

B458-2-198

CATHERINE OF BRAGANZA
A WIDOW

by PAULO MARQUES

Charles II died in 1685. Catherine, who was born in 1638 at Vila Viçosa, two years before the restoration of Portuguese independence from Spain (1), was therefore forty seven years of age. It had been twenty three years since, a shy bride, she had arrived at Portsmouth and, on being offered a glass of ale, said she was unused to this beverage and would prefer a cup of tea which surprised her hosts. Later she had floated in magnificent progression down the Thames from Hampton Court to Whitehall.

The King's death left Catherine prostrate with grief for she, like many others, had fallen in love with her royal spouse, that «Prince of many virtues and many great imperfections» as John Evelyn said. John Dryden also attests her great attachment to the King. He writes of Catherine:

The best of Queens, the most obedient wife:
His life the theme of her eternal prayer.

(1) In her correspondence Catherine always refers to Spain as Castille, though Spain as a unified country had existed for over a hundred and fifty years.

She received the ambassadors and special envoys in her rooms where she lay in darkness in bed, and all the chambers were covered in black including the floors and ceilings. The new King, James II, showed every consideration, and Catherine stayed at Whitehall a further two months, moving then to Somerset House.

According to her marriage contract, described as the Treaty of Whitehall, she could choose to come back to Portugal in her husband's inheritor's ships. She had always missed the «Sol de Portugal» as she often said in her many letters to her brother King Pedro II of Portugal (2). Now her return was possible, and having had no children and being a devout Catholic in a country where Protestantism was growing increasingly militant, there were few binds to keep her in England. In her letters she actually talks about «saudades duma vista do Tejo.» Yet due to many circumstances she would be compelled to stay in England for a further seven years.

James II, a Catholic and facing increasing problems at home, wanted to keep her at his side. Also there were questions with her pension. Being a careful person she had accumulated a considerable fortune. Her income was about £30.000 a year, but she suspected her treasurer, Lord Clarendon, of not giving her the full amount, so in 1688 she went to law. The King was not pleased at this public spectacle but did not interfere, observing that the Queen Dowager was «a difficult person.» Catherine won her case and Clarendon had to pay up. Also her brother D. Pedro II was not immediately keen to have her back, so for some time he withheld his consent for fear of displeasing his English ally. Portugal's independence from Spain was not yet a confirmed matter.

(2) Indeed letters to her brother survive in the Cadaval papers, describing difficult periods such as those concerning incidents with the King's mistresses and the terrible accusations of Titus Oates during the Popish Plot. Some letters are stained with her tears.

Soon after James II's succession the Duke of Monmouth, the late King's natural son by Lucy Waters, disembarked at Lyme and raised the Protestant standard against the King. He was quickly defeated at Sedgemoor (3) by the King's troops led by Lord Feversham, a Protestant and the Queen Dowager's Lord Chamberlain and devoted friend. Monmouth was brought in chains to London and condemned to death. He wrote an abject letter to Catherine seeking her intercession with the King. It shows her nobility of character that she pleaded with the King for the life of this man who after all was a living and recognised proof of her husband's infidelities (4).

All the King consented to do was to receive Monmouth. It did not save him and he was executed at Tower Hill.

At this time, Titus Oates, who had indeed almost caused Catherine's execution, had it not been for her husband's courage and firmness, was publicly punished as a perjurer, and the words engraved on the Monument in the City accusing the Catholics of having caused the Great Fire were erased.

Yet the dowager Queen was increasingly lonely. She went for long walks, sometimes at eleven at night to the great annoyance of her ladies-in-waiting who had to accompany her. Her great friend, the Conde de Castelo Melhor, returned to Lisbon. Catherine repeatedly asks her brother's permission to return; her health is not good and she feels the only cure is «o Sol de Portugal». D. Pedro at this time was busily preparing for his second marriage to the Princess Maria Sophia of Neuberg, a daughter of the Elector-Palatine. James II provided a fleet to escort the new

(3) The last battle fought on English soil.

(4) However, when Monmouth was granted a coat of arms, Catherine protested that the royal arms carried no bar sinister, and he was subsequently granted a second coat of arms depicting this sign of bastardy. But Catherine was generous to King Charles's natural children. When she finally left England she gave an annual pension of £2,000 to the Duke of St. Albans, son of «poor Nell».

bride, and Catherine hoped to get «a lift», but D. Pedro was still reluctant.

All these requests to her brother were made in secret and when he eventually gave his consent to her return, Catherine then formally asked for King James's permission. He was understandably rather displeased at not having known earlier of the Queen Dowager's intentions. But he gave his permission. The Portuguese King sent a special Ambassador to bring Catherine back — the Conde de Pontevel —, and Pepys, then Secretary for the Admiralty, tells us that he needed three months to prepare the fleet.

