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MIDSHIPMAN WILLIAM ROWLATT IN LISBON:

1825

Ever since the Portuguese Royal Family had arrived in Brazil in January 1808, as refugees from the French occupation of Portugal, relations between Portugal and Brazil had grown increasingly strained. The colonists were well aware of Portugal's dependence on the riches of Brazil; and the opening of Brazilian ports to foreign ships in the same year served only to boost the Brazilian economy at the expense of Portugal; while the arrival of the Court further bolstered the inhabitants' sense of their own importance. This feeling was not altogether discouraged by the Prince Regent who, in the years of Napoleon's hegemony, may have seen himself ending up simply as King of Brazil.

In 1815 Brazil was declared a separate kingdom in union with Portugal. The next year Queen Maria I died and the Regent became Dom João VI.

The Braganças settled down happily enough in Rio where Brazilian politicians were strongly in favour of their remaining. In Portugal, however, the King's absence, now the war was over, was much resented. Various attempts were made to persuade Dom João to return, partly in the hope that his presence might help rid the country of Marshal Lord Beresford whose tutelage during these years had grown increasingly autocratic. The Napoleonic Wars had left Portugal physically ravaged and economically exhausted. She was also riven by faction, and Beresford kept the army at war-time strength to buttress, as he thought, his own position. This was an added drain on the

economy. In 1820, in the face of growing unrest, Beresford sailed for Brazil in search of wider powers and of money for the Portuguese exchequer.

With Beresford out of the country, the Oporto garrison revolted, made cause with the radical politicians, and the revolt spread. On return from Brazil, Beresford was denied permission to re-enter Portugal. At the same time the politicians were busy drafting an advanced form of constitution. They demanded the return of Dom João, and the King, fearing he might lose his European throne, at last decided to leave Rio, to the displeasure of his subjects in Brazil.

Dom João left Brazil with its own government and his eldest son, Dom Pedro, as Regent. Neither the Prince nor his ministers were disposed to humour Lisbon where the Radicals now made maladroit attempts to reassert some control over the former colony. These came far too late to do more than harden the attitudes in Brazil. Dom Pedro sent back the Portuguese troops there to Europe and, when a further contingent was sent out, it was not allowed to disembark. In Lisbon the Brazilian deputies to the Portuguese "cortes" were largely ignored and, as a final insult, the parliament demanded that Dom Pedro return to Europe to complete his education.

On 7 September 1822 Dom Pedro declared Brazil independent and a month later he was accepted as Constitutional Emperor. When Dom João wrote to his son on his accession, he omitted the imperial title: the letter was returned to him unopened.

By 1823 a series of upheavals in Portugal had ended with a more moderate government in power, anxious to prevent the breach with Brazil from widening. Lisbon now asked Britain to mediate, and the next year talks began in London with Austria (representing the Holy Alliance) and Britain as arbiters. But the negotiations languished and were finally suspended without positive result.

Canning, as British Foreign Secretary, now decided on a direct approach to both countries. On the one hand he was anxious to maintain Britain's dominant position in Lisbon and to avoid interference in Portuguese affairs by the continental powers, alarmed by the radical Constitution of 1821. At the same time, calling "the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old" was not unconnected with the benefits that might accrue to Britain from trade with South

America; and here Brazil was of obvious importance. Early in 1825 Canning called Sir Charles Stuart (1) from his post as Ambassador at Paris, to head a mission to Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro.

On 15 March 1825 Sir Charles Stuart and his suite sailed from Spithead in H.M.S. *Wellesley* bound for Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro.

On board the *Wellesley* was an observant young midshipman -- 15-year-old William Rowlett. Luckily he was also an ardent family correspondent, and his letters to his mother give a lively picture of his stay in Lisbon which lasted some weeks while talks went on between Stuart and the King.

Letter I:

My dear Mother

We sailed from Spithead and I bid adieu to the shores of Old England for the first time. At about 5.30 sent the hands aloft to reef Top Sails. When John Adams was endeavouring to get into the Fore Top he fell on deck, a distance of 50 or 60 feet. In his fall he struck the galley funnel; he was taken to the sick bay but the spark of life had already fled. They sewed him up in his hammock and put him under the half deck with a Flag over him. He was a fine young man and a smart seaman. But accidents will happen in the best regulated families and Jack's time had come. I dined in the Cabin and thus missed the sight but I saw his body which was dreadfully mangled and the left side of his head beaten in.

