence of the Mhondoro of Mutota, Chisamharu often lived there, and that the Motete river, referred to by Godigno, may well be a corruption of the Utete. But it seems unlikely that this is where Gonçalo died, for it is too far away from the Musengezi. Moreover, investigations made by missionaries both round Chikato, and from those who had known the old chief Kaskete in the nearby Mazarabani Reserve, brought to light an old tradition according to which Chisamharu used to live in a *guta* about 50 miles north of Chitako, on the same bank of the Musengezi, and just downstream from where it is joined by the Kadzi. The tradition went on to say that here he had been visited by a Portuguese *mufundisi* or teacher, whom he had killed and thrown into the Musengezi. Ruins have, in fact, been found near the spot pointed out by this tradition.

In favour of this more northerly site it may be said that it is actually by the banks of the Musengezi, and also that Froes relates how Gongalo, two days before he reached the Monomotapa's *guta*, came to a place called Chatucuy, where he met Antonio Caiado. This may well be Chitako, which would have been on Gonçalo's way as he travelled north. It is about a couple of days' journey from the place where the Kadzi and the Musengezi meet.

The evidence, therefore, seems to show that Gongalo passed through Chitako, but that the *guta* at which he found the Monomotapa was the more northerly one. Since, however, it is on the north bank of the Kadsu, which here forms the political boundary, Rhodesians must probably reconcile themselves to the fact that the first apostle of their country was actually put to death a few hundred yards inside Portuguese East Africa.

But all this was still in the future when, in December, 1560, Gongalo came down the Musengezi valley to Chatucuy and met Antonio Caiado. He reached it on Christmas Eve, which thus became the first clearly recorded date in Rhodesian history. The next day he said the three Christmas Masses, the first known to have been said in Rhodesia. Antonio Caiado was much trusted by the Monomotapa, who used him as an intermediary with the Portuguese. The traders and settlers in Portugal's overseas possessions had not a good reputation, and St. Francis Xavier had said much about their bad example and opposition to his work. But Caiado seems to have been a great help to Gongalo, as Gomes Coelho had been before, and as the coloured Joao Raposo had been to Fernandes on his first coming to Otongue.

Caiado brought to Gongalo the Monomotapa's presents. They were lavish, taking the form of gold, cattle and slaves. He had been told that the new arrival, besides being a man of virtue, was also a great Portuguese noble, and had been one of the principal people in India. There was some truth

in this, for Gonçalo certainly belonged to one of Portugal's noble families, he was related to the Governor of Mocambique, and he had been intimate with the late Viceroy of Goa. But probably the Monomotapa gave exaggerated importance to it all, and hoped for political support, of which there was no question. Gonçalo politely sent the presents back, saying that Caiado would tell the Monomotapa what kind of gold he had come to look for. The Monomotapa was amazed. He had never before, he said, met a Portuguese who wanted neither gold nor goods nor slaves.

But Gonçalo had still to reach the Monomotapa's *guta*. So after his three Christmas Day Masses, he again set out and, on the afternoon of December 26, the Feast of St. Stephen, he came to the end of his journey.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Godigno, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
- <sup>2</sup> The map forms the frontispiece of the Hon. A. Wilmot's *Monomotapa* (1896).
- <sup>3</sup> Godigno, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
- <sup>4</sup> Godigno, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- <sup>5</sup> Published by Theal, *Records, II*, pp. 116-128.
- <sup>6</sup> First published in German by Fr. G. Schurhammer, s.J. See Brodrick, *St. Francis Xavier*, p. 383.
- <sup>7</sup> Published by Theal, *Records, II*, pp. 101-4.
- <sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 102.
- <sup>9</sup> Boxer, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
- <sup>10</sup> Godigno, *op. cit.*, p. 111. See Boxer, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- <sup>11</sup> *Guta* is the Shona word for a large stone-built village, and better describes the residence of the Monomotapa than either the more usual *kraal*, or the word "capital" used by the older writers who were apt to write of Central Africa in European terms. *Zimbabwe* might be better, but it might be confused with the famous Zimbabwe much further south, near Fort Victoria.
- <sup>12</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, pp. 104, 126.
- <sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 135.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Monomotapa Dynasty* in the *Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual*. Vol. 36, 1959, pp. 58-84.
- <sup>15</sup> Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