Alas, Queen Catherine fell gravely ill and all plans were delayed, Pontevel returning to Lisbon.

She continued to play her part, though quietly, at the English Court, and early in 1688 she was present at the birth of the King's first son, the future «James III», the Old Pretender. Catherine was his godmother. The Queen, Mary of Modena, got on well with her sister-in-law. Otherwise the dowager Queen liked music (5) and played a game called «basset» for small stakes, when Lord Feversham was always banker.

The situation in England deteriorated; King James, a Catholic, was unable to satisfy the country's strongly Protestant feeling. In 1688 William of Orange landed in England and marched to Windsor. James, from Rochester, sent Lord Feversham with a letter to William but he was imprisoned. James then fled to France where King Louis XIV treated him with every royal courtesy. On the very day that William entered London he called on the Queen Dowager at Somerset House. It was evening and he remarked on the fact that the Queen was not playing «basset». She answered with some spirit that her «banker» was imprisoned. William ordered his release. Queen Catherine

(5) Catherine's father, D. João IV, kept one of the best music libraries in Europe.

returned the visit some days later, thus recognising the new régime. But relations with the new King and Queen were tense, specially with Queen Mary, daughter of James II by his first wife, Ann Hyde. Mary's ungenerous nature led to many occasions of difficulty for the dowager Queen. When many years before Mary had been in tears at having to leave her country to go to Holland to marry William, Catherine had consoled her, saying that she too had had to leave her country. At this Mary rudely answered: «But you came to England, Madam; whereas I have to leave England.»

Catherine was now the only Catholic royal person left in England. She was very much alone, surrounded by a hostile nation, and with strained relations with the new Court. She was not invited to the Coronation. It was now D. Pedro who insisted on her return but King William would not provide the necessary fleet. D. Pedro refused to send his ships since he had not yet recognised the new king, and in any case by treaty it was the English King's obligation.

Matters became worse for Catherine, and in 1689 the House of Commons passed a Bill reducing her Catholic servants to eighteen, but the House of Lords refused to sanction such a grievous measure. But it was symptomatic of the times.

Catherine moved for a time to Islington and in despair tried to go to France with the excuse of taking the waters in Bourbon. But, prodded by James II, it seemed in the King of France's interest that Catherine, as a Catholic, should stay in England, and Louis gave no encouragement. Catherine even thought of leaving through Hamburg. She returned to London and, when William went to Ireland on James II's invasion of that country, Catherine was subjected to a series of humiliations by Queen Mary. At a certain moment William, accusing the dowager Queen of keeping Somerset House as a focus of opposition to him, asked Catherine to leave for Windsor or Audley End. She replied with firmness that her only wish was to return to Portugal and in any case by her marriage treaty he could not interfere with where

she lived. He relented. For a time she also stayed at a small convent at Hammersmith that she had helped to found with some nuns from Munich (6), and later spent two months at Windsor where she relived many happy memories of the late King. On the King's return from Ireland, Catherine herself returned to Somerset House.

The gradual disappearance of any serious threat by James II caused the hostility to Queen Catherine also to subside and finally, in 1692, King William provided ships to take her across the Channel to Dieppe. She left London on March 30 1692: a ceremonial departure and as she passed the Tower of London salutes were fired. She was accompanied by a retinue of one hundred and twenty people, including the Countess of Fingall and her two daughters, Lady Tuke and Mrs. McBrain, Mr. Sandys the «first Lord of the Chamber», and also her doctor, a Dr. Street. Catherine had made careful provisions, leaving £10,000 a year for the upkeep of her London residence, Somerset House, and servants. She was now fifty four years of age.

When Catherine arrived in France a special Embassy awaited her, and she was asked to go to Versailles but refused. She passed by St. Germain-en-Laye where she met Mary of Modena (7) and her godson, the young Prince of Wales, who had gone to meet her at Pontoise.

She skirted Paris and proceeded to Bourbon where she took the waters and convalesced for three months. Then to Avignon where she stayed at the Papal Legate's Palace (8). Next to Bayonne, and Catherine entered Spain by Irun. Again a considerable embassy awaited her, including three friars from the Arrabida convent. But her health was not good; she was suffering from erysipelas.

(6) Now the nuns who run St. Mary's Convent School at Ascot.

(7) James was in Holland making a new attempt to fight William.

(8) Avignon remained Papal territory until the French Revolution.

Finally near Almeida she entered Portugal by Val-de-la-Mula. It was thirty years since she had left. She arrived at Almeida on New Year's Day 1693 and progressed to Pinhel where she was met by the aged Bishop Russel who had been her professor of English when she was a girl.

