

## Prince Rupert in Lisbon

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Though the death of King Charles in January 1649 may be said to have ended the Civil War on land, there was still no peace at sea. Prince Rupert in command of a large portion of the Fleet was continuing hostilities against Blake in command of the rest. Their tactics seem to have consisted in avoiding each other and seizing unarmed merchantmen whose cargoes they impounded. Since the best worth catching were to be met coming from the East or South America, it was not long before both were manoeuvring for the possession of Lisbon harbour as a base. The King of Portugal, who on Charles' death declared himself bound by treaty to his successor, was quite prepared to welcome Rupert and offer him all reasonable assistance. Unfortunately Rupert was Rupert, and in return proceeded to ride down Portuguese sensibilities as if they were enemy infantry. His first step was to send a gentleman, by name de Lisle, to Lisbon armed with a remarkable document demanding that the King of Portugal should give him the freedom of his ports in all his dominions, and that should any of his ships bring prizes into any of the said ports, the King of Portugal, through his local representative, should guard the same till they could be disposed of in the interest of the King of England. Furthermore the said ships were to remain in the said harbours as long as was necessary, and were not to be visited by any one on behalf of the King of Portugal, nor by any of his officers, not by any person whatever. Nor was that all. Merchandise so carried into any of the said places was to be sold by Prince Rupert's representatives, and that free from taxes and impositions on the seller's part. Portuguese subjects were to be at liberty to take service with Prince Rupert and were to enjoy all the afore-mentioned chances of making a good thing out of it. Then followed a somewhat entangled clause which, however, made it clear that the final decision as to what constituted a lawful prize was to rest with the captors.

In return the King of Portugal was to receive the same privileges in the dominions of the King of England which, at the moment, was about as much of the neighbourhood of Kinsale as was covered by Rupert's guns. Dom João, in reply, sent a diplomatic answer. He began by granting the Prince's demands *en bloc*, and then went on to refuse them one by one. Under Treaty, he admitted, the King of England's ships were at liberty to come and trade in any of his ports and he had issued commands to that effect. He had also ordered that they should be received benignly and suffered to sell all goods, «because it belongs not to His Majesty to decide the legality thereof». They were also to be supplied with all they needed and to stay as long as they liked. There was, however, a small matter to which he felt bound to draw their attention. Commerce with Portuguese possessions was forbidden to foreigners, and on that point His Majesty could grant no more to the King of England than to the Kings of France,

Sweden, Holland, and other Princes, who pretended to the same and had been denied. But, as had been mentioned above, they were to be well used, “only they are advertised that they make no sale of what they bring for that would be commerce and not permitted”.

To this ambiguous document no reply was attempted. De Lisle, who by this time was in Lisbon, was in a better position to judge what methods were likely to succeed than from Kinsale. So much so that his next demand was merely that should any enemy ships come in a port where the King of England’s ships chanced to be, the latter were to be allowed three clear days sailing before the former might pursue them. He then tried to shake Dom João on the subject of the sale of captured goods, upon which the English Royalist finances largely depended. “I represented anew to His Majesty” he reported, “that these kingdoms lose nothing but rather gain by facilitating the coming into them of the said goods free of customs”. The King, however, remained undazzled by this argument, but conceded that if he could not prevent the seizure of merchandize, they must at least pay duty like other people. In this line he was stiffened by an outcry from the merchants of Lisbon, who saw the market flooded by these free-traders, while their own importations were as heavily penalized as ever. Not the least vociferous were the Puritan Members of the Lisbon Factory, whose political principles were powerfully strengthened by their financial sufferings.

Nothing had been settled one way or the other when, in November, Rupert sailed into the Tagus at the head of his squadron, and, we are told, was received with all possible expressions of love and friendship. That he was an unpleasant person to argue with must have struck the Portuguese immediately. His harsh, handsome face, set more than six feet above his shoes was backed by a manner at all times imperious and now that of a desperate man with nothing to lose. In fact he differed little if at all from a Treasure Island pirate with a set of great big ships behind him, manned by men as hungry and as reckless as he was himself.

The Portuguese immediately agreed to everything he asked, as they could hardly help doing, including the arrest and imprisonment of certain leading Members of the Factory who had shown themselves to be of the Rebel Party. After this the fleet got busy capturing merchantmen and selling their cargoes in the public market. It was not long before trouble began. They seized a ship called the Roebuck which was returning heavily laden from Brazil. It was the case the Portuguese had been waiting for, for they could prove that, though an English ship, it was chartered by the King of Portugal, the cargo therefore being his personal property. As soon as the goods were landed the sale was stopped by a letter from the Secretary of State, demanding that they and the ship should be handed over. Rupert replied lightly that this was all nonsense as the ship belonged to diverse Rebel merchants of London. He added, however, that if the King would affirm in his own writing that the ship was his it would be immediately restored to him. No answer was returned.

It was an ill chosen moment for a dispute for the Commonwealth Government was putting out feelers for a Treaty and the opportunity this offered to play one faction off against the other was irresistible. At the end of January the Secretary of State wrote a letter to Rupert, from the tone of which it seems clear that he already knew Blake and his fleet were on their way to Lisbon. The Secretary complained that Rupert’s proceedings «might happen to unquiet

the welfare of the Kingdom, and that the said Kingdom had begun to present to His Majesty, with great resentment, that he by no means do any offence to the Commonwealth by reason of the damage that might thereby result to their commerce with the City of London». His Majesty had therefore commanded the writer to give notice to His Highness that he cease his activities and to procure his speedy departure “with all brevities”.

