

POST SCRIPT TO THE EXCURSION

IN BECKFORD'S FOOTSTEPS TO ALCOBAÇA AND BATALHA (1)

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History speaks to us with two voices, the living truth and the later documents and if these are to harmonize great integrity is needed. William Beckford as we know, rode very loosely indeed in this respect and the search for truth has to be made through the tangles of his considerable literary imagination and talent, put in the main at the service of his own reputation. At the same time, there has been much writing up of his story at a later date.

Our late member, Mr. Boyd Alexander was the pioneer among the Beckford documents, making clear for modern readers the true story of this fascinating but some think repellent character who evoked in Portugal such affection and dislike in the Portuguese and British respectively. The present researchers limit themselves in this paper to a purely topographical aspect, a modest addition we hope, to the byways of Beckford-

(1) A journey undertaken at the suggestion of Susan Lowndes Marques, until recently Editor of the Anglo-Portuguese News, and compiled in collaboration with her. This research took place in 1969 so allowance must be made for some passage of time. Page numbers quoted refer to the 1835 edition of the Book.

iana, already so well explored. The facts about the original Journals and their editing must by now be well known but in order to avoid confusion for those not familiar with them, they are briefly as follows:

Italy with Sketches of Spain and Portugal — The Book as Talleyrand dubbed it in admiration — first appeared in its final form in 1834 and was compiled from the original *Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain*, edited by Mr. Alexander in 1955. The *Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaca and Batalha* appeared as another Book in 1835 and was taken from *Beckford's 1794 Journal* also edited by Mr. Boyd Alexander though few people nowadays read the Books as published in Beckford's old age, fascinating as these are from a literary standpoint. The Journals have superseded them.

We decided to follow in Beckford's footsteps to Alcobaca and Batalha exactly as described by him, to mark his topography as it survives in present day Portugal and to compare the Book with its Journal — the «slight notes» which Beckford says in a foreword served as the foundation on which his memory worked and which he expanded for publication forty one years later. To make this journey with the texts in hand is greatly to enhance the experience and we were able to follow the famous traveller step by step, identifying the places described, visualising the adventures which befell and the countryside passed through by the cavalcade. Very little topography appears in the Journal so Beckford in the Book must have relied almost entirely on memory for place names and scenery and a remarkable memory it proved to be. Not once did we fail to identify except in the strange case of the Bird-Queen's garden later destroyed by the French according to a note by Beckford on p. 226.

The *Excursion*, a little masterpiece, was written for entertainment and while we may accept and enjoy the picture of rural and ecclesiastical Portugal during the regency which terminated the reign of D. Maria I, we must also be aware of the suspect, even spurious elements in the account. This need not spoil

our pleasure in what can be called a delightful series of *genre* paintings of landscaped scenes populated by peasants, fantastics, abbots and monks engaged in gargantuan feasts or solemn services filling the great abbeys with colour, chant and incense, splendours which never failed to cast their spell on Beckford.

So, on a June morning in 1969, on the 3rd of the month — the same day on which Beckford left Lisbon in 1774 — we set out to compress the twelve day journey into a much shorter excursion of our own and to make, as it were, a modern map of it. It was, we noted, some thirty years short of two centuries later and we did not know how many of the footsteps we sought would have been obliterated by time, vandalism or modernity.

We started at the Quinta de S. José do Ribamar (p. 3) which Beckford rented on his second visit to Portugal and which still stands above Algés. From there the confused, noisy and tumultuous departure was made. There were mobs of cheering onlookers, horses and mules rearing and plunging, baggage carts, chaises and *dormeuses* backing and splashing into the Tagus whose waters lapped the shores of the quintas in those bygone days when gardens, orchards and pine groves stretched along the banks of Lisbon's river.

Beckford watched the scene with disdain «... a racket and hubbub on the shore that was perfectly distracting... one of my delicate English mares was trying to get through the crowd with a most engaging air of sentimental modesty...» There were prolonged shouts and *vivas* for the Prince Regent, the Marialvas and all their friends including the Englishman and the start was so delayed that it seemed as if another night would have to be spent at S. José.

