

BHSP2-1975

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PORTUGUESE (1823)

(Printed by courtesy of Mrs. G. Haigh)

[The letter that follows is printed *verbatim, literatim et punctatim*. Portuguese orthography has, of course, changed over the intervening years, but it is hard to say whether the other peculiarities are due to the writer himself or his Galician printer.

Wilson, who seems to have been a veteran of the Peninsular War, had chosen an unfortunate moment for his visit to Portugal. The country was warming up for the struggle which was to lead to the War of the Two Brothers; and British and French interference in Portuguese affairs, following the downfall of Napoleon, had made the nationals of both countries unpopular and suspect in Portuguese eyes. This was particularly true of the British. Following the execution of Freire de Andrade, the Portuguese had expelled the British officers serving in the Portuguese Army, and had refused its commander, Marshal Beresford, permission to re-enter the country on his return from Brazil. Nor had the Constitution of 1822, drawn up on French Revolutionary lines, helped to unite the Portuguese or dampen the wave of xenophobia. In 1823 the Absolutists in the North issued a **pronunciamento** resisting the new Constitution; in the South the mob assassinated the liberal Duque de Loulé. An interesting short analysis of these events is to be found in George Young's **Portugal Old and Young** (p. 215 ff.). Young's verdict, written 60 years ago, on this rather sorry period in Anglo-Portuguese relations may be quoted: «Intervention in the affairs of other peoples is generally harmful, and our well-meaning muddlesome meddlings are always as bad as any.»]

PORTUGUESES

Tendo entrado no vosso Pais como hum verdadeiro amigo, e antigo companheiro d'armas: Entrei convencido de que tinha fundados e indispensaveis títulos para a vossa estima, e que não tinha na vossa Nação hum só individuo que me podesse creticar de huá acção injuriosa ou deszafecta.

Encaminhava-me a o vosso governo com porpoziçoens de importancia para a vossa sigurança, e honrra, pois que queria a dita sigurança e honrra en paralelo com a causa da independencia da Espanha, e não negarei que entretive alguas auctorizadas esperanças de renovar relaçãoes que me permitiraó participar da asegurada gloria das vossas façanhas.

Empedido na viagem pelas ocurrencias de Lisboa, e tendo perdido toda a esperanza pela Rial declaração de que a contra-reblução seria a garantia da paz entre Portugal e os envazores da peninsula (os francezes) eu dei a minha palabra de honrra ao novo Governo do Porto de não ter entervençao nos seus asuntos interiores, durante minha residencia em Portugal, e procuraria emeditamente voltar ao territorio Espanhol sem pensamento algum hostile sobre o direito de Portugal, de alterar, e estabelecer sua forma de governo o seu gosto e prazer; não obstante o muito que eu podia sentir, o exercicio do dito direito no cazo presente, e particularmente neste presente momento.

Huma populaça farnética reunida en Braga instigada por huns poucos de endevidos, (os que creio só o sabem as quelles que se desfarçaraó dos trajes de sacerdotes) para asesinar-me e aos meus endefensos companheiros, e na auzencia da suficiente força militar para precaver a violação das leis monocipales e publicas, puderaó conseguir a deternos como prezioneiros na Cidade por dois dias; libre desta prizaó opondo-se em todos os pontos na minha marcha a fronteira de Espanha, o Governo do Porto nos negou até hum momento de refugio e descanso, até que pudecemos embarcar; o Governador (levando arisca as ordens da junta) não só no prendeu, e desarmou das nossas armas de fogo, que até nos tratou com toda a insulencia que a sua auctoridade lhe dava, e os sentimentos vulgares de hum homem que sabia que podia abuzar do seu poder com impunidade.

Portugueses: ainda que fui asim insultado por una facção, e seus directores, estai persuadidos que jamais esquecerei o amigavel zelo de todas as classes cevis e militares, pelas quais tinha sido honrrado antes, e protegido ainda mesmo nestes momentos criticos de perigo.

Acreditai que apezar de toda a calunia, que em qualquer parte donde me achar, e debaixo de qualquer circumstancia em que eu esteja sereis sempre o objecto da minha sincera e alterable estima.

Vigo, 14 de Junho 1823.

R. WILSON.

* * *

Translation:

Having entered your country as a true friend, and former comrade in arms: I came in convinced that I had well-founded and indispensable claims to your esteem, and that there was not in your Nation a single individual who would be able to accuse me of a harmful or dishonourable intention.

I was approaching your government with important proposals both for your security and your honour, for I wished these just as I desire the independence of Spain, and I cannot deny that I entertained justified hopes of being able to renew relationships which would enable me to take part with you in deeds that must have been assured of glory.

My journey was cut short by the events in Lisbon, and having lost all hope after the Royal declaration that the counter-revolution would guarantee peace between Portugal and the invaders of the Peninsula (the French) I gave my word of honour to the new Government of Oporto that I would not interfere in its internal affairs, during my stay in Portugal, and that I would at once endeavour to return to Spanish territory without any unfriendly thoughts as to Portugal's right to set up its own form of government as it saw fit; however much I might deplore the exercise of this right in the present case, and particularly at this present moment.

In Braga a fanatical mob was encouraged by a few individuals (? known I believe only to those who go around disguised as priests) to assassinate me and my defenceless companions, and in the absence of sufficient military forces to prevent the violation of municipal and public law, they managed to hold us prisoners in the City for two days; freed from this, the Oporto Government, refusing at every point to allow me to continue my journey to the Spanish frontier, even denied us a moment's rest or shelter until we were able to embark; the Governor (interpreting the junta's orders to the letter) not only arrested us and took away our fire-arms, but even treated us with all the insolence that his authority allowed him, and the common lack of manners of one who knew he could abuse his powers with impunity.

Portuguese: although I have been thus insulted by one faction, and its leaders, be sure that I shall never forget the friendly zeal of all classes, both civil and military with which I have been honoured in the past, and which protected me even in these critical moments of danger.

Believe me that in spite of all the slander wherever I may be and no matter what the circumstances in which I may find myself you will always be the object of my sincere and changing (sic) esteem.

Vigo, 14 June 1823.

R. WILSON.