Richard Russel was born in England in 1630 of good family, but because of religious difficulties he came to Portugal, aged thirteen, as a servant to a Dr. Daniel, President of the English College in Lisbon. He was a brilliant student, studied at the Inglesinhos, was ordained in Paris and returned to Lisbon as Procurator of the College. He was appointed Professor of English to the young Princess Catherine then aged seventeen. He accompanied the Portuguese Ambassador, D. Francisco de Mello e Torres, to London and on his return to Lisbon became Secretary to the Queen Regent (9). He was an important go-between during the marriage negotiations and indeed he took Catherine's portrait to England to show King Charles. He went to England with Queen Catherine as her almoner. Later he returned to Portugal, becoming Bishop of Portalegre and later Bishop of Vizeu. He had the honour of being made a Portuguese subject without having to renounce his English connections. He died in 1693 and his portrait used to hang in the Council Chamber of the English College in Lisbon.

After Pinhel, Catherine of Braganza progressed through Celorico, Gouveia, Oliveira do Conde and spent a night at Sta. Comba Dão at the Solar dos Barões de Sta. Comba Dão where a plaque commemorates her stay. Then through the Serra do Bussaco, and finally she entered Coimbra in state. They remained there three days amid great festivities. Catherine stayed at the Bishop's Palace. There were bullfights every day which much amused the English visitors. In all cities through which she passed there was an amnesty for prisoners and at

(9) Widow of D. João IV and mother of Catherine.

Coimbra, although it was only January, she asked the Rector of the University if the students could be dispensed from further lectures for that year! History does not record the Rector's answer to this rather exaggerated request.

After Coimbra came Condeixa, Pombal, Leiria, Batalha (10), Alcobaça, Caldas da Rainha, Alcoentre and Vila Franca; then across to Via Longa, Póvoa de Santo Adrião and she met her brother at Lumiar. Her entry into Lisbon was indeed with royal honours such as she had not received for many years. Both D. Pedro and Catherine travelled in the same coach through Campo Grande, where the army was assembled to honour her, then through the «Campos de Alvalade», by the road of Andaluz, and the cortège entered Lisbon proper by the Portas de Santo Antão. Passing through the Rossio and by S. Paulo, they processed along the river side until they arrived at the royal Palace of Alcântara (11). This Palace, which was destroyed by the great earthquake, had been bought by Philip II when King of Portugal from rich merchants, and since 1640 had been a royal residence.

Here Catherine was met by the new Queen, Dona Maria Sofia, with whom she became great friends. She first stayed at Alcântara going very often to the convent of S. José de Ribamar on the cliffs of what is now Algés. This convent, occupied by friars from Arrábida, was subsequently bought by the Marqueses da Foz and until recently it was the Norwegian Embassy. You can easily see it high up above the Marginal at Algés. From here Catherine enjoyed seeing the Tagus she had missed so much.

She had the curious experience of being criticized for her clothes being too daring! This was ironic for thirty years before poor Catherine had been subject to criticism when she arrived in

(10) Where Catherine sprinkled holy water over the tombs of her ancestors, including Philippa of Lancaster.

(11) Which means «a bridge» in Arabic.

England for having very old fashioned clothes! D. Pedro was displeased, but Dona Maria Sofia and all the younger ladies implored her to be firm. So Pedro gave in, and we have notice of several dressmakers arriving soon after from Paris.

She didn't stay at Alcantara for long (12), and moved to the Quinta do Conde Redondo at Santa Marta (13). The Palace is the one facing the bottom of Rua Alexandre Herculano. From there she moved to the Palace of the Conde de Soure in the Bairro Alto which fell with the earthquake. She then leased the Palácio dos Condes de Aveiras at Belém which is now the Presidential Palace. It was bought for the Crown by her nephew D. João V in 1726. During this period she decided to build her own house and bought a large quinta at Bemposta. The land extended from where the Estefania Square now is to the present palace which is now the Military Academy. In the deeds of sale there is a curious mention of a buried treasure, and the deed states that if such treasure is ever found it should be returned to the vendors. The new Palace began to be built in 1699. It suffered greatly with the earthquake and subsequently with all the changes introduced during the XIXth century. Yet her large coat of arms survives on the façade with the Portuguese and the English Royal Arms quartered. A picture by Holbein belonging to Catherine used to hang in the chapel and is now in the Museu de Arte Antiga.

During this contented time Catherine kept many contacts with England. Several visitors came to call on her, and Pepys tells us that a nephew of his went to Lisbon and he ordered him to wait upon Her Majesty which he did. She was friendly with the British envoy, the famous Paul Methuen who negotiated the well known treaty which bears his name. It was said that the

(12) She was always rather restless regarding where she lived. In England she tried to buy Chatsworth House from the Earl of Devonshire and visited Euston and other great country houses.