It was an important occasion no doubt, but here the first contradiction between the Book and the Journal appears. The Book asserts that the *Excursion* was made in the company of two clerics, the Prior of the monastery of São Vicente in Lisbon,

ani mportant personage, and the more imposingly named but minor ecclesiastic, the Grand Prior of Aviz, the holder of a sinecure as a bastard member of the Marialva family. These two were to be the bearers of an important message from the Prince Regent to the Abbot of the Royal Monastery of St. Mary of Alcobaça — or so Beckford asserts. Not a word of this appears in the Journal which merely mentions the Grand Prior of Aviz as Beckford's companion on the journey (apart from his retainers Franchi and Dr. Ehrhart) while the Prior of São Vicente was to act as host at the houses of the Order where the travellers were to lodge on the way. Beckford's usual craving for grandeur seems to have infected his pen though the semi-official visit of a rich Protestant Englishman to the Abbeys of Alcobaça and Batalha should, as an unique event, have been sufficient to nourish his insatiable desire for self importance.

The day of our departure in 1969 was as hot as that of Beckford's in 1794. In spite of resolutions to live in the eighteenth century and ignore as far as possible modern encroachments on the Beckford scene, we were somewhat overpowered by the concrete city which Benfica, the first landmark, has become in recent years. In former times we had known it as a near village lined with villas and blue tiled houses behind their walls, colour-washed and flowery, enlivened only by the passing of an occasional and antiquated tram. Now, under the towering blocks of flats and in the roar of the traffic we sought confusedly and almost without hope the road described by Beckford as a «shady lane» (p. 9) leading to Luz, Lumiar and finally Tojal the objective of the first day. To our astonishment we found it still shady and countrified just off the thoroughfare from Lisbon to Benfica between house numbers 350 and 352. It could hardly have changed in two centuries.

At Luz (p. 9) Beckford found the church much damaged by the earthquake of 1755 and we found it in a like condition and from a like cause—the lesser but severe shaking of February 1969. On then towards Lumiar (the road leads from

the south eastern corner of the square of Luz) past fields still bordered with aloes and ready for the harvest. Here, beautiful walled quintas — suburban in the best sense — line the way. Beckford visited one belonging to his friend the Marquis of Anjeja (p. 9) a prominent politician of the time, and now belonging to the Duke of Palmela. As we strolled in gardens rich in tiles and hushed in shade as if in the gentle charm of a forgotten Portugal still redolent of Beckford's time, we echoed his words: «How often, contrasting my present situation with the horrid disturbed state of almost every part of the Continent did I bless the hour when my steps directed me to Portugal!»

The evening of the first day was to bring Beckford's party to Tojal where they were to be the guests of the Prior of S. Vicente at the Quinta da Abelheira (p. 10). In the afternoon they drove as we did through the hills and valleys which begin quite suddenly as Lisbon ends abruptly at Lumiar. Never, we thought had the wild flowers been so lovely crowding up to Lisbon's doorstep in a way that few European capitals can still enjoy. The late rains of that year and the sudden heat had brought them out in millions, strewn and splashed like an abstract design. Like Beckford we lingered to drink «at springs and fountains full of pastoral charm.»

But these charms are short lived and as you emerge from byways onto highways the atmosphere dissolves, modernity takes over and some encounter with it is inescapable. However, Tojal, lies across country on a minor road so that such interludes are short in this part of the journey. The village is dominated by the quinta and palace which at present, as in Beckford's time, belongs to the Patriarchate of Lisbon (2) (p. 16). Unlike Beckford who dismisses it as unremarkable, we found much to enjoy including the marble lined tribune in the church where he describes

(2) It is now the Lisbon centre of the Boys' Town movement founded by the late Padre Américo and one of the most deserving charities in Portugal. Visitors are always welcome.

himself reflected in the high polish. The parterres of the Cardinal's garden remain as he saw them surrounded by pretty little domes built over the springs of water. In the square outside, the huge baroque fountain, a building in itself, provides the villagers with both water and surely the grandest village pump in Europe.