## V. Journey's End

The Monomotapa, Chisamharu Nogomo, into whose presence Gonçalo was brought after his weeks of travelling, was a young man who had only become chief a year before and who was threatened by a Pretender called Chepute. It is at least possible that the welcome he gave to Gonçalo was due to his hope of strong Portuguese support against this rival, for a royal welcome it was. Gonçalo was allowed to speak to him and to his mother in the intimacy of the royal hut, an honour which he was said never before to have paid to anyone. The Father was asked if he wanted wives, or gold, or land, or oxen, and when they were all refused Chisamharu was incredulous, saying that a man so indifferent to everything must have been born of the grass of the field. He ended the interview by offering Gonçalo anything he might want.

Nevertheless, in spite of the honour shown to him, Gonçalo can hardly have avoided feelings of disappointment. Chisamharu was, no doubt, a great chief in the eyes of his neighbours, but he was very different from what Portuguese imagination had painted him. Far from extending through the greater part of Southern Africa, his rule extended rather precariously only over a small section of what is now Southern Rhodesia, and over rather less in Portuguese East Africa. And the civilization and culture of the great Emperor from which he had hoped so much, was considerably below that of most of the peasants in his native Portugal. But he does not seem to have betrayed a sign of what he must have felt, but, with his passionate fervour, he threw himself into making the best of the warm welcome given him.

So the promising beginning was quickly followed up and, within three or four weeks, both Chisamharu and his mother were Christians. The circumstances leading up to their baptism can have had few parallels in the Church's missionary history. In the hut given to Gonçalo for his use, in which he said Mass, he had a large picture of Our Lady. Some of Chisamharu's principal subjects caught sight of this through the door of the hut, and they reported to the chief that the *mufundisi* had a very beautiful woman with him. Chisamharu asked to see her, so Gonçalo wrapped up the picture in the finest materials he had, and took it to the chief. This, he said, was the Mother of God: to Him everyone on earth, even kings and emperors were subject. When Chisamharu's curiosity had been sufficiently aroused, Gonçalo unveiled the picture. Chisamharu was enchanted and begged to have it. Gonçalo gave it to him, making a shrine for it in the chief's hut.

This led up to Chisamharu's conversion, though admittedly it was one which turned out to be tragically short and disastrous. For, four or five nights after getting the picture, Chisamharu, when half asleep, thought that the Lady appeared to him and smiled. She spoke, too, but he could not understand what she said. This worried him and he told Gonçalo about it. Gonçalo replied that when he became a Christian he would understand well enough. This was enough for Chisamharu; in a few days he sent Antonio Caiado to Gonçalo to tell him that he and his mother wanted to be baptized.

Gonçalo showed some caution; he instructed him twice a day for a number

of days and then baptized him. Chisamharu was given the Christian name of Sebastian, his mother that of Donna Maria. Then began a short period of great hope. To celebrate his baptism, Chisamharu had given the Father a hundred cows. Gonçalo ordered that they should be killed, and that the meat should be dried and given to those who needed it. This made him very popular indeed, and between 250 and 300 of Chisamharu's most important subjects were soon begging to be baptized. Gonçalo did all he could; he instructed the new Christians, prayed for them and tried to bring down God's blessing by living as penitential a life as ever he had done in the past.

But the mission to the Monomotapa was to prove only too tragically similar to that at Otongue; it was to begin happily and then to end amid disappointment and failure. Its end, however, was to be the more swift and calamitous of the two for, while Fernandes grimly stuck to his mission in the South for two to three years, Gonçalo's stay with Chisamharu lasted only two to three months, and cost him his life.

The swifter end of the mission to the Monomotapa was partly due to the presence in and around his *guta* of Mohammedan traders. This was a danger which the Otongue mission never had to face. It seems probable that, had Chisamharu been left to himself, he would have treated Gonçalo in much the same way as Gamba was treating Fernandes. He would have got tired of the novelty of Christian teaching, would have become disgruntled when he realised that its profession had not won him any armed support, would have found its moral standards increasingly irksome, and so would have abandoned and neglected Gonçalo and, perhaps, allowed him to die of exposure and starvation.

