LETTERS FROM CATHERINE OF BRAGANÇA, QUEEN-CONSORT OF CHARLES II

to her brother, Dom Pedro II, King of Portugal

(1679-1691)

(contributed by Miss Virginia Rau, Assistant Lecturer in the Department of History, University of Lisbon)

It was rarely the custom for Portuguese ladies to record, either by letters or diaries, their inner hopes and aspirations. Save for some notable exceptions to this rule few indeed are the testimonies coming down to us from the succeeding generations of princesses and ladies of title who lived, loved, and suffered in times gone by. Nor was the 17th century — so fertile in this respect in other countries, and which, with us, saw the forceful shining genius of Padre António Vieira, to cite only one example — productive of any outstanding femine contribution to the field of litterature in letters or otherwise. However, if the Portuguese woman is somewhat adverse to letter writing, there are times when her love and care oblige her to confide to pen and ink her sorrows and anxieties, and it was thus so with Catherine of Bragança, the wife of King Charles II of England.

Many are the letters which remain to us of this princess who by the national polity of Portugal was constrained to accept the English throne. All these letters appear as a far-off echo of what she then suffered for love of her country and her inconstant husband in an exclusive bond of adoration. As wife, and as a Portuguese lady, Catherine was lacking in preoccupations with custom and the affectations of court parlance, but her innate goodness and gentleness, her natural qualities of character

and good sense shine out in crystaline clarity from the missives she sent to her brother, King Pedro the second of Portugal. Educated according to the Portuguese method of that period, body and soul compressed in a habit and religiosity essentially peninsular, the young princess left the royal palace at Lisbon to occupy the highest place in one of the most dissolute and dangerous courts of the 17th century. It seems incomprehensible that the sophisticated and arrogant Portuguese Queen-regent D. Luiza, whose ambition it was to secure to her daughter the throne of France, and when all hopes of this were lost, succeeded in elevating her to that of England, should have omitted entirely to instruct and train her for such a difficult position.

Unskilled in the art and bland suavities of pleasing, lacking the subtleties of fence and tact for parrying the intrigues of a brilliant court, restricted in speech to Portuguese and Spanish, and with no more than her virtues and general common sense, Catherine had no means of imposing her personality in the delicate situations which politics forced upon her. Who is to say that if Catherine, with her natural qualities enriched by a sound and broad cultural tuition, the destiny of the Stuarts might not have been modified? In the country where she had become Queen she was contemned for her religion, her sterility, and her uselessness as a political medium; albeit that when she left Somerset House, on the 30th March 1692, that moral integrity which she maintained alike in good and bad fortune had won for her, if not the love, at least the respect of all English people.

Here are six of these letters belonging to the *Casa Cadaval*, hitherto unpublished, written by Catherine herself between the years 1679 and 1691, and addressed to King Pedro II of Portugal, which it is now my privilege to bring to light.

The first of these, under date of the 17th March, 1679, reflects the anguish of Queen Catherine at the accusations of Titus Oates and William Bedloe, infamous informers and perjurers, and the conflicts between English political factions towards the end of the 17th century. This monstruous (Oates--Bedloe) conspiracy which became known as the Popish Plot cast a gloom over the kingdom, and filled the catholics with the direst apprehension. The Duke of York was exiled not only from the court but also from the kingdom, this step being taken

partly on account of his religious belief as well as to forestall any extreme measure which Parliament might employ, and against which any intervention on the part of King Charles himself would be doomed to failure. «I, Titus Oates, do accuse Queen Catherine of «conspiring the King's death and contriving how to compass it» brought the Queen to the very brink of the abyss, and only the urgent energy, chivalry, and astuceness of Charles saved her from the scaffold.

Alarmed by the news from London, the Lisbon court decided to send an ambassador to protect the life and interests of Catherine. Choice fell upon the Marquez de Arronches, a former envoy to the Hague, who left Portugal in February 1679 accompanied by Gaspar de Abreu, Domingo Barreiras, and Padre Manoel Dias chaplain to Queen Catherine. The ambassador arrived towards the end of April and on the 19th May was received in audience by King Charles. Annoyed by the privileged position which the Count of Castello Melhor — a compatriot and exile — enjoyed at the Court of St. James, and failing to grasp the intricacies of the situation in which he was supposed to intervene, the Marquez did nothing for Queen Catherine except to confuse the issue and complicate her relations with her brother the king of Portugal. Furious at Catherine's refusal to accept his suggestion that she should return to Portugal, and flabbergasted at her resolve «to see through the plots and intrigues directed against her and her husband» he lost all sense of courtly deportment, behaving in the most inept and malicious manner.