We peopled the scene with the slight foppish figure of the English millionaire feigning boredom, the charming, lazy old Grand Prior hardly summoning the energy to see sights which did not interest him in the least and lastly Franchi the singer, chatting with the enigmatic Dr. Ehrhart fresh it was said from the scaffold of Louis XVI. They were all obsessed with the happenings in France but here all was lulled and drowsy in the sun far from those dreadful convulsions which were soon to spread through Europe and reach Portugal at last. Beckford, in spite of certain liberal sympathies imagined that the Revolution could be kept at bay unable as we are to see it as an explosion with a fall-out still penetrating to the remotest corners. And by the great fountain we saw the shade of Beckford in his chaise ready to leave for Abelheira.

This quinta lies a short way beyond Tojal on the river Trancão and there we spread our picnic under the pepper trees and refreshed our memories of its history and long connections with our countrymen. After the suppression of the Religious Orders the quinta came into the possession of Dona Eugénia de Menezes who married William, Mr. Consul Smith, the illegitimate son of William IV (3). It thus passed into English hands and was inherited by Smith's son Major Astley Campbell owner of the Quinta do Pombal in Sintra which was later bought by the Cooks of Monserrate. Campbell dedicated himself to horticulture and model farming as well as carrying on the paper mill started by the Canons of St. Augustine from São Vicente in Lisbon whose

(3) V. letters on this subject written to Mrs. W.M.F. Stilwell.

Prior was Beckford's host during the Excursion. The mill and the quinta were later bought by the firm of William Graham who continued it until the business was sold. The English occupation of Abelheira brought it to perfection inside and out (4) and those were happy days. Now it belongs to an impersonal concern and the house is unoccupied and in disrepair. The gardens and grounds are a distressing sight for the water supply, the caretaker told us, had been diverted for the use of the mill. We could only read with sadness Beckford's descriptions of the orange groves and warm scented gardens and remember the days of beauty and loving care which we ourselves had known there. Beckford's party spent an idyllic day at Abelheira and could hardly tear themselves away. «To mass and then a-fishing and the evening of this day was like the morning — all chat and idleness».

On June 6th, sufficient resolution was summoned to proceed and they rumbled along towards the highway leading northwards. Still on the cross country road, they visited the Quinta Al Priate belonging to the old Duke of Lafões (5) who married the young and beautiful Henriqueta Marialva with much pomp after Beckford had left Portugal in dudgeon in 1787. We visited this chateau-like «frenchified» house as Beckford called it (p. 26) and found it without surprise abandoned and dilapidated. We were allowed to wander through the overgrown grounds and admire the fine pillared façade and massive elevations reminiscent indeed of French grandeur and unlike the usual Portuguese style running

(4) The last managers of Grahams in Lisbon, Mr and Mrs. Williams and Mr and Mrs. St. John Graham furnished it with great elegance and fostered the gardens with true English passion.

(5) A model of the chateau belonging to the 2nd Duke of Lafões and displaying its enormous original size before the fire which partially destroyed it, was kindly shown to the present writer by the family in Lisbon. The quinta is now known as the Quinta do Duque and is owned by Snr. Carlos Pereira (1969).

to decorated baroque or plain homeliness. The thickly creepered front overlooks a low box hedge maze also unusual in Portugal.

After lingering in this crumbling landmark we too made for the highway to the north, fast even in Beckford's time since it was kept in good repair for the Queen to pass along on her way to the Caldas da Rainha to take the waters.

The next stop for the excursionists was to be Cadafais (p. 28), reached by a sharp turn left at Carregado where they were to be the guests of the same Augustinians, this time in a rustic grange. We sped thither in a few minutes but had to pass some hours in keen detective work so as not to miss a footfall of the famous traveller.

