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A CONSULAR APPOINTMENT IN 1811

(Contributed by H. Hallam Hipwell)

One sometimes wonders whether our descendents will have as much rich historical ore to work over as has fallen to the Oldbucks and Dry-as-Dusts of the last hundred years. Science combined with mechanism has, we all know, enabled many records to be packed in very limited room. It has yet to be seen how diminished photostatic reproductions, and, for the matter of that, everyday typewritten letters, will stand the stress of time; as have ordinary commercial communications written on stout rag paper, with a substantial quill pen dipped in iron-gall ink, that preceded typewriters and photography. These reflections occurred as I turned yet once more the pages of Edmund Power's rough-draft letter book and stopped, almost by chance, to scan a draft dated 30 December 1809, that is some six months after he had come back to Lisbon, left by him and a number of other folk in some haste in the month of November 1807. For it was then that Junot swept southward into Portugal at Napoleon's bidding, and this letter, written nearly two years later, is addressed to Lord Viscount Strangford and reads as follows:

«Lisbon, 30 December 1809

«Altho' I have not had the honour of addressing your  
«Lordship since your departure from this it has given me  
«infinite pleasure to hear of your continuance of  
«goodhealth and happiness. The reliance I have on your  
«Lordship's friendship from what I have always expe-

«rienced encourages me now to request a particular favour  
 «of your Lordship in which I feel exceedingly interested.  
 «A most particular friend of mine, A. J. da Costa, the  
 «husband of my niece, has petitioned his R. H. the Prince  
 «Regent to be appointed consul of Liverpool and in case  
 «of any such patent being granted to any other person  
 «previous to his application to be appointed Consul in  
 «London on the decease of the present consul there.  
 «Convinced of your Lordship's influence at Court I have  
 «not a doubt of my friend's succeeding in his expectation  
 «through your kind interest in his favour. He is a person  
 «fully equal to undertake such an appointment and as  
 «such was strongly recommended by Mr. Villiers our  
 «present British envoy here to the Secretary of State. It  
 «would be obtained from the Regency but cannot be done  
 «but by order from H. R. Highness. I shall be happy to  
 «have the pleasure of receiving a few lines from you and  
 «beg leave to repeat my request in favour of my  
 «forementioned friend».

Percy Clinton Sydney Smythe, sixth Viscount Strangford and later, first Baron Penshurst, was appointed First Secretary at Lisbon in 1802. An Irishman, he entered the diplomatic service from Trinity College, Dublin, with something of a reputation for *belles lettres* and during his first year in Portugal he published «Poems from the Portuguese of Camoens». He it was who, in conjunction with Sir Sidney Smith, strongly supported the Prince Regent in his desire to emigrate to Brazil under the protection of the British fleet. D. João, together with some 15,000 people, left somewhat hastily, the fleet consisting of some 50 merchant vessels and 20 warships, and after a long stay at Bahia moved south to Rio de Janeiro. Lord Strangford himself apparently left for London, where he prepared a report on the state of Portugal, at Canning's request, and eventually reached Rio and the Prince Regent's court, not forgetting Dona Carlota Joaquina, on the 22 July 1808. This is not the place to enlarge upon the tangled web of plot and counterplot that then enmeshed all South America. Colonel Miranda, whose memory was recently honoured in London by the apposition of a plaque on the house where once he resided, was then doing all he could to interest Great Britain in the cause of South American freedom, and, more

