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The Siege Of Zamora

Robert Southey

When King Don Sancho heard what the Cid said, his anger kindled against him, and he said, You have given this counsel to my sister because you were bred with her. And my Cid answered and said, Faithfully have I discharged your bidding, and as a true vassal. Howbeit, O king, I will not bear arms against the Infanta your sister, nor against Zamora, because of the days which are passed;—and I beseech you do not persist in doing this wrong. But then King Don Sancho was more greatly incensed, and he said unto him, If it were not that my father left you commended to me, I would order you this instant to be hanged. But for this which you have said I command you to quit my kingdom within nine days. The Cid went to his tent in anger, and called for his kinsmen and his friends, and bade them make ready on the instant to depart with him. He set forth with all the knights and esquires of his table, and with all their retainers horse and foot, twelve hundred persons, all men of approved worth, a goodly company;—and they took the road to Toledo, meaning to join King Don Alfonso among the Moors. That night they slept at Castro Nuno. But when the counts and Ricos-omes, and the other good men of the host saw this, they understood the great evil, which might arise to the king from the departure of the Cid. They went to the king and said unto him, Sir, wherefore would you lose so good a vassal, who has done you such great service? If he should go unto your brother Don Alfonso among the Moors, he would not let you besiege this city thus in peace. And the king perceived that they spake rightly, and he called for Don Diego Ordonez and bade him follow the Cid, and beseech him in his name to return; and whatever covenant he should make it should be confirmed unto him; and of this he ordered his letters of credence to be made out. And Don Diego Ordonez rode after the Cid, and delivered the king's bidding, and said that the king besought him not to bear in mind the words which he had spoken unto him in anger. Then the Cid called together his kinsmen and friends, and they counselled him that he should return to the king, for it was better to remain in his land and serve God, than to go among the Moors. He held their counsel good, and called for Don Diego, and said that he would do the will of the king. And when the Cid drew nigh unto the host, the king went out with five hundred knights to meet him, and received him gladly, and did him great honour. And the Cid kissed his hand and asked him if he confirmed what Don Diego had said; and the king confirmed it before all the knights who were there present, promising to give him great possessions. And when they came to the army great was the joy

because of the Cid's return, and great were the rejoicings which were made: but as great was the sorrow in Zamora, for they who were in the town held that the siege was broken up by his departure. Nevertheless my Cid would not bear arms against the Infanta, nor against the town of Zamora, because of the days which were past.

The king ordered proclamation to be made throughout the host that the people should make ready to attack the town. They fought against it three days and three nights so bravely that all the ditches were filled up, and the barbicans thrown down, and they who were within fought sword in hand with those without, and the waters of the Douro, as they past below the town, were all discoloured with blood. And when Count Don Garcia de Cabra saw the great loss which they were suffering, it grieved him; and he went unto the king and told him that many men were slain, and advised him to call off the host that they should no longer fight against the town, but hold it besieged, for by famine it might soon be taken. Then the king ordered them to draw back, and he sent to each camp to know how many men had died in the attack, and the number was found to be a thousand and thirty. And when the king knew this he was greatly troubled for the great loss which he had received, and he ordered the town to be beleaguered round about, that none could enter into it, neither go out therefrom; and there was a great famine within the town. And when Don Arias Gonzalo saw the misery, and the hunger, and the mortality which were there, he said to the Infanta Donya Urraca, You see, lady, the great wretchedness which the people of Zamora have suffered, and do every day suffer to maintain their loyalty; now then call together the Council, and thank them truly for what they have done for you, and bid them give up the town within nine days to the king your brother. And we, lady, will go to Toledo to your brother King Don Alfonso, for we cannot defend Zamora; King Don Sancho is of so great heart and so resolute, that he will never break up the siege, and I do not hold it good that you should abide here longer. And Donya Urraca gave orders that the good men of Zamora should meet together in council; and she said unto them, Friends, ye well see the resoluteness of King Don Sancho my brother. Ye have done enough, and I do not hold it good that ye should perish, I command ye therefore give up the town to him within nine days, and I will go to Toledo to my brother King Don Alfonso. The men of Zamora when they heard this had great sorrow, because they had endured the siege so long, and must now give up the town at last; and they determined all to go with the Infanta, and not remain in the town.

When Vellido Dolfos heard this, he went to Donya Urraca and said, Lady, I came here to Zamora to do you service with thirty knights, all well accoutred, as you know; and I have served you long time, and never have I had from you guerdon for my service, though I have demanded it: but now if you will grant my demand I will relieve Zamora, and make King Don Sancho break up the siege. Then said