The second letter, dated the 22nd December, and possibly of the same year, shows very clearly to what extent the Marquez de Arronches displayed his effrontery over the Queen's appointment of her new Master of Horse — a nephew of the Maréchal de Turenne — and well disposed towards Portuguese interests. Catherine, whose patience was sorely tried by the long period of stress and dangers to which she was exposed, and fearing further intrigues, wrote to her brother King Pedro complaining of the behaviour of the Portuguese ambassador.

The other letters which I publish were written after the death of Charels II, but as they are undated as to the year it is only by consideration of the matters to which they refer that

they can be given an approximate period. They nevertheless show very clearly that life for the widowed queen had completely changed, and that now, ill, and prematurely aged, she had but one desire: to return to Portugal and her own folk. For seven years more her letters follow one another asking her brother Pedro's consent to return to her native land. Catherine knew well that Portuguese etiquette did not allow the same feminine liberty and independence as that to which she had become accustomed in England, and for this reason felt it necessary first to secure her royal brother's permission before retiring to Portugal. Moreover, in the absence of any ambassador from Portugal to assist her in her preparations her own pride halted at the possibility of the English court conceiving the idea that her return to Portugal, as a widowed Queen, was any less acceptable than her arrival as a young bride had been. The acquiesence of Lisbon was essential. Her brother Pedro, however, seemed to be in no hurry to take the steps asked of him. The return of the widowed Queen of England back to Portugal was not merely a family matter. Diplomatic junctures entailed a careful enquiry as to whether the ardent desires of Catherine could be complied with without in any way altering the cordial relations between the two countries, and that the sensibilities of the new English king in no way would be offended by this decision of his sister-in-law. However Catherine, who had taken this matter to heart, as indeed with all that pertained to Portugal, saw an opportunity of returning in 1687 by taking advantage of the company of her brother King Pedro's second wife, D. Maria Sofia de Neuburg, whom an English fleet was fetching from Rotterdam. Thereupon she wrote asking permission to profit by this means of transport with the new Queen of Portugal; but King Pedro made no reply, and the fleet passed without calling for Catherine.

There was no diminution of her ardent longing to return, and her letters of supplication followed one upon another: at times voicing the peril she was incurring, ageing and unprotected; an England become protestant, and whose monarchs had never shown her any great affection; at others harping upon past events that had all but led her «to the block on Tower Hill»; and that, as widow, no longer with her dear husband who had heretofore striven so much to prove her innocence and protect her. Conscious of the justice of her request, and though writing with moderation, she nevertheless

recounts to what extent she had been sacrificed for her country in whose interests and from which she had, for so many long years, been expatriated. In one of her most moving letters she writes: «Remember, my brother, that my becoming the Queen of Great Britain did not alter the fact that I am your sister».

Summing up the situation, any commentary one might make about these letters of Catherine of Bragança would be supererogatory. Rather let these letters speak for themselves with their many expressions of deep affection for the beloved brother and her distant motherland.

(Letters of Catherine of Bragança)

LONDON

«My Brother,

«I am appriz'd you have ample tidings of my affairs from other sources, and this shall be my reason for not sending them by my own hand; also, my Troubles are of such sorte that they have depriv'd me any alleviation of setting them forth in greater particularity to you. For the moment, the New Parliament is now being sett up from which it appears the greater part of the Old one will be re-chosen, and thus we cannot looke for any better outcome thereof for already there have been Unseemly attitudes towards the King (Charles). You will by this time have learned the Departure of the Duke (1) not onlie from the Court but from this Kingdom alsoe by Decree of the King, his brother. This was not Expected, it being held indeed that the King wd. always Uphold him, there being such manifest reasons, he being a Prince of notability, and having serv'd him with great Fidelity and Competence; but the King fearing the Fury of Parliament hath seemingly clos'd his Eyes to all this and taken a Step soe contrary to the affection he bears towards this Brother to whom he owes soe much. Such Decision evokes alarm that were others to support his attitudes they must suffer the same Fate. In that which concerns me I am most sure of my Innocence of all those things which Malicious Reports do impugne against me; likewise I am sure the King alsoe doth hold me innocent of them, and all those who are fair-minded; but for the Evil-minded there be no greater crime than Innocence; my trust is that the Almighty will establish the Truth, 'tis to His Hands I commend myself, desiring nothing save to conform to His Will. See to it that the Special Prayers and pious deeds are continu'd that it maye help us in being heard.

