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JOHN JEFFERY : H. M. CONSUL IN LISBON,
1809-1813

NOTES ON HIS ANTECEDENTS AND PERSONALITY

One of the lesser-known poems of Rudyard Kipling, entitled «The Pro-Consuls,» declares : —

«They that dig foundations deep,
Fit for realms to rise upon,
Little honour do they reap
Of their generation,
Any more than mountains gain
Stature till we reach the plain.

Which sentiment, broadly applied, covers much of the duty carried out by H. M's Consular services all the world over. More kicks than ha'pence fall to their lot, yet let there but come a time of uncertainty and danger, international or individual ; rumours of wars or arbitrary detention of a British subject in a South American *calabozo* ; and a hundred to one it is to the consular office that both the victim and the pseudo-oppressor will apply, the first to get out and the second to justify action which, in the cool light of morning, may seem to have been a trifle high-handed. Yet among the galaxy of names preserved on History's scroll you will look in vain for those of most consuls ; Lisbon, curiously enough, provides one of the rare exceptions, thanks in part to the close diplomatic and commercial relations which have existed between Portugal and England for centuries and, in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, to the unique connection that linked the

consular office with «the British Factors and Merchants», that active yet somewhat amorphous body known locally as the «British Factory.»

In the present Report some details are elsewhere given about one of the most outstanding «characters» on the list of Lisbon consuls, Thomas Maynard. Carried out first under the Protectorate and then in Carolinian times, his duties and his strong personality both brought him into prominence, if not always of an agreeable sort. *Pereunt et imputantur*. Not ours to judge, but one may observe that although Maynard showed much ability in gleaning individual testimonials from persons of importance whose interests he had served, there is no record of any collective testimonial such as was embodied in the resolution passed at the fateful meeting held on 30th November 1810 in which official cognizance was taken of the Factory's proximate demise. It will be found in «The British Factory in Lisbon» (*A. R. Walford*) and reads thus :—

«Resolved unanimously that the Thanks of the the Factory be presented to John Jeffery Esqr., His «Majesty's Consul General, for his distinguished efforts «in constantly upholding the British Rights and Privileges in this Country ; for his eminent services rendered to our Commerce and Navigation ; for his great «support invariably given to every description of His «Majesty's Subjects ; and for his conciliating conduct «and urbanity since his arrival in this Kingdom. And «the Factory embrace the present occasion of further «expressing their grateful feelings for his unwearied «zeal and indefatigable exertions so conspicuously «shown upon a recent occasion in preparing for the «removal of all British Persons and property at the moment of considerable alarm and apparent danger.»

That was a token of esteem worth receiving ; and recording ! It gives one a desire to know something more of John Jeffery, both as a Consul and a man. Through somewhat unusual good fortune it has been possible to obtain reasonably full notes on the earlier career of this, the last Consul to act as head of the British Factory in Lisbon.

John Jeffery belonged to a Quaker family of Exeter, and is said to have come to Poole as a young man, being the son of Walter Jeffery who had married Joan White, the heiress of William White, of Poole. The Whites were Poole Quakers and very wealthy Newfoundland merchants. In 1774 John Jeffery married Elizabeth Nickleson, who was also daughter of a prominent family of Poole Quakers. He was granted arms in 1776, composed of those of Jeffery, White, and Nickleson. Among ships owned by him were the *Swift* — 91 tons.; *Active* — 98 tons.; *Myrtle* — 108 tons.; *Nancy* — 132 tons.; *Diligent* — 145 tons.; *Hudson* — 167 tons. Among his other property was land and a malthouse in Town Gate Lane, Poole, and a residence built by him at Lytchett Minster, near Poole, named «Sans Souci», sold in 1810.

A Newfoundland merchant, he was called to give evidence concerning the state of the fisheries in June 1798, he being then a Member of Parliament. For John Jeffery was elected as a Member of Poole in 1796, was re-elected in 1802 and again in 1807, both in the first and the second Parliaments called in that year. The Parliamentary representation of Poole was at that time held by two members, and John Jeffery sat continuously from 1796 until 1809, when he was appointed H. M. Consul General at Lisbon. Parenthetically, another well-known Lisbon name comes within the same period. George Garland, who was also in the Newfoundland trade, was elected as an M. P. in 1801 and sat in the House with John Jeffery until this latter accepted the Lisbon post.

A zealous patriot, it is said that at the celebrations held in honour of Lord Howe's glorious but indecisive victory of the «First of June», John Jeffery was the leading spirit in getting a band together, distributing free beer, and generally rejoicing in honour of the event. In 1798 he could be found commanding the two volunteer companies of Artillery, and, on or about the year 1803, of the three battalions organized at Poole the second battalion figures as having been under the command of Lt. Col. Jeffery. The brethren may be interested to know that this active man, never weary in well-doing, was Provincial Grand Master of Dorset, having been initiated in the Lodge Amity of Poole on 21st January 1784 and ascending to the Chair of the Worshipful Master in the latter half of 1785. He must have faithfully car-

ried out his duties as a Master Mason since he figures as Grand Master in 1789 and Provincial Grand Master of Dorset from 1805-1807.

His activities did not however altogether commend themselves to the Society of Friends, and it is reported, but without certain verification, that he was asked to resign from membership. An indication that this is probably correct may be seen in the recorded joint gift by John Jeffery and George Garland of one double and four single brass chandeliers for the use of St. James Church, Poole. Again and again John Jeffery's name occurs in the Corporation records in prominent association with the affairs of the town : — the building of a gaol ; provision of a town's water supply ; defence measures for both town and harbour. For then, as now, the possibility of invasion was an ever-present factor in all civic planning.

When he sailed for Lisbon John Jeffery was 57 years old. It is somewhat beyond the age at which a man whose position was so assured, and presumably substantial, packs up and decides to settle abroad. In the Notes from which the foregoing paragraphs are built up there is no indication whatsoever as to his reasons for leaving Poole. Nor do we know much about his actions here, over and above the few pointers which Mr. Walford has gathered in his record of the Factory. His last signature as Consul is found in 1813 and his death came in 1822, he then being 70 years of age.

NOTE. — Above information has been gleaned from the following sources : — *Hutchin's History of Dorset* (3rd Edn). *Dorset Field Club Proceedings. A History of Lodge Amity*, H. P. Smith. *Benefactor's List, St. James Church, Poole Town Archives*, a communication from Newfoundland giving the Committee's Report of the House of Commons. Local tradition still extant in Poole.