

HALB 10-1946/1950

NOTES REGARDING THE BRITISH CONSULS IN LISBON
OF THE 17th CENTURY*(Contributed by Miss Virginia Rau, doutora e bolsaira
do Instituto para a Alta Cultura, Lisboa)*

It was well said a few years back, in respect of the British Consuls in Lisbon: «Never a bed of roses, the office of British Consul seems to have been the most arduous and «painstaking office imaginable, and deservedly worthy of a «separate study» (1).

With just the idea of adding a little further towards this study, one which I am sure will some day attract the attention of other investigators, and towards which both Mrs. M. S. Jayne (2), and Mr. A. R. Walford, have furnished a solid foundation, I am venturing in this brief note to deal with some of the documents in the Portuguese Royal Chancery relating to John Ryder, Onofrio Aldington, Thomas Maynard, and Peter Beliston, my remarks being merely intended as a commentary upon the researches of the above-cited authors.

The Restoration in Portugal of 1640, which overthrew the enforced domination of the Spanish monarchy in Portugal, coincided with a period of considerable political unrest in England, the internal dissensions which preceded and accompanied the English Civil War having their due effect upon

(1) «The British Factory in Lisbon» Lisbon 1940, p. 32.

(2) The Annual Report of the Historical Association — Lisbon Branch. «The British Consuls» by Mrs. M. S. Jayne, 1938, p. 78.

the life of the British community in Lisbon. Dependent upon whether the political opinions of the consul in office were of a royalist or anti-royalist character, in like measure was he supported or opposed by those of his fellow countrymen who held like, or contrary, views. We thus find Consul Richard Chandler, a fervent royalist, forced to abandon office due to the strong hostility of the British Factory merchants. Nor was the new consul, John Ryder, any more successful upon acceding to that post. He had elected himself to that office on the grounds that he held this right under an authority granted by one, John Howe, alleging that this latter was Consul General with power granted by the King of England to appoint any new Consul he should select. No sooner had John Ryder assumed office, duly sanctioned by the Judge of the Lisbon Custom-house, than a certain John Millis, and other British merchants, lodged an appeal against his appointment. The King, Dom João IV, was obliged to intervene, and decreed that a court of Portuguese judges should hear the appeal and give a decision within twenty days. The verdict was given in favour of John Ryder, and his right to the consulship acknowledged.

The English merchants, however, were not disposed to accept defeat, and moved embargos upon the two occasions that Ryder applied for written confirmation of his appointment. Again the King of Portugal was called upon to intervene, and on the 18th August 1644 Ryder was given a letter confirming his nomination as Consul to the English nation with the same powers as John Howe himself, i. e., as a person having received a patent from the King of England with the faculty of transmitting such powers to another individual (3).

Were it not for a later document issued under date of

(3) Arq. Nac. da Torre do Tombo, Chanc. D. João IV. Liv. 17, fl. 80 v. John Howe's Letters-patent read: «And for the better execution of the said office we do... grant unto the said John Howe full power and authoritie to substitute and appoint in all or any of the ports and places within the said dominions of Portugal... such... fitt and sufficient persons being our subjectes to be deputie Consulls or Assignes under him to assist him in the execution of the said office either in the place where he himself shall reside or in any other... places within the fore-said limitts...».

the 11th August 1645 it might well have been thought that Ryder's troubles were now over. Here, however, is what happened. Although the decision had gone in Ryder's favour, the matter still hung fire in the Custom-house seeing it was the Custom-house judge who had the last word in all judico-commercial matters relating to the English in Portugal. For in this year 1645 a man «Onofrio Aldington», had made his appearance claiming his right to the office of English consul under a letter from the King of England «and still addressed to the *Spanish* Sovereign». A new dispute arises this time between Aldington and Ryder, the latter now acting as consul or endeavouring to do so under the mandate of a similar authority from the same royal monarch. Claims from both contestants were duly brought to the notice of the King of Portugal and the Crown attorney. By a complete turn round of events not easy to follow, but in which a private letter from King Charles 1st to King John IV must have had considerable influence, the King of Portugal declared in favour of Onofrio Aldington, asserting that John Ryder had no case at all. Thus, on the 11th August 1645 the Portuguese monarch gave title to Aldington as «Consul in vertue of King Charles» letter, but made a proviso that King Charles should undertake, within the period of eight months, to re-present his letter couched in the same terms as that superscribed erroneously to the «King of Spain». Aldington was successful in carrying out this condition, and on the 26th January 1647 he was furnished with the desired warrant confirming his appointment to the consular office claimed (4).