(1). Sir Charles Stuart -- 1779-1845 --, son of General Sir Charles Stuart and grandson of the 3rd Earl of Bute, was among the most distinguished British diplomatists of his day. In 1808 he was Joint Chargé d'Affaires in Madrid. In 1810 he was made Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Portugal and, on Wellington's urging, appointed a member of the Regency. This no doubt led Canning to choose him as Envoy to Portugal and Brazil. In 1815-1816 he was British Minister at the Hague, and afterwards Ambassador to the French Court until 1830. In 1828 he was raised to the peerage as Lord Stuart de Rothesay. From 1841 until his death he was British Ambassador at St. Petersburg. He was made Conde de Machico and Marquês de Angra by Dom João VI.

The next morning, blowing fresh, close reefed the Top Sails; remembered John Adams and clung on like grim death. At 11.30 read the funeral service over the above mentioned unfortunate man and committed his body to the deep.

On the 25th saw land at about 5 o'clock a.m. laying North East by East; it proved to be the coast of Portugal. As the day dawned saw the land very clearly. We took on board a pilot, an old Portuguese of very singular and grotesque appearance. He was a man of about 5ft. 2in. high, thick set, with white hair, beard and whiskers. On his head he wore a woollen cap of divers colours. He had on a round jacket reaching to his thighs of a coarse cloth and the colour a sort of russet brown, his breeches were of the same colour and material. On his legs he wore a heavy sort of boots and gay stockings secured by garters in a peculiar manner being crossed about his legs in all directions. The amiable personage, to conclude the picture, was covered with dirt and filth of all descriptions from head to foot. This gallant Sea Officer, however, in spite of his shabby exterior, conducted us safely through rocks and quick sands (for such there are no doubt at the entrance of the Tagus though I saw nothing of them) until we arrived in the Tagus a little below the Packet Stairs (if you should be acquainted with that princely landing place). (2)

The Rock of Lisbon (3) and the entrance of the Tagus are exceedingly beautiful. It was formerly a custom (and I think still is) to make the English men of war heave to here, whilst they sent on board and enquired their names etc. and all other ships were obliged to anchor before proceeding to Lisbon. One Captain Elliott, some few years back, leaving Lisbon in a sloop of war, neglected this custom, upon which they fired at him, with great coolness he fired 2 or 3 of his main deck guns and knocked down one of the turrets of a fort which they have never taken the trouble to repair. Since this affair took place they have been very shy of firing at British Men of War.

(2). Presumably the Cais do Sodré. George Borrow, arriving in Lisbon in 1835, wrote, "we again anchored at a short distance from the Caesodré, or principal quay of Lisbon." *The Bible in Spain*.

(3). Cabo da Roca.

On the Saturday morning we saluted the Portuguese Flag and the British Admiral (4) and the Captains of the Fleet came on board to pay their respects to Sir Charles Stuart. The Admiral is as strange a genius as ever I have witnessed. At about 12 o'clock the Ambassador and suit disembarked. This morning I applied to go on leave on the old Lisbon side and was told that I could not go alone but that I must get the school-master to take care of me. I, of course, shall stay on board. How very ridiculous such an order is, and annoying to a man of my feelings and ideas

Letter II:

My dear Mother

Some time has elapsed since I wrote last during which time I have been living very quietly on board as the orders I mentioned in my last letter have been strictly enforced. But last Monday I made one of a very large and agreeable party. At about 6.30 we left the ship and landed at the Packet Stairs (of which should you desire a description on reading this I shall be happy to give you one).

We all mounted our steeds which were of various species, and presented a very ludicrous appearance. When mounted our numbers were (including servants and three donkey drivers, or Guides, to give them a higher title) nineteen, of which the following personages were the most distinguished. Lieutenants Delmer, Laws and Paget; Evans, our worthy Chaplain; Messrs. Birkett and White, in His Majesty's Navy; and Messrs Kenyon, Adams, and Daniel, all R.N.s of a less exalted rank.

Well, to proceed with my narration, we paced majestically through the streets of Lisbon until we arrived at the top of the hill on which the town stands, when we diverged into the open country. At this juncture we were joined by the Hon. Mr. Dundas (5) who was to make the trip in company with us. We journeyed on at an easy pace, as you may imagine considering how we were mounted, until we

(4). A British squadron, under Vice Admiral Lord Amelius Beauclerk, was stationed at Lisbon.