The house was described by Beckford as «a comfortable, antiquated mansion...cool and clean...» and set in scenery which would be immediately recognisable. After following a false clue to the one time Franciscan friary of Carnita, the only obvious religious house in the valley, we climbed hills and combed vales for a possible sighting of any building corresponding to Beckford's description. Running it to ground entailed later research among archives and family records as well as in local conversations and we came to the certain conclusion that the monastic grange was the property now belonging to the family of the Duke of Palmela and in fact called the Quinta da Granja (6). Unremarkable as a house it fits in perfectly in architecture and scenery with Beckford's pages about it. On the return journey he and his friends spent another two nights here. The first arrival was on June 6th and the second around the 13th, the rest of the journey intervening. The occasion of the feast day of Beckford's favourite St. Anthony seems to have impressed him as usual for he enlivens his adventures at Cadafais with an excursion to a Franciscan hermitage where a miracle was reputed to have taken place at the Holy Well.

(6) Now a restaurant run in the family.

We had to find this second landmark near Cadafais and it proved so elusive that we began to wonder if it were not a figment of Beckford's imagination as is probably the case with the Bird-Queen's garden. Once more we rose and sank through hill and valley surveying the countryside and enquiring of every passer-by who proved as usual to be a stranger in those parts. An ancient inhabitant with recollections of the ages of faith was what we needed and at that moment he miraculously hobbled into sight. We questioned him as to a place where St. Anthony had been venerated, a convent or chapel where pilgrimages were or had been held. We were extremely anxious to have no gaps in our story, not to be foiled in any search. He at once directed us to a hill top as Beckford described, where, hidden now among the trees which surround it, the convent undoubtedly stands (p. 181). Our quest was successful as proved to be the case with every landmark that Beckford mentions.

Our own excursion alas, is a tale of change and decay and this entrancing little hermitage is no exception. Privately owned but uninhabited it is little more than a ruin and worse than a ruin as will appear. The solitary caretaker let us in and we at once recognised the «low columned arcades and belfries...inclining to the ruinous (even then!) and bearing a strong resemblance in form and tint to the views I have seen of the semi-gothic chapels and cells at Jerusalem and Nazareth.» There too was St. Anthony presiding over a doorway curled and twisted into ringlets of lichen stone. But tragedy was again in store. We were taken to St. Anthony's well imposingly sheltered in a separate building. As well as being allegedly miraculous it was the life-blood of the hill top and of those who lived there. But the spring was not gushing, indeed was completely dry, its empty mouth mutely excusing the dried up garden with its yellowed plants and brown leaves crackling under foot. A modern artesian well, the caretaker explained, had been bored nearby, so altering the water supply that not even the miracles of St. Anthony could restore the situation.

Sadly we left mingling our lamentations with the tears of the caretaker, consoling ourselves again in Beckford's pages. For him the High Altar had streamed with light and thirty to forty brethren stood on the steps saluting the banner of the saint. Beckford was curiously touched by the country piety: «They filled the air with a volume of sound more intellectually harmonious than any which ever reached my ear from the artificial efforts of musicians and choristers.» In conversation with the Grand Prior of Aviz, who was ferocious about «the blood-stained monsters of France» Beckford agreed with him in condemning those who would destroy the happiness of faith.

From Cadafais to Alcobaça was a day's journey and a fatiguing one it must have been with its minor accidents in the deep ruts and with baggage upsets — about 45 miles in modern measurement, a long way with horses. On their arrival at the Royal Monastery (p. 34) the bells rang out and the whole community of Cistercians four hundred strong, lined up to meet them headed by the Lord Abbot, a prodigiously important personage.

The sumptuous proceedings thereafter, the visit to the kitchen, the banquets of lamprey and quail, the exotic desserts, the theatrical performance of the tragedy of Pedro and Inez were all written up with frequent recourse to memory and literary technique to form a picture designed to astonish and dazzle Beckford's readers. Practically none of it appears in the *Journal* so one has to make what one can of it. It is certainly not a very edifying representation of monastic life of the strict observance at Alcobaça but allowing for a most singular imagination one could suppose that the reception of a party of foreigners headed by a courtier would entail a special effort on the part of the monks to entertain worthily. It certainly entertains us as Beckford meant it to do.