(13) Near the Travessa dos Enviados de Inglaterra.

old Queen helped England with these negotiations but there is no proof that she did so. The Envoy only found one occasion to criticize her in his dispatches home and this was when she publicly showed her joy when James II once again tried to invade England. She was always faithful to King James, and when he died she went into deep mourning and ordered her servants and establishment at Somerset House to do the same. Slowly her English ladies (14) returned and were replaced by Portuguese widows of noble birth. A certain Francis Nicholson, however, a devout Catholic, remained with Catherine and was mentioned in her will. He eventually bought the Quinta da Pera at Caparica which he left to the English College whose members until recently used it as a summer retreat.

Catherine remained very pro-English in all international affairs. Thus when the wars of the Spanish Succession broke out she was always against the French pretension (15). When the Archduke Charles visited Lisbon, she received him with great pomp and ceremony (16).

In May 1704 D. Pedro went to the frontier to repel the invasion of the Franco-Spanish armies led by Louis XIV's grandson, Philip V, who had already conquered Castelo Branco. During his absence King Pedro appointed his royal sister as Regent. As such she proved to be a dedicated and strong ruler, presiding over the Council of State in which the principal figure was the Duke of Cadaval. Great efforts were made to prepare the army and equip it, and the victories of the summer of 1705 are greatly due to her efforts.

The British Envoy commends the Regent's bellicosity; and in these campaigns English troops were present and helped to capture Alcântara and Albuquerque and lay siege to Badajoz.

(14) They were criticized locally for their high salaries.

(15) Which her brother King Pedro first favoured.

(16) Self-styled Charles III of Spain, and England's ally.

As Regent, too, she refused to receive the Papal Nuncio, Conti, who later became Pope Innocent XIII, because of some slight he had done to the Jesuits. Catherine was always a great admirer of this militant order.

D. Pedro returned to Lisbon in November 1705 but fell ill, and he again appointed his sister to be Regent.

On the last day of the year 1705 Catherine was suddenly taken very ill «of collic» and died that night at Bemposta, attended by her English physician, Dr. Street. She was sixty-seven.

Queen Catherine's will was read the next day. She appointed as Executors the Earl of Clarendon (who, being very old, declined the honour), Lord Feversham, Steven Fox, Dr. Richard Bellings and Padre Manuel Dias. Her brother, King D. Pedro, was the universal to her now very large fortune. She made many legacies to her servants and ladies, and left considerable sums to the British and Irish religious Communities of Lisbon. These were — and I quote — «Convento do Corpo Santo dos Religiosos Domínicos Irlandezes, o Convento de Santa Brigida das Religiosas Inglesas (17), o Colégio do Seminário de S. Pedro e S. Paulo de Ingleses (18), e o Colégio ou Seminário de S. Patrício da Irlanda.» (19)

The Queen Dowager of Great Britain and Ireland was taken to Sta. Maria de Belém (the Jerónimos) where she was buried, according to her wishes, next to her brother D. Theodósio, long dead. The Court was in mourning for a full year.

(17) These were the Syon Nuns in the Madragoa where there still exists a Travessa das Inglesinhas. They returned to England in the XIXth century.

(18) The Inglesinhos in the Bairro Alto, recently closed by the Bishops of England and Wales.

(19) Very near the Castle of S. Jorge. It was closed in the XIXth century, though it continued a formal existence until recently. The late Father Paul of Corpo Santo was the last nominal Rector.

In 1855 the Prince Consort's cousin, D. Fernando de Saxe Coburg Gotha (20), during his regency for his son, D. Pedro V, decided to create the Braganza pantheon at S. Vicente de Fora. There all the Braganza princes were sent, including Queen Catherine (21).

Only in 1932 was the pantheon organized, and the dusty coffins, till then stacked on shelves, were buried behind plain shelved tombs. In one of these now rests Queen Catherine of Braganza. The inscription reads:

R.^{aha} de Inga.^{ra} D. Catherina
1638-1705

When the Queen died ten thousand masses were said for her soul. This virtuous, warmhearted and generous lady needed little of this. And with her death masses stopped being said for her husband, King Charles, who surely stood in greater need of them.

(20) D. Fernando was King Consort to Queen D. Maria II, Catherine's great-great-great-niece.

(21) Except Queen D. Maria I who rests in the Estrela Basilica, and D. Pedro IV (Emperor Pedro I of Brazil) whose coffin was returned to Brazil in 1972, though his heart is buried in the Lapa Church in Oporto.