But dislike and fear of Gonçalo were sown precipitately and eagerly encouraged by the Mohammedans, especially by one called Mingane, who came from Mocambique, and whom Froes calls the *cacique* (*caciz*) of the Moors, by which he presumably means the leader of the Mohammedans in that part of East Africa. On his instructions the Mohammedans played upon the fears that Chisamharu felt of his rival, Chepute. They told him that Gonçalo had visited Chepute on his journey to the *guta*, and that he had left his followers with him, so as to look innocent and friendly when he approached Chisamharu.

They told him, too, that Gonçalo had come by order of the Viceroy of India and of the Governor of Mocambique to spy upon the Monomotapa's kingdom, and to prepare it for Portuguese conquest. This he would do by his baptism, by which he would make the Monomotapa's people subject to himself, and incapable of resistance. It was thus, they said, that the Portuguese had taken Sofala over 50 years before.

Finally they appealed to the terror of magic, which gripped the very soul of pagan Africa, that of the Monomotapa as much as the lowest of his subjects. They said that Gonçalo was a sorcerer, and had come to bring drought and famine on the country, to kill the chief, and to set his subjects at war with each other.

Gonçalo was quicker than Caiado to sense the changing atmosphere. "I know that the chief will kill me", he said to him, "but I am delighted to receive so happy an end from the hand of God." Caiado was incredulous,

for Chisamharu still seemed to be Gonçalo's firm friend. So he visited the chief, only to find that Gonçalo was right. "If you have any belongings in the Father's hut", Chisamharu said, "remove them, for I must order him to be killed." This was on Friday, March 14. Within less than 48 hours Gonçalo was dead.

Caiado told Gonçalo of his danger and again saw Chisamharu. He seems to have softened him sufficiently to get him to say that the Father must at least go away. It is not clear from Froes' account whether Chisamharu was sincere in this; for Caiado was told that the matter would be discussed between the chief and his mother on Sunday, that is on March 16 but that Gonçalo would certainly have to return to the coast. But, in the meantime, they had ordered that before the sun rose on Sunday morning he should be killed.

Gonçalo was certain he would be killed, and apparently without giving a thought to escaping, he began to make preparations. On Saturday, March 15, he told Caiado to collect all the neighbouring Portuguese, so that he might hear their confessions and give them Communion, for he would not have another chance. He waited till midday and then, as they had not come, he said Mass. It was to be his last. In the afternoon he baptized another 50 Christians and, when the Portuguese at length arrived, he absolved them, but he could not, of course, give them Communion. He entrusted all his Mass equipment to them, but kept a cassock, a surplice and a crucifix. Caiado left two of his servants in Gonçalo's hut for the night and then himself went away. Gonçalo smiled as he said goodbye. "Antonio Caiado", he said, "it is certain that I am more ready to die than the Mohammedans are to kill me. I forgive the king who is young, and his mother because the Moors have deceived them."<sup>1</sup> These are his last recorded words.

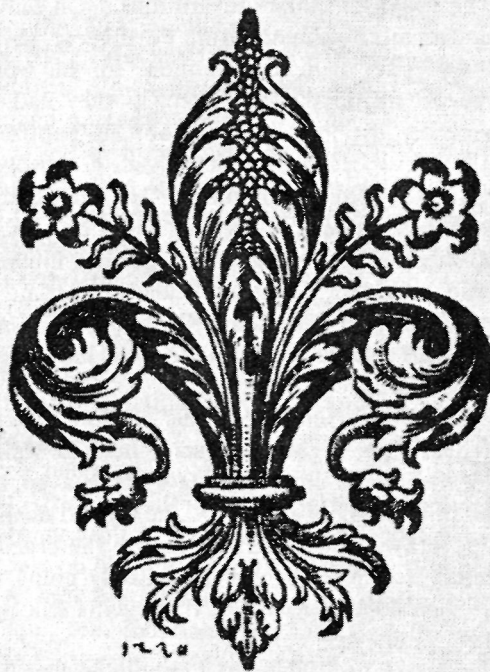
It was from Caiado's servants that the details of Gonçalo's death in time reached Froes. Until nearly midnight, they said, he had walked hurriedly up and down in front of his hut, at times looking up to heaven, and stretching out his arms in the form of a cross; at times, too, he uttered deep sighs. Then he went into his hut and prayed for some time before the crucifix. His vigil ended either by his falling asleep or by his deliberately going to sleep. He lay upon the reed mat which he used as a bed, the crucifix still beside him and the lamp still burning.