specifically Pitt and the Marquess Wellesley. Freedom and Revolution was in the air everywhere, save in Brazil. Indeed the arrival of the Portuguese royal family, with its numerous suite, caused much apprehension in the River Plate. Nor were these fears wholly without foundation, Dona Carlota Joaquina having imperialistic longings which were translated into attacks on what is now Uruguay and more particularly on the Colonia de Sacramento which lies just across the Plate estuary directly in front of Buenos Aires, the distance being but 23 miles. That the royal lady was a confirmed political trouble-monger is generally admitted. What is not such common knowledge is that it was thanks to Lord Strangford's tactful handling of a situation bristling with both material and diplomatic difficulties that trouble was averted, trouble which might easily have had grave repercussions on the course of the Peninsular War. It is a matter full of interest but too complex to be dealt with in detail here, bearing as it does more on the development of affairs in Spanish-America as contrasted with Luso-Brazilian doings. All one may say is that Dona Carlota had apparently «got round» the British admiral, Sir Sidney Smith and was on the point of persuading him to set sail for the Plate with the British fleet then cruising off the Brazil coast, his vessels to act as cover for the projected Portuguese expeditionary force bound for the Banda Oriental. The pretext under which all this was to be carried out was the plea that Dona Carlota, having eventual rights to the Spanish crown, might meanwhile serve the good cause by acting as regent in the colonies. Lord Castlereagh, in a letter to Canning dated 24th June 1809, said that «Sir Sidney had deemed himself «invested with great and even extraordinary powers which it «had never been in the mind of the Minister of War to grant «him». Castlereagh further wrote to the admiral himself at an earlier date (4th Aug. 1808) by a special messenger, one Col. Burke, who was acting as a secret service agent for the British government, informing Sir Sidney of latest developments in Spain and of the British government's wish to prevent the Spanish-American provinces from falling into Napoleon's grip. Lord Strangford and the admiral were not on friendly terms and the diplomat had not even been advised by the latter of the proposed departure of the fleet. It never left Brazilian waters for the Plate, the expeditionary force that Sir Arthur Wellesley was gathering at Cork, a force of some 10,000 men

originally designed for South America leaving for the Peninsula, and Lord Strangford managed to persuade the Prince Regent to advise the British Government that the leader of the squadron on the Brazilian coast was *persona non grata*. So Sir Sidney Smith was substituted by Rear-Admiral de Courcy and Lord Strangford's reputation as an able diplomat was considerably enhanced.

Edmund Power, it is evident, was not only on good terms with this distinguished person but also must have known him well enough to insist on his request after da Costa had written to say that the much-desired consular *exequatur* had miscarried and looked like being made out in the name of some other candidate. Here is E. P.'s second letter, dated 6th October 1810.

«I received with much pleasure your Lordship's much esteemed lines of the 21st May and am happy to find you enjoy perfect health which I most sincerely wish you a continuance of, with every other happiness. Mr. A. J. da Costa, of Liverpool, informs me that he has received his patent of being appointed Consul General of said city for which he expresses being indebted to your kind interference in his favour. I request your Lordship will accept of my most grateful acknowledgment for the favour you have conferred on me on this occasion with my sincerest assurance that I shall be happy in having opportunities of witnessing to you of my highest respect and esteem. I must beg leave to intrude further on your kindness in interfering in getting the Royal order fulfilled as the Portuguese Ambassador in England has not yet confirmed said appointment as he says he has not yet received official information of said appointment. I suspect that the said Minister in London may have in view some other favourite of his to be appointed and of course no time's to be lost. In point of the political state of this country your Lordship will hear more correctly than any information I can give you».

Matters were however not so readily straightened out and again and again in the correspondence of Edmund Power with Antonio Julião da Costa the subject crops up. In all there are

44 letters to this gentleman, though the last sixteen are addressed to A. J. da Costa & Co., this latter group beginning in July 1811, by which time he had presumably taken a partner. Possibly this house was the forerunner of a firm of general merchants and produce dealers well known in Liverpool in the 'nineties and, for all I am aware, still in existence. From first to last this group of letters affords an interesting and clear cut picture of Lisbon's overseas trade during the first quarter of the last century and no excuse is needed for presenting extracts here, the only pity being that the letters from Liverpool are no longer to be found. Writing from Lisbon on 3rd March 1810 E. P. says: — «the «Adiona» sails tomorrow with «convoy, as does the «Maria», Capt. Richd: Henney, for your «port, on which are shipped 14 parcels of your furniture. I «cannot ascertain in what they may be valued in, in case you «should determine on having them insured».