News comes that we may expect the Ambassador (1) in a few days now, This Court be in such state of Turmoil I fear lest he be not receiv'd with that Acclaim I could desire. Yet will we doe all we can; when he arrives he will surely acquaint you with all his Findings, while I for my part shall do all possible likewise, beseeching you not to fail me with all your Help that it may aid me at this time of Cruel afflictions. God guard and bless you more soe than myself, such is my constant Prayer. March 17.

from your unhappie, yet
devoted & always Faithful sister

Catherine (1)

«My Brother,

«Although the Marquez daily gives me cause for Affront I have refrain'd from complaining soe as not to worry you therewith, preferring to suffer these things rather than to give you acquaintance of them. Yet now am I compell'd to inform you what New thing hath happen'd which hath affected me more on your account than my own. Having for more than a year been depriv'd of my former Equerry who was Catholick the King was pleased to appoint for me a Frenchman, a faithful servant of his as likewise of the Duke my brother-in-law, and the most appropriate for my service in these times, being well dispos'd towards the interests of Portugal, & nephew to the Maréchal de Turenne, but with little affection for the Party towards which the Marquez leans. Yesterday the Appointment was made with the full approval of the Court, yet your Ambassador takes it upon himself, before the chief notables of the Court in my Reception room, to acte with such great Discourtesies as to Scandalize all Present, the King himself being much offend'd thereby & expressing himself to me in Blunt Terms against the Marquez. The Marquez in this manner not only brings discredit upon himself but also to some extent upon you which the more affects me in that he cuts a Riduculous Figure in this Court, which is a sign of the Hostility he bears against me, seeking to be at variance by taking the part of my

(1) Arq. Cadaval, Cod. 970, fol. 65.

Ennemies, and according no credence to those who are loyal to me. This renders him Odious & of little credit as your Envoy which is a matter of grief to me that in affairs of such grave Purport it was Hop'd you should choose someone with greater Talents. All this is mortifying to me, I beg you not to uphold him, and if may be, that you bring some Remedy thereto, it seeming to me sufficient all I suffer from the English, my only Consolation being that I suffer on your behalf & for my mother Country which I love soe much; it is hard & new indeed for me that no Portuguese hath part in my Disconsolations; I beseech you to effect a Remedy to all this in that I fear the Marquez shall proclaim my grievances have no Mending & shall soe misrepresent me to your eyes as to make my sorrow Everlasting. With the King's ready acceptance & approval I have appoint'd José Carneiro for service in my Chapel, being without any Catholick server. I know this will be agreable to you & it was sufficient for me to doe this knowing that he hath serv'd you faithfully & will serve me the same. But if soe be that you shall need him for your own service I shall always be pleas'd to let you have him. It is my intention that Friar Paulino de Estrella, one of my Chaplains, shall retire to his own Province. I sent him last year to Flanders; something happen'd about this, of no particular moment, for which he had no Blame, nor was it worthy of any Notice as some pretend through Cavil or excess of Zeal. I trust you will therefore send a message to the Prelates that this Friar merits no punishment, neither for the thing which happen'd nor for his absence from his Order, which was by my command & not by his own wish. I look forward to your good tidings for ease of my great Afflictions, I cannot describe them any otherwise, when I see what essays are being made to cause Disunion between two Souls who live but for each other. Let not my Enemies bring this about with you, for they shall not be Occasion of it with Me other than their Confusion in seeing the little I make of their Snares and the added Bonds it makes to my true Love; the greatness of this my Affection was the cause of my grief at the report that my beautiful Niece was Sick. Thanks be to God that there comes Better news to relieve me of further Disquiet. News from this Country shall be left to those who can better Relate it. You will hear such as shall seem like to every kind of Novels & Comedies, whereas my own must appear but Tragedies, all my efforts to satisfy Everybody being Unavailing soe that it may seem Odd and strange to you

the loving kindness with which your brother-in-law (Charles) treats me, and how he doth take to himself in person everything that hath relation to me & my affairs soe that he may thereby Protect my Interests, it being of a Surety that only to Yourself I could owe More. 'Tis true in this I give testimony to Frankness, and this, for you, shall always be what my Obligation demands, and my Love asks of the Almighty. 22 Dec.