(5). Possibly the Hon. Richard Saunders Dundas (1802-61), son of the 2nd Viscount Melville. He ended his career as a Vice-Admiral and a KCB.

stopped for breakfast on some beef, bread and wine – the only grub we could obtain. After finishing our humble repast we sallied out in the hopes of obtaining a view of the Royal Palace where the King of Portugal resides (6). After mounting our Rosinantes we proceeded towards Cintra. The youngest Princess was walking in the gardens (7) and saw us but we were not so fortunate as to fall in with her. We eat some of the Royal oranges and I cut a stick, in short, considering where we were we made ourselves very much at home. We have since heard that the Queen and Princesses were much pleased with our visit.

Well, as I said, we pursued our journey towards Cintra and the only thing I remarked of any novelty on the road was a woman surveying the head of her child, to use a very delicate expression; a person with his eyes about him may see the same *novelty* fifty times a day in any street in Lisbon

Letter III:

My dear Mother

This being my birthday I think I cannot do better than address a few lines to you. Last night I had just come on board, with a party from bathing, when the first "Luff" sent down to say he was going to the Opera and if any of the young Gentlemen wished to go he should be happy to take them. A great number, you may suppose, accepted this invitation and I among the rest. We went on shore in two ships, and proceeded to the Opera House (8), hired two boxes and finding that the opera would not commence for some minutes we took a ramble and I returned with my companion at the beginning of the first act.

(6). The Palácio da Bemposta, originally built by Catherine of Braganza as her last residence. It was much damaged in the earthquake of 1755 and largely rebuilt. D. João VI moved there with his two elder daughters from Queluz soon after his return from Brazil, and died there in 1826.

(7). Of Queluz Palace where Queen Carlota Joaquina was living with her youngest daughter, the Infanta Anna Maria. It seems unlikely that the Queen, a die-hard Absolutist, would have welcomed a visit from the Royal Navy!

(8). The Teatro São Carlos built in 1792.

The House is spacious and handsome, quite similar to our English playhouses. The performance was by no means first rate and I was unable to learn the name or the plot of the piece. It was however a love tale with a little fighting introduced and between acts a very pretty ballet. The music was very good throughout. Could I have understood the language in which the performance was carried on, I should have enjoyed it much more. As it was I was pleased but no so much as at any English theatre I have been at. At about twelve the curtain fell and we made the best of our way on board amid heavy rain which however my cloak protected me from in a general measure.

Nothing particular occurred that I can remember on the Friday but on the Saturday we received an invitation to a Ball, and after a little consideration I agreed to go. We picked our way through the streets of Lisbon at the infinite peril of soiling our silk stockings etc. until we reached the Ambassador's house. (9)

We were ushered etc. and introduced according to due form. Lady à Court bears the remains of a very handsome woman, indeed she can still boast of a good deal of beauty and is elegant in her person and manners. Sir William is by no means fascinating in his appearance. He bears the marks of pride of which he has the character. There were many splendid dresses and a great profusion of orders and stars, a few pretty women and as many handsome men.

The Dancing was kept up with great spirit and the Music was excellent. I amused myself by lounging about the room and eating Ices which were handed round in great profusion and in spite of the heat were very good. Sir Charles Stuart was dressed in a superb Diplomatic Dress, he looked very well and his manner seemed to give pleasure to all. Lord M. Hill (10) sported a gay Uniform as Lt. Colonel of the Militia Regiment, and the gay Colonel Freemantle in the uniform of the Hussars seemed determined to captivate all the fair hearts. The Commander in Chief of the Portuguese Army is a very marked

(9). The British envoy was Sir William à Court. At this period British envoys chose their own embassies.

(10). Unidentified. Perhaps a son of the Marquess of Downshire.

personage (11). In his youth they say he was possessed of uncommon strength and could hold a bull by the horns. At about twelve we left and went on board to sleep; from this time until yesterday evening I have amused myself to the best of my ability, bathing and Jackass riding occasionally

Letter IV:

My dear Mother

In my last I told you of the intention the King of Portugal had of paying us a visit and now I shall inform you that this day week he put his royal design into execution and came on board with his three lovely daughters (12) and a massive suit of Courtiers and Nobles. On the Sunday evening we commenced operations and were all most constant day and night until the Wednesday afternoon. The Quarter Deck and Poop were filled all round with benches covered with a sort of red damask with a gold facing. On the poop were placed chairs and card tables for the Royal Party, and on the quarter mast a sofa. On the fore part of the poop was erected a platform and throne of crimson velvet and gold lace. The signal locker abaft and the hammock nettings on the Quarter Deck were also covered in choice plants in pots.