After alluding to the non-arrival at Liverpool of a vessel called the «Portilhão» and expressing a hope that the loss will be covered by insurance, the letter continues, «I am anxiously «expecting some favourable information from Rio de Janeiro «with respect to your application of being appointed Consul «General and I entertain every hope that you'll succeed «therein from the strong *empenho* in your favour. I hand you «an enclosed from Mrs. Costa to which I refer you in point of «her departure which I think will be next packet as she is very «anxious to see you. It will not be yet in my power to «accompany her as I have yet some dependencies on hand «that require my attention. From the reports we have from «Spain, from frontiers, if things come to the worst it must take «up a few months before the enemy can conquer this country, «but ultimately I fear the country must fall».

Some six months later «we do not consider this country in «that dangerous state for the present that in general it is supposed to be», and on the 23rd August 1819, after mentioning the arrival of 87 barrels of rice by the «William», which E. P. fears «will not fetch much of a price as other «parcels are on their way from England, not to speak of that «which may come direct from America», the writer mentions having received with much pleasure a note from Sr. João Pedro «informing me of your being appointed Consul at Liver-

«pool, when I immediately called on him and he read for me  
«copies of the letters you had received from Don Rodrigo,  
«from which I think it admits of no doubt but you'll receive  
«your patent very shortly. I have received a few lines of the  
«26th May from Lord Strangford».

He adds that «by a newspaper presented to me by Captain  
«Jennings of the «Swan» I saw there was another person  
«appointed, which I presume was done by Don Domingos your  
«Ambassador, which I think cannot be valid. Our late Minis-  
«ter, Mr. Villiers, has shown me a letter which he received  
«from said Don Domingos expressing his great anxiety of  
«succeeding in obtaining you the Patent, which Mr. Villiers  
«interested himself in, and that he would write to his brother  
«in the Rio to that effect. I must say that he has acted with  
«some degree of duplicity in the business, at the same time I  
«hope you'll carry your point».

Even so, all was not plain sailing. Edmund Power writes  
again on the 26th November: — «I am sorry to observe that  
«your Ambassador continues to decline carrying into effect the  
«Prince's order with respect to your patent of Consulship but I  
«flatter myself it must be ultimately decided in your favour  
«but upon the whole Don Domingos has acted basely. There  
«is not a doubt but he is importuned in favour of the person he  
«has appointed there but I am in great expectation that Lord  
«Strangford's interference in your favour will upset his pro-  
«jects». Clearly Edmund Power left «no stone unturned, no  
«avenue unexplored» to ensure that his nephew by marriage  
should be definitely appointed to the coveted Liverpool post.  
Writing again under date 12 January 1811 he says :

«I herewith hand you a letter for Lord R. Fitzgerald  
«and one for Mr. Villiers relative to your Consulship. I  
«can't reconcile to myself that Don Domingos can continue  
«to act in the rascally manner that he has heretofore done  
«in opposition to the commands of the Prince. I should  
«suppose that on Mr. Villiers speaking to him and repre-  
«senting what he wrote to him protesting his anxiety of  
«complying with his wishess in your favour that he will  
«not persist in acting as he has hitherto. The ship «Bess»  
«is arrived and the captain has this day made his entry in

«the Customs. We shall use every diligence in having her  
«unloaded and reloaded for Pernambuco with every degree  
«of expedition but as to any goods on freight offering we  
«have no expectations».

Two months later — 23rd March 1811 — it looks as if the  
various «*empenhos*» had done their work since E. P. writes: —  
«I feel highly gratified by the information you give me of your  
«Ambassador's having at length come to the determination of  
«complying with the commands of his Master the Prince Regent  
«of putting you in possession of your Consulship which I most  
«sincerely congratulate you on as I consider it to be a matter  
«that will turn out of utility to you. I am sorry that the «Sta  
Ana» has put back to your port in distress by which I very  
«much apprehend that my parcel of rice in her must turn out  
«in a miserable state besides coming to a market quite glutted  
«with said article, however these are circumstances that Trade  
«is always exposed to and of course I must submit to the fate  
«of this little adventure whatever it may be».