Your affectionate Sister,

Catherine (1)

«My Brother,

«The great & Insatiable desire I have of seeing you has increas'd in its strength, were such a thing possible, these recent days by your Envoy telling me that you meet this my desire with one of like Fervour. So you will well perceive what great Consolation it was for me to hear it, whereby I am sustain'd in that fond hope coveted these many years, which is Seeing you; & the only Stumbling Block now is that merely by the Desiring of it, You & I, it is not Brought About; the only reason known to me in this particular being that you yourself can bring a Remedy to it with all despatch & there be no other Path to follow save that which I put forth to you, & thus it is in your own hands to accomplish. But you may well conceive that a matter of soe much weight & Authority require that such a state of Affairs demand the right Person for their performance; It is not soelong ago we saw these two Kingdoms faced with a like problem, & it is for that Reason I now find myself besett with difficulties; There were then Reasons for my coming to this Kingdom, solely for the advantage of Portugal, & for this cause & for the interests of our House I was Sacrific'd. Now that these advantages have been secured, & the Cause ended for which I was brought here, I might well expect, besides your love of Justice, that you take Boldly upon yourself the same Steps which then were taken, for at that time an Ambassador was sent to treat of my Marriage, and you have now seen fit to send one to conduct the Queen your Wife & my Sister; My Brother, I have so much confidence in my Love, & for the

(1) Arq. Cadaval. Cod. 970, fol. 65.

much of that same I presume you bear towards me that I count upon the latter as my Proxy to bring about that which I doe soe Earnestly desire; Decide therefore, I beg again of you, Bring this About, Be convinc'd of it, Rest assur'd that to no one else do you need to turn for the accomplishment of our being Reunited, conformable to our mutual circumstances, for nothing can make up for my loss & Sufferings save but the just & great happiness to be with you, especially on this Occasion when all those who bear towards you & the Kingdom such Great Affection may remark my not being Present on the occasion of such great Ceremony, & indeed a Lawful one & of much consequence to me, to be united with You, Your Wife, & daughter, & at the same time to see my Home land on whose behalf I have been Exil'd from it for six-and-twenty years always longing to be there with you. Well may you be not Unmindful that being as I was the King my husband's first concern, now am I no longer soe, & that should like Occasions arise from which I was then Protected & to avoid these Mortifications which cause soe much affect to my health, you can avoid all this by sending, as I say, an Ambassador to treat of this Business, & not by Letters, as an affair of such Importance cannot be otherwise conducted. There is another Circumstance, & one which still more concerns You. My interests were to be entirely for your Account & the Kingdom, seeing my legitimate inheritance, which our Lord & Father bequeath'd to me & was soe Appointed as you well know, was merged & Ofsett in my Dowry as an Alleviation to you & the Kingdom in satisfaction of my Marriage Allowance, that Portugal shd. not be the loser having this Income there; Seeing that I was cause of soe much Expense I desir'd soe to Help, & Commit myself to God, already advancing now in years; These are heavy matters but not impossible of solution if there be Someone able to Cope with them. Grant me this Favour, I beseech you, & read this letter more than Once, for I fear I do not explain matters well enough that you comprehend it at the First time; All that I ask of you is that you make an immediate Execution thereof without delay, for I doe believe that you Desire me Alive, & this is the Only way. God Guard you.

Your Sister

Catherine (1)

(1) Arq. Cadaval, Cod. 970, fol. 65.

«My Brother,

«By the last post, on the fifth day of this month, I wrote to you all that concerns these my affairs, Of which I soe anxiously await the completion. It is this same reason that causes me to urge you once again that you send an Ambassador who shall with full authority conduct everything to a satisfactory Conclusion, bringing all the necessary Orders & Instructions for accamplishing my requirements; Believe me that no other consideration exists in my mind than that of finding myself back in my Native land & being with you. Do not hesitate, Choose whomsoever you wish, I onlie ask that he be Competent for the purpose required. It is this I desire, & therefore the onlie Delay is that in your Sending him, & his crossing the Seas, the which in no Weathers shall intimidate me, navigating them but towards my own Country. Despize not this fondness, it comes from my heart. I rejoic'd to hear the news of the safe arrival of the Queen my Sister. If I do not presume too much, I ask that you embrace her for me, and likewise my charming little Niece. Greatly should I love to carry out this commision myself, but alas! have no means of soe doing. I trust to send my personal Greetings by one of my equerries if so be that the King my Brother-in-law his affairs shall permit of this, that he helps me with one of his Ships, for that the Seas are not always safe unless sailing together in Convoy. I tell you all this because if it shall not take place you shall not impute the Blame of it to me, but to the conditions here which are now much altered for me than was formerly the case. For were all former Calumnies to recurr, or new ones take place, I no longer have your Brother-in-law who labour'd soe much on my behalf to establish my Innocence; these are the reasons which move me to urge all Brevity in what I lay before you. I shall only add thereto that the choice you make of the Person who is to come to treat of my personal affairs be well dispos'd to my interests & Service, for if he be not soe affected he will be more likely to Embroil than to help in their Adjustment; and since this same hath happen'd in my affairs here it seem'd very advisable to Speak of it to you at this time, for whoever hath Grave matters to handle, as such mine are, in a Nation like this, great Shrewdness & Tact are required with much Zeal & labour to succeed in what one strives for; but there is this to it, that by working with every Intent, success shal follow;