But the murderers whom Chisamharu had appointed had been watching, and now their time had come. One of them was known to Caiado's two servants. His name was Mocerume, and though a pagan he had shown himself favourable to Gonçalo, and had had meals with him. Accompanied by the other assassins, he rushed into the hut. They killed Gonçalo in the way that a *muroyi* or sorcerer would generally have been killed as late as the beginning of the present century. He was first thrown on his face, and then lifted up by his hands and feet. A rope was tied round his neck and pulled from both sides until he was strangled. Blood poured from his nose and mouth. His body was then dragged by a rope to the nearby Munsengezi and thrown into it. This was the normal way of getting rid of the body of a sorcerer, so that the poison it was thought to contain should not pollute the atmosphere. The murderers had finished their work; Caiado's two servants fled in terror into

VITA  
PATRIS GONZALI  
SYLVERIÆ, SO-  
CIETATIS IESV

Sacerdotis,

*In urbe Monomotapa martyrium passi.*



LVGDVNI,

Sumptibus Horatij Cardon.

---

M. DC. XII.

CVM PERMISSV SUPERIORVM.

The First Accounts of the Martyrdom

The title page of the first edition of the earliest surviving biography of Silveira, written by  
Nicholaus Godigno, s.j., and published at Lyons in 1612.

the bush, and nothing was left in the darkness but the empty hut, the smashed crucifix and the trail of blood stretching towards the river. To a superficial glance it might, perhaps, appear symbolic of the first Christian mission to Central Africa.

NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Theal, *Records, II*, p. 103.

## VL The Grain of Wheat

Even when Gonçalo was dead his enemies still feared him and tried to blacken his memory. They appealed to Chisamharu's fear of sorcery and told him that Gonçalo had appeared stripped to the waist outside the palisade which surrounded the *guta*; that he had taken some of the bark from it and that it was at this point that a thunderbolt had crashed through the palisade and partly destroyed the door of the royal hut. With the African chief's careless prodigality of his subjects' lives, Chisamharu, in his blind rage and terror, ordered that the 50 new Christians, whom Gonçalo had baptized on the last day of his life, should also be put to death.

But in this he was going too strongly against the feelings of his tribe. Some of his councillors came to him boldly and said that if these 50 were to be put to death because the Father had poured water over their heads, they should be put to death themselves. So indeed should Chisamharu himself for he had also been baptized. The chief rescinded the order, says Froes, and retired into his hut in confusion.<sup>1</sup>

In time the Portuguese thought it safe to speak to him. They warned him of God's anger, which would certainly punish him for the murder of so holy a man. Also it would not be at all surprising if an army was sent from India to avenge the outrage. The wretched Chisamharu now seems to have been as terrified of the Portuguese as he had formerly been of sorcery. He put the blame on the Mohammedans. Froes had heard a report that he had ordered the execution of the four who had done most to persuade him to kill the missionary. Two were killed, while Mingane and another escaped.

Gonçalo himself could, perhaps, have escaped, and it has been said that he should have done so, and that really he threw his life away. But surely it seems that, under the circumstances, flight would have been an abandonment of his duty. First, it is not certain that escape would have been possible, for the Mohammedans were certainly urging Chisamharu to prevent it.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, work remained for him to do; a few hours before his death he baptized 50 Africans. Whether the flight was successful or not, he would have given a very poor example to these new Christians, and to others whom he had converted in the recent past, had he weakly thus tried to run away, leaving them to the anger of Chisamharu; anger, moreover, which they would have incurred precisely by listening to his teaching. As it was, they were in the gravest danger. But they had the example of Gonçalo's bravery to encourage them. To risk his life for them was both the least and the most he could do. Finally there was the chance that Chisamharu might change his mind. He had turned against Gonçalo suddenly and unexpectedly; he might turn round and favour him as unpredictably as he had turned against him. Actually he did become opposed to those who had advised Gonçalo's death, but by then it was too late.