How long did Aldington serve as Consul? Was his position, based on the letters-patent of the King of England, recognized by those who had renounced the royal authority? To this and other questions we should much like to be able to reply, but the Portuguese documents are dumb on the subject. Let us hope that somewhere in British archives elements of this period will be forthcoming to throw more light upon this appetizing yet at the same time difficult task covering a period of the greatest political unrest in English history.

(4) Arq. Nac. da Torre do Tombo, *Chanc. D. João IV*, Liv. 16, fl. 313
(Onofrio — Humphrey).

Thomas Maynard, «a man of strong character, of manifold ability save that of tact, tenacious of purpose as well as of opinion», was British Consul in Portugal for thirty-five years. Quite at home during the Commonwealth, as likewise in the reign of Charles II, he succeeded in rebutting the accusations made against him by his enemies, and although recalled to England «for an investigation of his conduct» was subsequently allowed to resume his consular post in Lisbon.

Maynard's political and professional activities are mostly set forth in the historical records I have already mentioned (1 & 2), so that I need not repeat them. There is, however, a particular feature of his activities connected with Portuguese interests which is worth while recording.

We know that in the year 1655 «When Thomas Maynard «first emerges it is as holder of a post in Plymouth dockyard, «apparently in connection with the good maintenance of the «government's ships» (2). Some years later, no longer preoccupied with naval construction but rather engaged in commercial transactions, we find him in Lisbon directly interested in the despatch of an English ship to Brazil. An official Portuguese document of the time gives these particulars about this enterprise: It was the «Sol Dourado», arrived at Lisbon, of approximately 350 tons burden, with 34 guns, and manned by a crew of 60 English and French seamen, with a Portuguese pilot. The ship's master was Captain Nicolas Maynard, a relation, doubtless, of the consul.

It appears that Thomas Maynard was trying to secure a permit to send this ship to Brazil for commercial purposes. With his characteristic astuteness he conceived the idea of facilitating the granting of a permit by the king of Portugal by a donation of 600 milreis towards the expenses of the war which Portugal was waging against Spain, and making an offer of 4 hundredweights of gunpowder and 4 hundredweights of lead to be delivered to the Portuguese authorities at the first port in Brazil at which the «Sol Dourado» would touch. This «generosity» procured him the desired permit, and D. Afonso VI, by a despatch dated the 10th of March 1659, granted him the permit requested upon the condition that the ship should return to Lisbon and unload the cargo she brought

back upon which the customary duties should be payable to the royal exchequer ⁽⁵⁾.

Twenty years later, when Maynard left for England «for his trial and to be heard in his own defense» he left Peter Beliston in his place and to whom, on September 24th 1668, he delegated his consular powers. To legalize this substitution Peter Beliston lodged a petition to the prince regent, Dom Pedro, who, receiving agreement from the English Envoy, Sir Robert Southwell, and the conformity of the Crown attorney, granted on December 12th 1668, a warrant for the consular powers deputed to Peter Beliston by Maynard ⁽⁶⁾. This substitution lasted but a short time, Maynard returning to Portugal in due course with official «reaffirmation of his consulship».

Only in 1689, already aged and worn, was this former tough and vigorous man relieved of his consular office, possibly due to his advanced years; no longer the man he had been heretofore, «a double-crosser of exceptional brilliancy».

⁽⁵⁾ Arq. Nac. da Torre do Tombo, *Chanc. D. Afonso VI*, Liv. 23, fl. 137.

⁽⁶⁾ Arq. Nac. da Torre do Tombo, *Chanc. D. Afonso VI*, Liv. 45, fl. 45.