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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Antonio Vazquez de Espinosa, *Compendium and Description of the West Indies*. Translated by Charles Upson Clark. Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, v. 102 (Washington, 1942). xii, 862 pp., introduction, index.

The Vazquez manuscript of 1628 was a "lost" manuscript until translator Clark found it in the Barberini collection of the Vatican some ten years ago. It took considerable work on the part of Clark and his distinguished colleagues to determine that the Carmelite friar Vazquez de Espinosa was the author and that the work actually was regarded as the most exhaustive of its time dealing with the New World.

Fray Vazquez died in Seville in 1630 without having made the final revisions to the massive work. But while it is a minor irritation to discover that an ordnance inventory is incomplete, or that certain material is duplicated, these are trifling matters indeed in comparison with the vast scope of the compilation.

Vazquez' admitted purpose in writing this encyclopedic volume on Spain's America was "the description of the provinces" with "a bit of everything for the reader's entertainment" and an occasional "story for dessert." None will deny his achievement. The volume is divided into two parts, each of which comprises six books of from four to ninety-five chapters. Part I deals with New Spain (Mexico, the colonies in the Indies and Florida) while Part II relates to South America, including the Spanish Main.

To read even the first part of this work is to acquire considerable knowledge of basic Spanish colonial problems. Such knowledge is essential to

appreciation of Spain's role in the pageant of the Americas. And a thorough reading is apt to work a complete change in one's perspective of American history.

Vazquez has written in almost unbelievable detail about the characteristics-geographic, biologic, ethnographic, administrative, economic and religious-of the various colonial areas from Peru to the Philippines. At the outset is detailed the course of the galleons to the Indies and the route of their return to Spain. He demonstrated, apparently at least to his own satisfaction, the "sphericity of the earth, its dimensions, and how in His Majesty's dominions at every hour Mass is said." He discoursed at length upon the aborigines-their origin, languages, customs, their trials and tribulations.

The succeeding books deal each with a separate *audiencia* (judicial division). Book II, a typical example, treats the Audiencia of Hispaniola (Haiti). Its 39 chapters include a geographical definition of Haiti, a historical summary of its discovery by Columbus, descriptions of the principal settlements, the adjacent islands and territories of Puerto Rico, Margarita, Trinidad, Cuba, Venezuela and the Orinoco river, the city and fort of St. Augustine, Florida, and "many other provinces belonging to the Florida district." Jamaica is included, and with it Vazquez related "a remarkable event." On the eve of the festival of San Diego (St. James) a corsair arrived with a fleet of 16 ships to take the island and sack the town. Some 600 pirates disembarked for the task. The Spanish inhabitants met the invaders with such success that they killed over 100 of them and drove them off with a loss of only one Spaniard. Said Vazquez: "The chief cause of their rout was a friar [San Diego], mounted on a powerful horse and singing the hymn of vic-

tory ; accordingly from that time on the town . . . has him as their patron”

A great many places Vazquez himself knew. For descriptions of others he relied upon various sources, with supplements from his own store of knowledge. He made no claim to the office of historian; Solorzano, Herrera, Acosta, Garcilaso de la Vega and Gomara have furnished much of his history. Yet he has included eyewitness narratives that might well have been lost had he not seen fit to write somewhat as a historian.

The Florida portion of the *Description* is in Part I, Book II, chapters 30-33, pp. 106-115. Naturally this part of the volume will be of greatest interest to Floridians. It is also more or less typical of Vazquez' style in the remainder of the work:

Florida

“Florida,” wrote Vazquez with his usual factual and concise approach, “is a point of land projecting 100 leagues into the sea . . . and forms part of the mainland with New Spain [Mexico].” Next comes a brief history of the discovery, the exploration of Narvaez, Soto and others, and the abortive missionary attempt of Fray Luis Cancer. “After all this, in the year 1559 [!], Commander Pedro Melendez de Aviles went to these provinces of the warlike Florida Indians; and after subduing some districts adjoining the coast, he founded and colonized certain forts and cities, such as San Mateo [as the Spanish renamed the ill-found French settlement on the St. Johns river], which was soon abandoned, and the city and fort of St. Augustine, which I have heard still remains as a settlement in that vast region.” Thus easily does Vazquez gloss over the bloody 16th century fight for Florida. He wrote on:

St. Augustine

"This city of St. Augustine lies near the sea at the water's edge; it contains over 300 Spanish residents, who are all married soldiers living there as a garrison. The city is well built of stone, with an excellent parish church and a Franciscan convent with some 30 friars, who are almost all evangelizing the Indians in their villages. There is a hospital to care for the indigent sick, a shrine of Santa Barbara, and a fort with some 25 excellent bronze cannon. His Majesty appoints a Governor, who is Captain General, and two Royal Officials.