Round the Main Mast an orchestra was raised and the Mast bound with evergreens as high as the awning. All along the gangways on each side were sufficient tables laid with great taste and elegance with very beautiful plate and a sumptuous banquet spread on them. The guests had chairs and there were plates for upward of 200 people. In the centre between the tables was a passage for the servants in waiting; this was covered with a profusion of evergreens and flowers hanging in festoons.

(11). The Portuguese C-in-C was the King himself. Under him came the *Secretário de Estado dos Negócios da Guerra* who at this time was the *Conde de Barbacena*. He may be the character referred to by Rowlett.

(12). The *Infantas Isabel Maria* – Regent of Portugal for 2 years on her father's death –, *Maria da Assunção* and *Anna de Jesus Maria*, afterwards *Duchess of Loulé*.

On the booms were side boards with everything you could call for. There was a curtain formed by flags, and all before the fore mast was screened in for the men. And the Standards of England and Portugal covered the poop and quarter deck. In short there were lights wherever they could be placed and the whole effect was extremely brilliant. In the Captain's Cabin was a table laid with fine chairs for the Royal Party and the plate which was of gold was the most magnificent I have seen anywhere. The attendants in here were chiefly clad in Sir Charles Stuart's livery.

On His Majesty and the Princesses coming alongside the Captain and three senior lieutenants received them and conducted them up the ladder attended by two Mids of which I was one. And after saluting etc. the presentations were made. I had the honor of making my bow to His Majesty. Shortly after they signified their request that the dancing should commence. The Ball was consequently opened by Lord M. Hill and the dancing was continued with great spirit till past 12 when they went to supper. In the space between the dances many kissed the Royal Paws but I had no good opportunity of doing so.

Ices were also handed about and I continued to capture some, 6 or 7 I ait of them. At the Supper the Captain drank to the King and, on a rocket thing (being?) thrown up, the K. of P. then drank to his Cousin of England and on a similar signal the ships again saluted. The Sovereigns of Europe were then drunk and a third salute fired. The supper went off on the whole very well. After the supper the dancing was continued, and at the desire of the Princesses a reel was performed which ended rather badly, for one of our Mids who composed it was rather blurred and cut a great deal of supernumerary capers. His partner fainted and another of the ladies cast her shoe.

At about half past one the Royal Party retired after the same fashion as they came on board. We burnt blue lights at the yard arms and the other ships saluted. The rest of the Company speedily followed. Then there commenced a scene of disorder strangely different from that of the three or four hours previously. Mids, Warrant Officers and Men grubbing at the remains of the supper, some quite drunk and others very nearly so. At last the Captain and Officers succeeded in restoring order and sending People to their beds. Most unfortunately it was my mid-watch, at about 4 I stood-to. The next

morning all hands were employed in getting the ship ready for sea and in a few hours there was hardly a vestige remaining of the late decorations.

It was said that the King could not eat because the Nobleman the plate belonged to was obnoxious to him. When he eats he throws the bones over his shoulder, uses both hands, stuffs his Royal jaws as full as they will hold, and if you hand him a Plate of Cheese cut up for the Whole Company he empties it on his plate. This is indeed his favourite dish.

Major G. was highly honored by having the youngest Princess on his arm for more than a quarter of an hour. This, I understand, the King did not like. A Marine Officer also had the honor of handing another of them up the Poop Ladder. Sir Charles Stuart embarked yesterday afternoon. We weighed at 9 this morning. And now my dear Mother I must conclude this letter by writing myself ever your affectionate Son

William Rowlatt.

Sir Charles Stuart's mission was so far successful in that an agreement was reached which confirmed Brazilian independence while granting D. João the title of Emperor during his lifetime, D. Pedro remaining King of Brazil while his father was alive. The friendship between the two countries was also reaffirmed.

The treaty was signed in Rio de Janeiro on 29 August 1825, and reached Lisbon on 9 November. The original document with Stuart's signature on it may be seen in the museum of the Torre do Tombo in Lisbon.

History seems not to have recorded how many ices William Rowlatt managed to "capture" during his stay in Brazil.

(The Council is most grateful to Miss Mary Rowlatt for having brought these letters to the attention of the Society.)