Donya Urraca, Vellido, I do not bid thee commit any evil thing, if such thou hast in thy thought; but I say unto you, that there is not a man in the world to whom if he should relieve Zamora, and make the king my brother raise the siege, I would not grant whatsoever he might require. And when Vellido heard this he kissed her hand, and went to a porter who kept one of the gates of the town, saying, that he should open the gate unto him when he saw him flying toward it, and he gave him his cloak. Then he armed himself, and mounted his horse, and rode to the house of Don Arias Gonzalo, and cried with a loud voice, We all know the reason, Don Arias Gonzalo, why you will not let Donya Urraca exchange Zamora with her brother; it is because you deal with her like an old traitor. When Arias Gonzalo heard this, it grieved him to the heart. Then his sons arose and armed themselves hastily, and went after Vellido, who fled before them toward the gate of the town. The porter when he saw him coming opened the gate, and he rode out and galloped into the camp of the King Don Sancho, and the others followed him till they were nigh the camp, but farther they did not venture. And Vellido went to the king and kissed his hand, and said unto him these false words with a lying tongue: Sir, because I said to the Council of Zamora that they should yield the town unto you, the sons of Arias Gonzalo would have slain me, even as you have seen. And therefore come I to you, sir, and will be your vassal, if I may find favour at your hands. And I will show you how in a few days you may have Zamora, if God pleases; and if I do not as I have said, then let me be slain. And the king believed all that he said, and received him for his vassal, and did him great honour. And all that night they talked together of his secrets, and he made the king believe that he knew a postern by means of which he would put Zamora into his hands.

On the morrow in the morning, one of the knights who were in the town went upon the wall, and cried out with a loud voice, King Don Sancho, give ear to what I say; I am a knight, and they from whom I spring were true men and delighted in their loyalty, and I also will live and die in my truth. I say unto you, that from this town of Zamora there is gone forth a traitor to kill you; his name is Vellido Dolfos. Look to yourself therefore and take heed of him. I say this to you, that if evil should befall you by this traitor, it may not be said in Spain that you were not warned against him. And the men of Zamora sent also to the king to bid him beware of Vellido; nevertheless he gave no heed to the warning. And Vellido, when he heard this went to the king, and said, Sir, the old Arias Gonzalo is full crafty, and hath sent to say this unto you, because he knows that by my means you would have won the town. And he called for his horse, feigning that he would depart because of what had been said. But the king took him by the hand and said, Friend and vassal, take no thought for this; I say unto you, that if I may have Zamora, I will make you chief therein, even as Arias Gonzalo is now. Then Vellido kissed his hand and said, God grant you life, sir, for many and happy years, and let you fulfil what you desire. But the traitor had other thoughts in his

heart.

After this Vellido took the king apart and said to him, If it please you, sir, let us ride out together alone; we will go round Zamora, and see the trenches which you have ordered to be made; and I will show unto you the postern which is called the queen's, by which we may enter the town, for it is never closed. When it is night you shall give me a hundred knights who are hidalgos, well armed, and we will go on foot, and the Zamorans because they are weak with famine and misery, will let us conquer them, and we will enter and open the gate, and keep it open till all your host shall have entered in. The king believed what he said, and they took horse and went riding round the town, and the king looked at the trenches, and that traitor showed him the postern. And after they had ridden round the town the king had need to alight; now he carried in his hand a light hunting spear which was gilded over, such as the kings from whom he was descended were wont to bear; and he gave this to Vellido to hold it while he went aside, to cover his feet. And Vellido Dolfos, when he saw him in that guise, took the hunting spear and thrust it between his shoulders, so that it went through him and came out at his breast. And when he had stricken him he turned the reins and rode as fast as he could toward the postern. Now it chanced that the Cid saw him riding thus, and asked him wherefore he fled, and he would not answer; and then the Cid understood that he had done some treason, and his heart misgave him and he called in haste for his horse, but while they were bringing it, Vellido had ridden far away; and the Cid being eager to follow him, took only his lance and did not wait to have his spurs buckled on. And he followed him to the postern and had well nigh overtaken him, but Vellido got in; and then the Cid said in his anger, Cursed be the knight who ever gets on horseback without his spurs. Now in all the feats of the Cid never was fault found in him save only in this, that he did not enter after Vellido into the town; but he did not fail to do this for cowardice, neither for fear of death, or of imprisonment; but because he thought that this was a device between him and the king, and that he fled by the king's command; for certes, if he had known that the king was slain, there was nothing which would have prevented him from entering the town, and slaying the traitor in the streets, thereright.



Now the history saith, that when Vellido Dolfos had got within the postern, he was in such fear both of those who were in the town and of those who were without, that he went and placed himself under the mantle of the Infanta Donya Urraca. And when Don Arias Gonzalo knew this, he went unto the Infanta and said, Lady, I beseech you that you give up this traitor to the Castillians, otherwise the Castillians will impeach all who are in Zamora, and that will be greater dishonour for you and for us. And Donya Urraca made answer, Counsel me then so that he may not die for this which he hath done. Don Arias Gonzalo then answered, Give him unto me, and I will keep him in custody for three days, and if the Castillians impeach us we will deliver him into their hands; and if they do not impeach us within that time, we will thrust him out of the town so that he shall not be seen among us. And Don Arias Gonzalo took him from thence, and secured him with double fetters, and guarded him well.