On occasions in the past Gonçalo does seem to have lacked discretion; for this reason he had not been very successful as Provincial of India. Later he had insisted in sailing down the African coast in a *zambuco*, when he and his companions could easily have made the journey more safely and quickly



in one of the Governor's carracks. When at sea, and afterwards, he had not taken sufficient care of his subjects, allowing them, or indeed ordering them to fast when they were not fit to do so. But in his death he was above reproach. He was called on to give an example to those whom he had converted, and to stand by them, even at the risk of his life; he gladly made the sacrifice for which all his years as a Jesuit had been the preparation.

So Gonçalo da Silveira was dead, and his mission was apparently a failure, just as the Otongue mission was to be eighteen months later. But the work for which he died went on, though under tremendous hardships. Apart from the remoteness and the primitive and difficult country, fever seldom loosed its grip for long. Probably it did more to hamper Portuguese attempts to penetrate into the continent than all the other obstacles put together. As the four months between Gonçalo's leaving Tete and his death were passed in the rainy season, it is hard to see how he could have avoided malaria. But he apparently made no mention of it to Caiado or to anyone else. Perhaps it was then so much taken for granted among Europeans in East Africa as not to be thought worth speaking about. But Gonçalo was so far away from giving way to any weakness caused by the climate that when the murderers stripped his dead body, they found he was wearing a shirt studded with iron points. He had kept up his heroic mortification till the end.<sup>3</sup>

His successors showed equal mortification in facing fever, the wild country and the dangerous fickleness of the African, of which the first missionaries had had so tragic an experience. Ten years after Gonçalo's death, two Jesuits, Fr. Francisco de Monclaros and Fr. Estavao Lopes, went with the military expedition which was sent up the Zambesi under Francisco Barreto, the former Viceroy of India and Gonçalo's one-time penitent, and they sent back valuable reports about the country. But, as a result of his experiences, Fr. Monclaros advised against further missionary activity up the Zambesi, with the result that the Jesuits left the area till 1607. Meanwhile, in 1577, some Dominicans had come from India, and the two Orders worked side by side from 1607 till 1610. Then instructions from the king of Portugal handed over the country south of the Zambesi to the Dominicans,<sup>4</sup> whose missionary sphere thus came to include the dominions of the Monomotapa, and the place of Silveira's martyrdom. The Jesuits, however, still kept their stations along the Zambesi, and their *Annual Letters* of 1624 show that they were at Tete, whence they served Marangue, some miles down the river, and they had also nine missionaries at Sena, and two at Luabo and its neighbourhood. This is in the Zambesi delta. There were also six Jesuits at Mozambique.<sup>5</sup> The information they gave about the country later proved invaluable. "Their reports", says Theal, "are the clearest, best written and far the most interesting documents now in existence upon the country. Compared with the ordinary state papers they are as polished marble to unhewn stone."<sup>8</sup> Not even the reports of the Jesuits, however, tell for certain how far west they and other missionaries penetrated. But Livingstone, in 1860, found an old chapel and a broken church bell at Zumbo, which is on the northern bank of the Zambesi, where it is joined by the Luangwa. He wrote sadly, "one can scarcely look without feelings of sadness on the utter desolation of a place where men have met to

worship the Supreme Being, or have united in uttering the magnificent words, 'Thou art King of Glory O Christ', and remembers that the natives of this part know nothing of His religion or even of His name. A strange superstition makes this place sacred to them, and they never come near it."<sup>7</sup>

Zumbo is 250 miles upstream from Tete and 50 to 60 miles north-west of where Gonçalo had died. So missionaries had penetrated at least that far. Livingstone found many other traces of their work and wrote that they "established themselves in a vast number of places in Eastern Africa, as the ruins of mission stations still testify." He said, too, that the memory they had left on the native mind was "decidedly favourable to their zeal and piety."<sup>8</sup> It is possible that with more discoveries of ancient ruins in the northern part of Southern Rhodesia and the adjacent parts of Portuguese East Africa, and their scientific examination, greater knowledge may be obtained about the unknown missionaries who worked in what was then the very heart of darkest Africa 300 or more years ago.