After the magnificent proceedings gastronomic and religious which took place at Alcobaça, Batalha was a curious contrast. The journey was short and the party travelled at their ease, stopping at Aljubarrota where Beckford with a patriotic

fervour, shared it seems by no one else, beheld the field where the battle which secured Portugal's independence from Castile was fought and won. (p. 62) Shortly afterwards they reached the quiet vale, wooded and pastoral in which stood the memorial abbey. Those who go there now are confronted with a concrete desert closely skirted by a modern motorway a-roar with traffic from whence the gorgeous pile rises starkly and somehow diminished. Instead of seeing it emerge from wooded slopes you rush at once upon it dwarfed by the complex of cement and fly-overs which distract the attention inordinately. A sudden and inclusive view which presumably was the intention when the changes were made is no substitute for the gentle, anticipatory experience which was so uplifting. Some improvements were doubtless necessary, some clearances of squalor would have been understandable but this orgy of bulldozing in such a hallowed spot was surely a disaster of modernity, an immolation of atmosphere. It can only be hoped that there are plans for trees and gardens though municipal efforts in this direction are usually unsatisfying.

Beckford reached Batalha by moonlight (p. 65). The buttresses, pinnacles and fretted spires cast their long shadows of early night, lights glimmered in the windows and torches flared to guide them to the frontal. Beckford's imagination would have been keyed up for drama and romance. Their hosts were Dominican friars as poor and unworldly as the monks of Alcobaça were rich and powerful. The Lord Abbot himself had sent the travellers off with sumpter mules laden with baskets of pies, smoked sausages and other provisions against gastronomic hardship. The poor Dominicans were rather embarrassed; as they were when gauze covered beds, superb coverlets and silver bedroom appurtenances were unloaded and carried into the convent. «Poor souls», says Beckford commiseratingly, «they hardly knew what to do, say or be at, running about rebuking one another unable to reconcile this with monastic decorum». Supper that night was shared with at least some of the community

who asserted that such things had not been seen among them since a Royal Progress of king John V, fifty years earlier.

On this night sleep would not come to Beckford. Pensive and overwhelmed by the glories and associations of Batalha he seated himself at his window watching the reflection of the moonlight and listening to a nightingale in ecstasy. As his spirit became quiet and the night wore on he was roused suddenly by dreadful sounds of grief—a voice crying: «Judgment! Judgment! Woe to Portugal! Woe, Woe!»

Appalled, he beheld a tall, majestic, deadly pale old man appearing like a spectre from the thicket, moving onwards with a glassy gaze. Beckford was profoundly disturbed, his blood, he says ran cold and he remained at the window watching for the dawn. Thus, Beckford's story of which nothing is noted in the *Journal*. At first light the Prior of Batalha appeared at his door apologising for the disturbance of the night. The spectral figure he explained, was no spirit from another world but a member of the community and a relative of the Duke of Aveiro whose merciless execution for his alleged complicity in the attempt on the life of King José was one of the most lamentable events of the reign of Queen Maria's father and his minister Pombal. The savage executions caused a wave of horror which was by no means spent. The man who filled the night with his lamentations had been thrown into a dungeon and finally released but his mind had been unhinged by the dreadful events which marred for long afterwards the political life of Portugal and some think drove the Queen to madness. The old man had lived in the convent for twenty-eight years convinced of the innocence of his relative and of the dire results which might be expected for the royal house and for the realm.

Did this incident really happen or did Beckford write up and embroider something basically true? It is impossible to be sure. It certainly added colour and drama to the Batalha scene. On the other hand such an inmate of the Abbey would have been well known and his existence easily checked by other travellers

or by the Portuguese themselves. Beckford's nocturnal vision certainly figures in the novel about him by Rebello da Silva but historical fiction cannot be trusted (7).