"The city lies full 30° N.; its climate is like that of Spain, with winter and summer; the country is fertile, level, and wooded, with some swamps. Spanish fruit trees bear with great abundance, as do also cereals, garden truck, and vegetables; they grow excellent quinces, pomegranates, pears, and other kinds of fruit, and marvelous melons."

Vazquez mentioned the "many districts converted to the Faith; the Indians are very good Christians, and devout." He listed the Indian villages roundabout, and went on to describe the Province of Guale (Georgia). "Farther on," he then continued, "is the Province of Santa Elena [South Carolina], and in that direction at 120 leagues from St. Augustine, the Sierra de Tama, all rock crystal, where fine diamonds have been found . . ." Even so late did the legend of the Crystal Mountains persist.

As did the religious before and after him, Vazquez bewailed the lack of missionaries to work the fertile Florida fields-and he likewise took notice of English settlement to the north, a danger which even at that time was becoming serious: "the Bishop of Cuba does not go to Florida because there are perilous risks of enemy pirates who habitually keep raid-

ing and infesting those coasts, and because also of the dangerous character of the sea in those regions, with so many hurricanes ; furthermore, the English of Xacal [Virginia] are so close by land . . . nor do they neglect to teach their perverse religion to those poor heathen. . . .”

“In this [Florida] region,” the friar went on, “there are many provinces well peopled by warlike tribes and abounding in food supplies of corn and other cereal and root crops, quantities of fruit, fallow deer, elk, rabbits, and other animals, with plenty of feathered game, partridges, quail, doves, turtle-doves, turkeys, pheasants, and other birds ; in the mighty rivers there is abundance of delicious fish and great beds of pearls.” He described numerous Indian towns and districts, such as Chile, a village of “over 10,000 Indians, a brave and warlike tribe, whose habit it is to set out for war with large feather headdresses, very handsome after their fashion”; and Apalache, “fertile lowlands with many field cabins and much cultivation . . . very rich in fish and pearls.” (Vazquez continually emphasized the richness of the Florida region: in the territory of Ichiaha one Spaniard found a pearl “as large as a hazelnut, and of great value.”)

Much of the Florida information was drawn from the narrative of Soto’s march. Characteristically Vazquez judged that “the complete failure and collapse of Gov. Hernando de Soto and his Spaniards, resulted in nonsettlement of many most suitable districts which the local chiefs affably requested them to colonize; had they done so, the colonies would have grown greatly and another kingdom would have been established as extensive as that of New Spain.”

The *Description* is a book of unusual value. “Even with a delay of 300 years in its publication,”

writes the translator, "it is not to be considered for a moment as merely a historical curiosity." Broad scope and painstaking description are two qualities not usually found in a single volume.

True, it must be read critically. Perhaps it is primarily valuable for historical geography, though for the layman it is unfortunate that both Vazquez and Clark neglected to supply a map. Observations on Indian customs make the book useful-even indispensable-to the anthropologist. For other scientists it is a mine of information, sometimes exceedingly curious, such as the raindrops at Puerto Bello, which, "after falling turn into little toads." Vazquez has taken virtually the whole field of 17th century science as his interest; there are elaborate descriptions of mining processes, plants (especially medicinal plants) and animals (including the exploits of the famous Spanish war dogs), as well as extended discourses upon such peculiarly related subjects as the bible and the causes of volcanic eruptions. And as Clark points out, the book will probably be required reading for students of Spanish colonial and ecclesiastical administration. The perspicacity of this "honest and earnest old Carmelite" in these fields is reflected in his observations on the weaknesses of Spanish colonization.

