

BRITISH CONSULS IN LISBON

From 1583

(Contributed by Mrs. M. S. Jayne)

The earliest patent of a British consul which appears in the Chancellaria books is that of John Taylor, or, as his name is written therein «João Telarte». The patent, which is dated November 13th 1583, is valid for a period of three years, and empowers him to act on behalf of the English, Irish, and Scottish nations. As he represented both England and Scotland—still under separate crowns — and there is no mention of him in the State Papers, Portugal, it seems likely that he was chosen from themselves by the local merchants of both nationalities, who, owing to some similarity of language, and the enjoyment of an equal degree of official suspicion, were fast hardening into one community. Three years earlier Portugal had become a province of Spain ruled by a Vice-roy; Elizabeth had refused to recognize the annexation, and continued to make inexpensive gestures of sympathy to the Prior de Crato, while her captains alleged this respectable motive for sacking cities and waylaying treasure ships. Whether England and Spain were actually at war must have been a matter of continual debate among the subjects of both crowns, but there was no doubt at all that as far as the English and Scotch in Lisbon were concerned they had no one to look to but themselves.

A consul was therefore chosen, who, besides acting as arbi-

trator in their own disputes, could, when need arose, act as their spokesman to the Vice-roy. For this it was necessary that his functions should be officially recognized, and in all probability this took some time. The Spaniards had to be convinced that Taylor was a Catholic who was careful in the practice of the Faith, and after that Philip II had to make up his slow mind about it. It therefore seems likely that Taylor was exercising some of his functions for months, if not years, before the date of his patent. But the choice once ratified seems to have suited everybody for, unfortunately for himself he was still Consul when, in 1589, the Vice-roy woke up to the activities of his flock. They were charged with espionage, smuggling, consorting with and harbouring heretics, and indirectly giving information to the enemies of Spain. Some were also charged with being heretics though professing to be Catholics. The smaller fry were put out of the country, but the more important received fairly heavy sentences. The special charge against Taylor is not stated but he may well have been held responsible for his colonies of Scots and English. He was condemned to perpetual banishment and the payment of a fine of 200 crowns, and so disappears.

No one else was appointed for some years, and in 1603 complaint was made that «the English being now without a Consul do fall upon one another for want of order». Upon this a man called Richard Culmer was elected, of whom no more is known than that he died at Valladolid two years later. He was followed by a man who signs himself Maillard y Richards. Richards wrote a letter or two to London but did not obtain recognition. He held his appointment from the Vice-roy, which must have made him unpopular with the merchants, and with the Peace Treaty of 1605 no more is heard of him.

The signing of the treaty brought the position of the Consul into greater prominence, for there was still no resident diplomatic representative in Lisbon. A fresh appointment had to be made, and as usual there was a clash about it which was not eased by the attitude of masterly neutrality assumed by the English Government. On the one hand was Hugh Lee, who was elected by the merchants, and on the other Edward Banes, appointed by the Vice-roy, to whom he had previously made himself agreeable by spying on his countrymen. He kept a

lodging and boarding house in S. Paulo, and had more than once affronted his boarders «at the time of their meals, in their thanksgiving, by forbidding them to pray for His Majesty, as in duty every good subject is bound to do». Whereupon his guests left his house. His consular office seems to have been more of a nuisance to Lee than of profit to himself, and the latter might have got rid of Banes without much trouble if the English Government had not from time to time exchanged a letter with him as well as corresponding regularly with Lee, whose patent, however, they delayed for three years to ratify. At the same time they expected Lee to exercise all the powers of his office, though they repudiated his actions whenever it suited them.

The case is not unique — nor, fortunately, are men like Lee.

«According to the measure of his understanding he advertiseth diligently» was all the commendation he got in return for long, weekly, outpourings of his trials and difficulties, the limited means at his command to deal with them, and his unheeded entreaties that his position might be defined, and his hand strengthened, by the granting of his patent. But with or without it he fought like a sheep dog for his flock, who in turn did little to make his task easier. Whenever they could they refused to pay him consulage, «though», he adds bitterly, «very ready to take benefit of my travails ;» nor would they consent to be governed by him in their disorders. Instead of helping, they were a perpetual hinderance to him in dealing with the local authorities, «which causeth the more unkindness to be offered to them». Those prisoners of the Moors whose ransoms he advanced would not always repay him when they regained their liberty, and when, in 1608, the Spanish Trading Company was wound up, the treasurer, Lancelot Green, took away the cash balance and left Lee to settle all the outstanding accounts out of his own pocket.

But nothing checked him in the performance of the duty he had undertaken. If there was a fellow-countryman in trouble, or British interests to be advanced, there was Lee donning the lion's skin and roaring as loud as he was able, knowing all the while that he was as likely as not to be blamed by everybody at the end of it.

At least half his cases came within the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, and were rendered all the more ticklish by the fact that the civil authorities through whom he had to approach it, went in fear of it themselves. It was not only active in pouncing on sailors who were alleged to have been converted to Islam by much the same methods of persuasion it employed itself, or such fervent spirits as made a nuisance of a foreign heresy, but its tentacles scooped up a man's goods as well as his person and was more reluctant to let go of the former than the latter. It was even said to make a practice of arresting any Portuguese merchant who had received a valuable cargo from England, and impounding it. As this in most cases had not been paid for, the angry shippers wrote to the Consul to get back their goods or their money, and when he failed in this — as he was bound to do — denounced him to the Privy Council for an incompetent who could not perform his office.