Ten days later, in a letter dated 3rd April 1811, there is  
another interesting sidelight on the trade of the period. E. P.  
has, on da Costa's instructions, shipped to one Robert Popland  
750 chests of fruit (? raisins) and 107 moys of salt. This, with  
ship's disbursements, runs into money, 7769\$369 merchandise  
and 112\$269 disbursements, for which he has drawn at 60 days  
sight, payable in London, and he is not too sure of the  
drawee's financial stability. It reads as follows :

«You will observe the precautions I thought necessary  
«to take with respect to the cargo I was in the act of  
«shipping on the «Joseph» for account of Mr. Popland. I  
«have enclosed Bill of Lading of the cargo deliverable to  
«order with your endorsement, which I am confident you'll  
«make use of according as you find necessary for my  
«security, either by delivering it to said Mr. Popland in  
«case that you find him a person of perfect solidity, if  
«not, to require security. What causes some *desconfiança*  
«is his not having communicated to you anything of the  
«orders given us, and in his letter recommending our  
«applying to Mr. Sealy, to whom we have spoken and in  
«his reply to us he signified that he knew nothing about

«him further than his clerk having made some shipment  
 «for him on receiving a confirmed credit on London.  
 «Under these circumstances I must say we feel ourselves  
 «under some anxiety in point of our executing his orders  
 «but we submit the business entirely to your discretion  
 «convinced you'll pay every attention to my safety in the  
 «transaction. Herewith I hand you draft on him for the  
 «above amount, agreeable to the note at foot, with which  
 «please do the needful. I flatter myself that we can consi-  
 «der ourselves now quite free of the enemy. I presume  
 «you have heard of Mascarenhas' son being taken up some  
 «time ago as a spy, as he really was and was yesterday  
 «put to death and burnt on Caes de Sodré as a Traitor to  
 «his Country. In the act of my writing to you came to  
 «hand your regarded favour of 19th ult., with a copy of  
 «your circular letter which I shall present to your uncle  
 «tomorrow. Your Minister has certainly acted by you in a  
 «most base manner but I hope you'll surmount all the  
 «difficulty that he has caused, with which I am longing  
 «very much to have a confirmation. The detention of the  
 «S. Anna» is disagreeable as I am confident my parcel of  
 «rice must turn out in bad order. With most affectionate  
 «regards to Mary and my little favourite, I remain, etc.».

Here then we may well leave the now definitely appointed Portuguese Consul in Liverpool. Apparently Antonio Julião da Costa made good and was commercially successful, for, writing on 22rd July 1814, the old merchant, now himself retired from business and winding up outstanding affairs, remarks : — «am «happy to hear particularly from your uncle of you and your «family enjoying perfect health and sucess in your business, «which I most sincerely wish you a continuance of. I am now «to inform you that Mr. Anto. Fer.\* Velho of Oporto has made «Power and Horton a remittance on your account of 1783\$203, «which bill falls due next week which I shall in course place to «your credit. Every kind of commerce is in a very dull state «here without any immediate prospect of improvement. I have «had some expectation of paying you a visit this summer but «really my advanced time of life is what has put a check to «my wishes».

Lord Strangford's career subsequent to his post in Brazil is a matter of history. He became Ambassador at Stockholm in

1817 and three years later was accredited to the Sublime Porte in Constantinople. Thence, in 1824, he went to St. Petersburg for a few months previous to his diplomatic retirement. Thereafter he devoted himself to literature and the arts, entertained largely and was friend of Thomas Moore, Samuel Rogers, and Crocker, the friend of Canning. He died in 1855, in the 75th year of his age.

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