

GARRETT AND ENGLAND: ENGLISH REMINISCENCES  
IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALMEIDA GARRETT.

Summary of Lecture delivered by Dr. Carlos Estorninho, Librarian of the British Council, in Lisbon, at the British Institute, Lisbon, on 3rd December, 1954, to members and friends of the Portugal Branch of the Historical Association, to mark the First Centenary of the death of Almeida Garrett.

The lecturer began by stating that whoever studies the life and works of Garrett finds them filled with reminiscences of England. Some of these reminiscences are purely accidental, others are due to the long years of exile which Garrett spent in England during the most crucial and receptive period of his existence.

On the side of his paternal grandmother, he was descended from an Irish family. His love for an English girl, Elizabeth Hewson, made him change his career. He renounced his studies for the priesthood, and became a Law student.

When he heard, in Coimbra, the news of the execution of Gomes Freire, Garrett's patriotism was aroused and he

became violently anti-British. In Oporto, Garrett was involved in a serious accident caused by a horse belonging to General Wilson who was serving under Beresford. From that time onwards Garrett always had to wear a wig.

After taking his degree, Garrett wrote in Lisbon, «Catão», considered to be his finest work in Arcadian style. It was inspired by Addison's tragedy. At the precise moment at which Garrett was being initiated into English literature, he was obliged to flee from Portugal because of Miguelist persecution and disapproval of his liberal, democratic and anti-absolutist ideas. When Garrett returned clandestinely to Portugal, he was arrested and deported to England. There he was entertained by the Hadley family at Edgbaston, near Birmingham, where he spent several quiet months. Garrett devoted himself to the study of the English language, literature and legislation, and adapted himself to the habits and customs of a civilized, cultured and highly-educated milieu. Byron's poems fascinated him. Walter Scott's historical novels revealed to him a new medieval world and he appreciated all the tragic beauty of Shakespeare's works. The collections of popular ballads, made by Ellis, Percy and «Ossian» reminded Garrett of the Portuguese *xácaras* and *rimances*. During these months of study and meditation Garrett mapped out the complete plan of his existence. He described that period as «not the most satisfactory, but the quietest and happiest» of his life.

In his spare time, he went on excursions to see beautiful scenery, Gothic cathedrals and ruined castles. These trips made a profound impression on Garrett and strengthened his leanings towards Romanticism. His poems «Camões» and «D. Branca» with which he initiated the Romantic movement in Portugal are strongly reminiscent of his life and reading in Edgbaston.

Back in Lisbon, he founded the first modern Portuguese daily paper «O Português», and «O Cronista», a high-class weekly dealing with politics, literature and art. With the return of Miguelism, Garrett was again arrested and emigrated for the third time to England where he remained three years. Just as his retirement in Edgbaston had been a time of preparation, meditation and literary training, his exile in London was a period of intensive political, social and literary activity. He was appointed attaché to the Portuguese Embassy in London, and took the opportunity thus afforded him to complete his political and social training through his contacts with political

and diplomatic circles. He attended sittings of the House of Commons, frequented scientific and literary libraries, maintained correspondence with writers and politicians and entered fashionable society where he managed to flirt simultaneously with the three Robinson sisters. The alteration in the attitude of the English Government and English public towards the Liberal Cause was largely due to Garrett's contacts and influence.

Garrett's literary activity was prodigious. He published in London, in rapid succession, the following books: «Adozinda» with which he started the fashion of collecting popular Portuguese songs; «Lírica de João Minimo»; «Da Educação» a work on pedagogy and instruction generally, in which the influence of Locke and of the English educational system is apparent by reason of the many references it contains to English authors and English works; «Indicação e Discurso de MacIntosh», this consists of Garrett's version of the intervention of this member of the British Parliament on behalf of Portugal's Liberals; «A Lealdade em Triunfo» or «A Vitória da Terceira», one of Garrett's finest poems; a second edition of «Catão» dedicated to «the noble, ancient and loyal city of Oporto, fervent supporter of constitutional liberty»; «Portugal na Balança da Europa»; «Elogio Fúnebre de Carlos Infante de Lacerda» and «Carta of Mucio Scevola».

In addition to the above-mentioned works, Garrett founded two periodicals in London, «O Chaveco Liberal» and «O Precursor». The policy of both was the defence of Liberal principles and democracy and opposition to absolutism.

As a private, Garrett took part in the expedition to Terceira by the Portuguese Liberals, and was complimented by Mousinho da Silveira for the plans he drew up for the first great social, administrative and political reforms in Portugal.

Garrett returned to England for the fourth and last time and at length after five and a half years of exile he was able to return to Lisbon. Passos Manuel assigned him the task of drawing up important social reforms. He was elected by the Constitutional Party and became their leader. He founded the National Theatre, the Conservatoire of Dramatic Art and the Board of Supervision of Theatres. He wrote «Frei Luís de Sousa», which is definitely Shakespearean in style. He gave a fillip to the stagnant Portuguese intellectual life of the period by starting public lectures similar to those delivered in England. The English dramatist Sheridan Knowles began the Portuguese-

-British cultural intercourse by a visit to Lisbon during which he delivered six public lectures.

But it was as a parliamentary politician that Garrett demonstrated most vividly both his patriotism and his English training. He drew up a law of literary and artistic copyright which was moulded on that of England and afterwards, in its turn, served England as a model. Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey inspired Garrett to propose the foundation of a Portuguese National Pantheon. It was also at Garrett's suggestion that the English men of letters John Adamson and Robert Southey were decorated with the Order of the «Torre e Espada» in recognition of their research into Portuguese subjects.

The reforms which Garrett introduced into the Portuguese Academy of Sciences were based on the statutes of the Royal Society.

In addition to being a Liberal and a Member of Parliament, Garrett resembled an English gentleman. During the last years of his life, Garrett published the «Romanceiro», which in style was influenced by the «Percy Reliques» and the «Minstrelsy» of Sir Walter Scott. His «Viagens na Minha Terra» bears close similarity to Sterne's «Sentimental Journey» and contains many reminiscences of Garrett's English studies and flirtations.

Of all Portuguese national figures, Garrett is the one bearing closest affinity to England, although he was Portuguese to the backbone. He never imitated English models, but the influence of England was the source of his inspiration. He assimilated what he had learnt in England during his long years of exile, but all his literary work bears the stamp of his own personality and is Portuguese to the core.

Garrett was a striking example of the benefits to be derived from cultural relations between England and Portugal yet his knowledge of England did not denationalize him but enabled him to develop his own genius.

It was a happy coincidence that the first Anglo-Portuguese Cultural Convention was signed during the Garrett Centenary Commemorations in 1954.