In 1619 Lee died, and his place was taken by John Stone. The official statement says he soon became infirm and gave up his post, but a more candid report declares that he had much friction with the merchants and was «forced to flee». At this point some effort seems to have been made by the merchants to prevent the appointment of another Consul, whom they considered an expensive and useless luxury. The date of his patent — especially the English one which was generally considerably delayed — is no guide as to when Chandler took office and he may have been acting-consul for some time before 1631 — the date of his English patent. The Portuguese Government did not grant him theirs till 1635 ; when they did, they tried to combine him with one John Howe, described as a «proprietario». The English Government in a fit of absent-mindedness had also granted Howe a patent, though they seem to have given preference to Chandler.

Chandler's appointment met with some opposition from the merchants, but he managed to retain his office. In times of trouble the Consul was the only help they had, and in the face of outside attacks they forgot differences with him. In 1634 he forwarded a petition to Charles I. on behalf of 6 leading merchants imprisoned by a Custom House official named Rodrigo Botelho, «who in his indignation is so bold as to threaten them with the losse of their estate». Apparently something was done

to amend this for Chandler soon afterwards laments that the merchants have omitted to «certify the Lords of the Council of their gratitude».

Home politics were beginning to find their way to wherever Englishmen were gathered together. Chandler was an ardent Royalist and was soon at grips with one «Thomas Kendal» whom he describes as being «one of those who have the most sway among the refractory, audacious, peremptory, and worthy to be called in question for rash and undutiful speeche publicly spoken in derogation of the Royal Power». Kendal had advanced the very acceptable theory that His Majesty could not impose any taxation upon his subjects in foreign parts without their consent. In other words, he and his following had delightedly discovered that it was against their consciences to pay consulage, and that a Higher Purpose ordained they should worry Chandler out of his mind. He earnestly but somewhat vaguely entreats that the Lords of the Council «shall in their wisdom see fit to suppress these exorbitant proceedings». This, unfortunately, was more than could be accomplished nearer home.

But before the Civil War broke out in England the English in Lisbon were—at least temporarily—united in rejoicing that the long Spanish domination was at an end. From the first, Joao IV showed them good-will, and one of the earliest acts of the new government was the drafting and signing of a new Treaty with England which granted all the privileges included in former treaties and added some new ones. Meanwhile the Factory, as the body of merchants and factors or agents was now called, was rapidly becoming a small reflection of the civil strife at home. The bulk of the merchants appear to have favoured the Rebels, probably taking their views from the City of London with which they were closely connected rather than from any hope that any government of whatever colour would fail to tax them. Meanwhile Chandler's position was growing more thorny. Apart from his personal opinions, his patent was held direct from the King of England and as such was not acknowledged by His Majesty's subjects who had renounced the royal authority. The Portuguese government here stepped in and did what they always claimed they had the right to do : they appointed a Consul themselves, chosing John Robinson,

the head of the «Inglezinhos», possibly because no merchant would have been found acceptable to all his fellows. Father Robinson held the office for four years. One would like to know how he got on with the Factory, but beyond his patent in the chancellaria books there is little trace of his consulship.

Times were becoming increasingly difficult. An inauspicious visit from Prince Rupert may well have done something towards convincing the King of Portugal that the time had arrived for making his peace with Cromwell, who had obviously come to stay and was offering sound advantages. A new Treaty was signed in 1654 under which a Consul, for the first time sent out from London and holding his appointment as a British Government servant, came with the special Envoy, Philip Meadows. After Meadows left he remained to exercise the additional office of chargé d'affaires which, at least in his own opinion, carried with it diplomatic status.

Neither the Portuguese Government nor the Factory — both of which claimed the right of appointment — seem to have been consulted on the choice of Thomas Maynard, who was destined to keep his countrymen in a ferment for the next thirty-five years. Under the circumstances, it would have required a man of phenomenal tact and charm to win over the various oponents he immediately encountered, and, unfortunately, Maynard lacked both. One of the British Ministers with whom he served, and with whom he got on well, describes him with some shrewdness as : «a man of very pretty parts, and very officious «— indeed liberal — when he must make his court. He has «on the other hand a very unfortunate mixture in his temper «towards those he lives withal, bein very imperious and passionate. For that, in this place, he will never live quiet, nor «will it be convenient for Your Lordship to struggle for him, «lest he engage Your Lordships in his embroils».

In spite of this plain advice which had already been illustrated by numerous instances when their Lordship's interests had run a very considerable risk from Maynard's temper, the latter survived one storm after another, not excluding perpetual demands from the Portuguese Government for his removal. He was unswervingly loyal to his superiors, however often these changed ; he was energetic, and at least clever enough to

convince the Lords in Council that any trouble he got into arose from excessive zeal on their behalf. In the face of all this, petitions and complaints fell harmless as dead leaves on the Council table, for in addition there often reposed a letter in Mr Secretary's own pocket from the honest fellow recounting how — after incredible pains — he had (God be thanked) succeeded in procuring and forwarding another barrel of the same superb vintage as the last, and a trifle cheaper. Finally, he seems to have had the luck to amuse Charles II, but that was much later. Till 1660 there was no more staunch Republican in either country.

(To be continued.)

See : State Papers, Portugal Vols. : 1 to 4.

Calender of Dom. : St. : Ps. Elizabeth to Commonwealth.

Chancellarias Philip 1. to João IV.

Commercial Relations of England and Portugal : Shillington & Chapman.
