

BRITISH CONNECTIONS
WITH THE PALACE OF NECESSIDADES

by MANUEL CORTE REAL

The stay of Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, at the Palácio das Necessidades from 1801 to 1804 (1) may have led to some disagreeable consequences for the Prince. Though still a young man at the time, it was during his years at the Palace that he developed his taste for old books and works on theological subjects. It was all too easy for him to climb the stairs connecting the Palace with the Convent and there to consult at his leisure the very important library belonging to the Priests of the Oratorian Congregation which by that time would have comprised some 25,000 books. He may well then have acquired the taste for reading books on theology which was to lead him to collect such works later on in England. And this in turn caused public opinion to accuse him of being a Papist.

The sojourn of this English Prince at the Necessidades was not, however, the only event that connects the Palace with certain characters and events in the history of Great Britain. His brother, the Prince of Wales, later King George IV, also visited the Duke of Sussex at the Palace, staying there on his way to and from Gibraltar.

(1) The Duke of Sussex suffered severely from asthma and spent much of his early life abroad to avoid the English winters.

In 1809 Wellington, as Commander-in-Chief of the Anglo-Portuguese army, made this Palace his residence.

Later, the Portuguese Queen, Dona Maria II, chose to live at the Necessidades with her husband, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg, a first cousin to Prince Consort Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Queen Victoria's husband. Though Victoria and Albert never visited Lisbon, the letters exchanged between the two families strengthened the ties between them. These ties became even closer during the life of King Pedro V who also lived at the Palace and who visited the British Royal Family twice. The choice of a bride for the Portuguese King was most probably made by Queen Victoria who wished to meet Princess Stephanie in person when she travelled out to Lisbon. The friendship then became even more close, and when Queen Stephanie and then King Pedro V died, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were deeply grieved (2).

The Palácio das Necessidades was not to receive visits from members of the British Royal Family again until the reign of King Carlos. In 1903 Edward VII, on his first official visit to a foreign country, came to Lisbon. King Carlos lent him his own small apartment, comprising a study and a bedroom. The arrangement of the furniture was altered and the rooms were made more comfortable and cosy, as is shown by photographs of the period. In 1905 came the turn of Queen Alexandra to visit the Portuguese capital. She, too, was lodged at the Necessidades.

(2) On 12-11-1861 Queen Victoria wrote to her uncle the King of the Belgians: «I hardly know *how* to *write*, for my head reels and swims, and my heart is very sore! *What* an awful misfortune this is! How the hand of death seems bent on pursuing that poor, dear family! once so prosperous... It is an almost incredible event! a terrible calamity for Portugal, and a *real* European loss! Dear Pedro was so good, so clever, so distinguished! He was so attached to my beloved Albert, and the characters and tastes suited so well... *All, all* gone! *He* is now happy, united again to dear Stephanie (from) whose loss he never recovered...» *The Letters of Queen Victoria 1837-1861* (Murray: London, 1908) III, pp. 465-6.

King Carlos once more gave up his own rooms to which the adjoining room, the Throne Room, was added, after being changed into a living-room with pieces of furniture sent over from the Palácio de Ajuda.

Last but not least in this brief run-down of British ties with the Palácio das Necessidades, we should mention that, during the reign of King Carlos, a British subject, Charles Ryder, was put in charge of the royal stables. It seems that traditionally a British subject was «the head of the royal stables», for already in 1848 it was under the supervision of a Britisher that these were reconstructed and altered. These stables were located in the court-yard of the old Convent which today serves as the entrance to the Foreign Office.

Charles Ryder, with his wife and their ten children, lived in a part of the rooms that had served as the apartments of King Ferdinand II. Ryder's wages — 72,000 reis — were rather high for that period, if we compare them with the Librarian's 50,000 reis or those of the Curator of the Picture Galleries at 45,000 reis.

On other occasions, besides those mentioned, British royalties visited Lisbon but did not lodge at the Necessidades. In the long tradition of good relations between the Royal Houses of Portugal and Britain these are the only facts connected with the Palace that are certainly documented. But, of course, there were many occasions when the Portuguese Sovereigns were visited at the Necessidades by British envoys, politicians, intellectuals and friends, though such visits were not invariably recorded.