Clark praises Vazquez as a "born story teller." The evidence bears him out. Take the incident of the Indian Francisco, who discovered that his wife had been eaten by alligators. Determined upon revenge, Francisco and his fellows captured the 'gators, slit them open and retrieved the various portions of the unfortunate lady's anatomy. The corpse having been pieced together, it was buried in the church. "It was I who said Mass for her," stated friar Vazquez, "because I happened to be

staying there." No less entertaining is his relation of the whale hunts conducted by the Chilean natives.

Vazquez used graphic, if sometimes indelicate language. His description of the guava (a sometimes maligned fruit very familiar to Floridians) speaks volumes: "To recent arrivals from Spain, at their first taste of them [guavas]," writes the good friar, "they seem to possess a bedbug odor."

Vazquez has done much to humanize history.

ALBERT MANUCY

* * *

The Letters of Don Juan McQueen to His Family, Written from Spanish East Florida, 1791-1807. With a Biographical Sketch and Notes by Walter Charlton Hartridge. Published by the Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America. (Bostick & Thornley, Columbia, South Carolina. 1943. 89 p. index. \$2.50)

Juan McQueen emerges from his letters as a person of great versatility and unlimited activities—whether as captain in the South Carolina navy, participant in northern Revolutionary fields, member of Carolina law-making bodies, chasing pirates while trying to halt William Bowles's incursion into East Florida, acting as padrino at numerous baptisms at which his friend Father O'Reilly officiated along the rivers where McQueen was commander, or in his own business enterprises.

Prior to the time the letters were written McQueen, unable to pay the heavy taxes on vast land holdings he had obtained in Georgia, moved to Spanish East Florida where he again started to accumulate lands. He became a convert to the Catholic faith; and because of that his wife remained in her Georgia plantation home, clouding McQueen's existence by refusing to permit their daughters to

live with or visit their father in St. Augustine or on his San Pablo plantation.

Nothing less than actual perusal can give an adequate idea of the pleasurable contents of the letters to his daughter Eliza Anne, and signed "Your Affectionate Father." Almost equal, to many readers, will be the unusual tone of the correspondence that John McQueen Jr. sent to this sister. References to musical instruments, love affairs, gallantries of courtship, even advice on selection of a husband show trends of thought of the juniors of that period.

Rich in details of life in the East Florida of the second Spanish period, and particularly in allusions to St. Augustine, the letters not only provide much information along human lines but, as they are carefully read, a certain literary flavor is recognized that adds charm to the selections printed.

Intimate as the letters show McQueen to have been with Spanish royal officials and the clergy, nothing provides an explanation of why this newcomer from Georgia was made Captain of Militia by the King, and Commander of the St. Johns river and the rather turbulent borderland area of St. Marys river. Later he was made judge for both sections.

Following McQueen's rather sudden death, his papers were distributed among his heirs. The papers in English went to female descendants; only part of those extant being included in this volume. These were presented to the Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America by Mrs. Franklin B. Screven and Miss Phoebe H. Elliott. Mr. Hartridge has been asked to edit another series of letters from this collection.

Many Spanish documents were sent to a male member of the family and their whereabouts is unknown. It may be that in them is some explanation

of McQueen's rapid rise in Spanish favor and influence.

Every detail of the volume shows the care and scholarship given by its editor Walter Charlton Hartridge of Savannah to its compilation, to his biographical sketch of McQueen, and to the extensive notes provided. The topography and format are outstanding and are reminiscent of the fine publications of the Florida State Historical Society.

First are eleven letters written to or about McQueen himself. Among their writers are George Washington, Marquis de La Fayette, Thomas Jefferson, Comte D'Estaing and Governor Quesada of East Florida. In 1779 Washington is sending by Captain McQueen documents to La Fayette of such importance that he reminds the bearer he shall destroy the package in case of danger on the voyage. The La Fayette and Jefferson notes, belonging to a later trip to France, indicate the friendly terms existing with these leaders in Revolutionary affairs. They serve to place McQueen as a person of broad experience, and furnish a contrasting background for the tender affectionate letters he writes to his dear daughter.

Not least satisfying is the pleasing balance secured by subordination of copious footnotes to the letters themselves. The edition is but 500 copies, and already interest indicates that the Colonial Dames were justified in the publication, made possible by Mrs. Henry L. Richmond.

An introduction by Professor A. J. Hanna written from his own research in the period and his acquaintance with McQueen's career, serves admirably to place the man and give the reader a helpful background.

KATHERINE SWAN LAWSON.

The St. Augustine Historical Society