These Jesuit missions continued until the tragic September 8, 1759. This was the Feast of Our Lady's Nativity, and the Fathers at Tete were having their after dinner recreation. Fr. Maurice Thomann, who was there at the time, tells us that they were discussing original sin. While thus talking they were suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted by the Governor of Tete and an armed escort. With tears in his eyes he told them that it was his duty to arrest them all; they might not even go back to their rooms to fetch a change of clothes or a breviary. They themselves had done nothing wrong, he went on, but their brethren in Portugal had plotted to kill the king, and had committed many other crimes, and all had to be punished.<sup>9</sup> It was the execution in distant Central Africa of the Marquess de Pombal's vindictive and misguided order destroying the Society of Jesus in all the territories of the King of Portugal. They had made themselves loved by the tribes round Tete, who would have risen to defend them, had they not been held back by the Fathers themselves. But, owing to the machinations of Pombal and an ignorant government 6,000 miles away, the Society of Jesus was lost to Central Africa, and the inhabitants were left to that paganism in which Livingstone found them 100 years later.

Meanwhile the Dominicans had been working south of the Zambesi and, in May, 1629, they converted the Monomotapa himself, Mavuru II. It is possible that his conversion was little more genuine than that of Chisamharu; he certainly needed Portuguese political support against a Pretender. Still, whatever the motive, he gave the missionaries much help, though they had often to lament, like Gonçalo and Fernandes before them, that the Bantu were quick enough to profess Christianity, but equally quick to disregard its moral teaching. Mavuru II's successor continued to help the missionaries and, in 1652, he became a Christian himself and was baptized with great ceremony. But little permanent effect was made on the Bantu tribes. Polygamy may have been too strong or, perhaps, the missionaries were too few for, in 1667, the Dominicans only numbered six.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless they continued in their remote, difficult and fever-ridden apostolate for the greater part of the eighteenth century until, in 1775, 16

years after they had seen the Society of Jesus expelled, they were all recalled to Goa. The Portuguese possessions in East Africa were to be handed over to the secular clergy and it was thought that eight would be enough for their 300,000 square miles. With this any serious missionary enterprise came to an end.

For over 100 years darkness came down on the Zambesi valley and the neighbouring country until, in April, 1879, a mission under Fr. H. Depelchin, S.J., set out from Garahamstown, in what was then Cape Colony and, by the end of the year, the Sanctus bell was again heard in the lands bordering on the old "Empire" of the Monomotapa. Two years later the Holy See also commissioned the Society of Jesus to do missionary work in the Portuguese territories along the Lower Zambesi, and so they once again followed Silveira's way up the great river.

At first the work was carried on amid tremendous hardships, and with the loss of many lives. For the first 20 years of the mission the average age at which the Jesuits died was 40, and the Fathers at least, were over 33 before they reached it. But through this sacrifice the Faith was built up again along the river up which Gonçalo had sailed, and in the kopje-strewn *bundu* of north-east Mashonaland which he was the first missionary to tread. And today the work is bearing fruit. In the Archdiocese of Salisbury, which includes the part of Rhodesia which Gonçalo knew, the number of African Catholics more than doubled in the four years 1955-8. It is a late harvest but a generous one, and would be more generous still if there were more to reap it. In rapidly changing Africa, where there is so much to cause dismay and anxiety, there are grounds, too, for hope in this rapidly increasing Catholic population, the result of the work of missionaries who toiled for so long and in such tribulations, and only saw very little of the abundant harvest which they planted.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Theal, *Records, II*, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Godigno, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Theal, *History and Ethnography of South Africa, I*, p. 435.

<sup>6</sup> V. J. Courtois, *Notes Chronologiques sur les Anciennes Missions au Zambese*.

<sup>6</sup> Theal, *History and Ethnography, I*, p. 494.

<sup>7</sup> *The Zambesi and its Tributaries* (1865), p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Livingstone, *The Zambesi and its Tributaries*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Fr. Maurice Thomann's account of the execution of Pombal's decree at Tete is given in Courtois' *Notes Chronologiques sur les Anciennes Missions Catholiques au Zambese*.

<sup>10</sup> Theal, *History and Ethnography, I*, p. 485.

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