The effect of this missive on Rupert may be easily imagined, nor was his temper eased by taking stock of his position. The contents of the letter appear to have been simultaneously imparted to such Rebel members of the Factory as were still at large and they in turn proceeded to broadcast it to such effect that buyers of Rupert’s merchandize refused to touch it-much less pay for it-fearing their title to the same. All the ships’ victuallers clamoured for immediate settlements of their accounts, and he could get nothing except for ready money of which he was extremely short. Nor without food and water could he sail.

In the first gale of fury he began a letter in his own hand, but then changed his mind and commanded that a public remonstrance should be drawn up in the Latin tongue, to be posted all over Lisbon, setting forth in the plainest terms how the King of Portugal had broken faith with the King of England, at the same time making what speed he could to get his fleet to sea. This last proved every minute more impossible.

The Portuguese probably had their own intelligence service on board, and it is highly likely that Rupert’s dictation could be heard all over the ship. However it was, the Court got early wind of his purpose and we are told that the Ministers, thinking it more conducive to their honour to stop the publication of this remonstrance, sent the Secretary off in a hurry. He arrived on board before the letter was fully finished and going immediately to the Prince, expressed the King of Portugal’s regret that any such mistaken interpretation should have been put on his letter, at the same time renewing all the King’s former promises that the Treaties should be observed. Whereupon Rupert, who had had time to cool, realizing that he was in no position to quarrel with his host, gave orders that the remonstrance was to be held back for the present.

This uncomfortable situation dragged on all through February. Though the Portuguese were tired of Rupert, they were by no means anxious to exchange him for Blake, who was now off the mouth of the Tagus, also engaged in stopping ships and relieving them of their cargoes. One of them it may be noted, was the “Mayflower”, now running in the Brazil trade. On March 10<sup>th</sup> Blake at length anchored in Cascais Bay and put ashore the newly accredited representative of the Commonwealth Government to the Portuguese Court – by name Charles Vane. From Cascais he made his way to Lisbon and there had a formal audience of the King.

After this he lost no time in calling together the merchants of the Factory and putting the following proposals to them. The first was that they should sign a petition to the King urging that both fleets should be sent out to sea, so that they might no longer hinder the trade of the city. He must have been aware that most of his sympathizers among the merchants had been locked up, but either he failed to realize the degree of hostility to the Commonwealth that had survived 6 months of Rupert’s depredations, or he was trying to make the best of a bad job. The reply he received was not without dignity.

His drift being smelt out by the merchants (we are told), that by these means he wished to engage the two fleets in a fight, the greater part of them refused to sign, as a thing in no way fit for them to meddle in, but proper for the King and his Council to determine; to which others added that “they should by no means subscribe to a petition which might be the occasion of the effusion of so much English blood”. Upon this rebuff, Vane changed his ground, and put forward the rather mean proposal that they should no longer pay consulage to Chandler, the consul appointed during the late reign, but reserve such fees for the nominee to be sent by the Commonwealth. This proposal was not only rejected by most of the merchants, but they sent Chandler to the King to complain of Vane’s insolence; as he had no commission from the rightful King of England, nor had been elected by the Factory - the only recognized authorities.

While Vane was thus engaged on shore, they were busy on Blake’s ship drawing up a retort to a declaration which Rupert had issued about them. Their efforts produced a clumsy document, containing so little to the purpose that though it was sent in Vane’s name, he later publicly repudiated it. It did its authors no service with the Portuguese and with it, and Vane’s activities in Lisbon, the English Government found themselves obliged to issue instructions: “That the Generals now at sea, who find themselves in a difficult posture to the King of Portugal, are to secure the person of Charles Vane and his papers and take him off”. Young Republics are commonly very generous of rewards, but the Commonwealth must have been unusually short of suitable services for recognition when they summoned Charles Vane to the Bar of the House of Commons to receive the thanks of Parliament for his successful mission.

Meanwhile in Lisbon we are told that “all men were amused, expecting the event of these debates and other passages”: in short, the first class spectacle of a sea-fight in Lisbon harbour. But before that could happen a fortunate incident intervened. A French vessel coming into the river was seized and searched by Blake. A complaint was immediately lodged by the French Minister and here the King of Portugal saw his chance. A little more rope and Blake at any rate would hang himself. He answered the French evasively and waited. Before long two French men-of-war came in which were stopped and searched by Blake. He further informed them that they might not proceed to Lisbon unless they gave an undertaking not to assist Rupert. Upon their refusing to do anything of the kind they were detained.

At this the King began to move. He sent Vane to Cascais with an intimation that if the English did not release the French ships forthwith they should “hear from him in a manner otherwise than they had done”. Blake’s instructions had been to open friendly relations with the Portuguese and this plain threat to loose Rupert, plus French and Portuguese warships, on him, convinced him he was on the wrong road. He let the Frenchmen go, whereupon they sailed up to Lisbon and dropped anchor beside Rupert who received them with great rejoicing. Seeing the game was up and his “posture to the King of Portugal” becoming increasingly difficult. Blake picked up Vane and departed with all speed. Three days later, Rupert, now victual, led by the obliging French, followed him, and Lisbon with a sigh of relief, turned to other matters.

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