Meantime the Castillians went to seek their king, and they found him by the side of the Douro, where he lay sorely wounded, even unto death; but he had not yet lost his speech, and the hunting spear was in his body, through and through, and they did not dare to take it out lest he should die immediately. And a master of Burgos came up who was well skilled in these things, and he sawed off the ends of the spear, that he might not lose his speech, and said that he should be confessed, for he had death within him. Then Count Don Garcia de Cabra said unto him, Sir, think of your soul, for you have a desperate wound. And the king made answer, The traitor Vellido has killed me, and I well know that this was for my sins, because I broke the oath which I made unto the king my father. As the king was saying this the Cid came up and knelt before him and said, I, sir, remain more desolate than any other of your vassals, for for your sake have I made your brethren mine enemies, and all in the world who were against you, and against whom it pleased you to go. The king your father commended me to them as well as to you, when he divided his kingdoms, and I have lost their love for your sake, having done them great evil. And now neither can I go before King

Don Alfonso, your brother, nor remain among the Christians before Donya Urraca your sister, because they hold that whatsoever you have done against them was by my counsel. Now then, sir, remember me before you depart. And the king said, I beseech all ye who are here present, that if my brother King Don Alfonso should come from the land of the Moors, ye beseech him to show favour unto you, my Cid, and that he always be bountiful unto you, and receive you to be his vassal. Then the Cid arose and kissed his hand, and all the chief persons who were there present did the like. And the king said unto them, I beseech ye intreat my brother King Don Alfonso to forgive me whatever wrong I have done him, and to pray to God to have mercy upon my soul. And when he had said this he asked for the candle, and presently his soul departed. And all who were there present made great lamentation for the king.

Now when the king was dead, the townsmen who were in the camp forsook their tents and fled, but the noble Castillians would not depart from Zamora, nor break up the siege thereof, but remained bravely before it, though they had lost their lord. And they took counsel together how they should proceed against the men of Zamora for this great treason which had been committed. Then Count Don Garcia de Cabra arose and said, Friends, if there be one here who will impeach them for this thing, we will do whatever may be needful that he may come off with honour, and the impeachment be carried through. Then Don Diego Ordonez arose, and he said unto them, If ye will all assent to this which ye have heard, I will impeach the men of Zamora for the death of the king our lord: and they all assented. Now my Cid did not make this impeachment against the people of Zamora, because of the oath which he had sworn.

Then Don Diego Ordonez went to his lodging and armed himself well and rode toward Zamora. And when he drew nigh unto the town he began to cry aloud, asking if Don Arias Gonzalo were there, for he would speak with him. And Don Arias Gonzalo went with his sons upon the wall to see who called for him, and he spake to the knight, saying, Friend, what wouldest thou? And Don Diego Ordonez answered, The Castillians have lost their lord; the traitor Vellido slew him, being his vassal, and ye of Zamora have received Vellido and harboured him within your walls. Now therefore I say that he is a traitor who hath a traitor with him, if he knoweth and consenteth unto the treason. And for this I impeach the people of Zamora, the great as well as the little, the living and the dead. If there be any one in Zamora to gainsay what I have said, I will do battle with him, and with God's pleasure conquer him, so that the infamy shall remain upon you. Don Arias Gonzalo replied, If I were what thou sayest I am, it had been better for me never to have been born; but in what thou sayest thou liest, and I will do battle with thee upon this quarrel, or give thee one in my stead. But know that you have been ill advised in making this impeachment, for the manner is, that whosoever impeacheth a council must do battle with five, one after another, and if he

conquer the five he shall be held a true man, but if either of the five conquer him, the council is held acquitted and he a liar. When Don Diego heard this it troubled him; howbeit he dissembled this right well, and said unto Don Arias Gonzalo, I will bring twelve Castillians, and do you bring twelve men of Zamora, and they shall swear upon the Holy Gospel to judge justly between us, and if they find that I am bound to do battle with five, I will perform it. And Don Arias made answer that he said well, and it should be so. And truce was made for three times nine days, till this should have been determined and the combat fought.

Then when the truce was made they chose out twelve alcades on the one part, and twelve on the other, who should decide in what manner he was bound to perform combat who impeached a council. Two of them who were held the most learned in these things arose, the one being a Castillian and the other of Zamora, and said that they had found the law as it was written to be this: That whosoever impeacheth the council of a town which was a bishop's seat, must do battle with five in the field, one after another; and that after every combat there should be given unto him fresh arms and horse, and three sops of bread, and a draught either of wine or of water, as he chose. And in this sentence which the twain pronounced, the other twenty and two accorded.

On the morrow the four and twenty alcades marked out the lists upon the sand beside the river, and in the middle of the lists they placed a bar, and ordained that he who won the battle should lay hand on the bar, and say that he had conquered: and then they appointed a term of nine days for the combatants to come to those lists which had been assigned. And when all was appointed the Infanta Donya Urraca ordered a meeting to be called, at which all the men of the town assembled. And when they were gathered together, Don Arias Gonzalo said unto them, Friends, I beseech ye, if there be any here among ye who took counsel for the death of King Don Sancho, or were privy thereunto, that ye now tell me, and deny it not; for rather would I go with my sons to the land of the Moors, than be overcome in the field, and held for a traitor. Then they all replied, that there was none there who knew of the treason, nor had consented unto it. At this was Don Arias Gonzalo well pleased, and he went to his house with his sons, and chose out four of them to do combat, and said that he would be the fifth himself.

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