Of this I have the Proof in twice having succeeded since I am here, for my affairs turn'd out well when there was someone who took them fully to Heart, pursu'ng them closely, & putting aside all Misconstructions, For 'tis not surprising they fail when no steps whatever be taken, & it is to Remind you of this that I make reference to it, that you may choose the Right person to aid me in this my Request, & I trust that he being to your satisfaction shall not fail thereof to either of us in that respect. Brother mine, do this, I beg of you, & more still that it be done with all Brevity for my Remedy & consolation; Remember that in becoming the Queen of England I did not cease being your Sister, in that you should come to my aid in times of difficulties & Afflictions, my life cd. not be more unbearable than it now is; to you it is for lightening my burden, it is your Duty; Do not fail me, you have no reason for soe doing, & in that way I shal be more indebted to you, if so be that is possible. All that relates thereto I have written here, as likewise in the last letter I wrote you, it now remaining only that I take leave of you, trusting that it shall be but few times more by this means. God guard you; To-day, 12 September.

Your faithful & loving sister

Catherine

«What is here said of a Ship, refers not to myself, but to my Equerry.» (1).

«My Brother,

«Today, which we count here as the 28 November, you will find once again the same suplications that you have for soe long been a witness of my deep desire & firm Resolve to be again with you & in my fatherland, from which & for those motives you know I was separated soe reluctantly & always feeling the same Repugnance. Now that the Almighty hath seen fitt to set me free, do not therefore abandon me to God's Chastisement, for a Widow'd woman in the world, where she hath no purpose to fulfil, hath nothing more to hope for, and

(1) Arq. Cadaval, Cod. 970, fol. 65.

this do be of much dread to me. I do assure myself that when this letter shall reach you will have already chosen the Person who is to conduct me thither after having carried out those measures which you & I have to impart to him. I do not linger on this point now because on others I have already dwelt more largely; & being of a mind that this business was more formidable in the Appearance thereof than in its Solution I discuss'd it with those who were in my service here on that occasion, & some are known to you, Padre Dias, to wit. I shall not harp more upon this, & therefore shall not repeat what he & my letters, which must already have reach'd you, have given you to understand. Be firmly assur'd that all I have said through these facilities is beyond all Question, & most earnestly do I ask that you rescue me from this misery in which I exist. Take decision upon yourself, & seek not to take Counsel of anyone, for I fear that some there be who know our mutual affection & have no desire to see us reunited; & I do promise you even this, that not to embarrass you with my presence & it be desirable not to be soe near to you, I will accommodate myself thereto by going to Vila-Viçosa where I was born, & at that Distance there can be no Jealous apprehension that my affection can be in any way of Influence with you. My dear Brother, this is not choosing, but Facilitating indeed by every possible means in finding a way which corresponds with my intents & desires; & after saying this, my good brother, there remains nothing more to say than, if Hermitages were not forbidden to Women, or were I of the other Sex, it wd. be no longer necessary for the World to take account of me, certain it be I shd. no longer be Here; Yet all these motives aforesaid, & that of being your Sister, have been the cause of my Enduring what hath been by no means agreable to me, & I am surpriz'd you have not properly understood it, I having soe persistently made it manifest that I cannot live with any pleasure of consolation with Brothers-in-law who have always put their own interests against mine, they being always inclin'd towards their own Advantage, which be that of diminishing ours. After this Frankness there is no more for me to say as regards Me; 'tis for you to act. A Deus, for that I be quite wearied.

Sister,

Catherine (1)

(1) Arq. Cadaval, Cod. 970, fol. 65.

My Brother,

I send this letter merely to Bear Witnesse that I am not altogether Dead, tho' greatly afflicted by my affairs having taken of a very bad shape through my not understanding of them, & by Changes which probably will Ruin me; Do not leave me to Perish without by every Brevity coming to my assistance, for unless you do this forthwith by someone with authority & Sufficiency, you will force me to do that which wd. cause me grief, that of withdrawing myself from Here to Elsewhere, which wd. indeed be matter for Surprise, that of Your Sister wandering Abroad, & submitting myself to do that, much against my Will, which unless you come immediately to my asssitance I see no fashion for avoiding of it. A Deus, I can say no more. 14 December.

Catherine (1)

(translations by Mr. A. R. Walford)

(1) Arq. Cadaval, Cod. 970, fol. 65.