The splendours of architecture and history at Batalha are described in all the guide books but they cannot bring the great church to life as does Beckford in his *Book*. He makes it glow, fills it with sound as the voices peal among the spaces, the trebles of the young choristers reminding him of the cathedral services of his own land, bringing tears to his eyes. It is a gentle Beckford that we see at Batalha. The ceremonies are not pompous and glittering as at Alcobaça but reverent and sincere as became poor friars, touching all present with spiritual awe. As the usually cynical young man listened he shared in this and must have recollected the scene clearly as the sunset poured through the west door and the glorious rose-window, clothing them all in the hues of heaven. In a rhapsody of Batalha he writes:

«No tapestry however rich—no painting however vivid, could equal the gorgeousness of that tint, the splendour of the golden and ruby light which streamed forth from the long series of stained windows: it played flickering about in all directions, on pavement and on roof, casting over every object myriads of glowing mellow shades ever in undulating motion, like the reflections of branches swayed to and fro in the breeze. We all partook of these gorgeous tints—the white monastic garments, seemed as it were, embroidered with the brightest flowers of paradise, and our whole procession kept advancing invested with celestial colours.»

As we communed in the same though unpeopled scene, we felt that such a mediaeval vision—a cathedral as a confluence of stone, glass, sound and colour symbolising the whole man and his aspirations—must have quickened Beckford's poetic nerve and been transferred forthwith to English Fonthill.

(7) *Lagrimas e Thesouros* by Luiz A. Rebello da Silva.

We know in fact that this was so. The Excursion which so influenced Beckford's later thought and style culminated at Batalha that intricate marvel of stone lace and leaping arch, warm and glowing as the sunset turns its vaults to rainbows and its old walls to gold.

The way back — and we of course did not undertake this journey all in one day — was full of incident for the travellers but devoid of higher things — in fact Beckford was at his worst, lamentably suspect of falsifying facts in his own supposed interests. Mr. Alexander in his comments is certain that this is the case though the evidence against Beckford is circumstantial and rests on general improbability and contradictions in his writings. Positive proof is lacking. The visit to the Bird-Queen, for instance, has a very unlikely and fictional air and the whereabouts are not explained in the Book. Beckford mentions or imagines its fate at the hands of the French, stated as a fact in an appendix.

Yet, however much critics may question Beckford's accuracy — and his distortions and concealments need no proof — the puzzle remains nevertheless. He knew and had kept many friends in Portugal; his books were widely circulated while he was still alive; other travellers followed him and could easily uncover downright inventions, especially as he had many enemies. Our contribution to these issues is confined to the topographical aspect and here we found him perfectly reliable though one or two of his assertions were so difficult to verify that it would have been easy to suspect him of romancing.

On the ninth day, after the strange description of the Bird-Queen's garden, the party visited Nazaré with a stop for lunch at Pederneira (p. 167-168) the district capital and a large grange dependent on Alcobaça. We had not visited this place before nor even known of its existence, origin and history except from the pages of Beckford. Perched dramatically above Nazaré Pederneira has a bird's eye view of the unique fishing bay which however, passed unnoticed except for the scenery, by the eight-

eenth century travellers. Artists and sociologists study Nazaré from another angle today and first impressions are of romantic awe as the high prowed fishing boats plunge from the sands into the green breakers, their painted eyes peering over the walls of surf which they have to climb. A rare scene unremarked by Beckford and one which is passing as the fishermen seek calmer waters and their tough, brave race dies out.

The village of Pederneira (p. 146) — likened by Beckford to an oriental caravanserai, still with the same air — has two large churches interesting for their links with the monks of Alcobaça and their domains, a connection which few tourists perceive nowadays. One of the churches served as a chapel for the hospital which it greatly exceeded in size. The old gardener tending the cemetery pointed these things out and in case we ourselves should doubt the former ownership called our attention to the Cistercian Madonna of Mercy in the church sheltering the monks under her cloak. The church was no cemetery of faith we noted, for the fishermen still come to light candles and place offerings on the altars. Atheism is not for such a dangerous place as Nazaré.

The main hospice where Beckford had a magnificent banquet of fish on the Friday of his visit, lies in a shady square with one of the largest elm trees we had seen in Portugal. The Royal Arms over the entrance to the building indicate its status as a daughter house of the Royal Monastery of Alcobaça. Yet another church adjoins the square in this purely monkish estate containing nothing of interest except the two-colour seventeenth century tiles which line it throughout. Here there were no praying figures and the church lay silent and empty in the sunshine. Perhaps the Christ of the Calvary Way and the sheltering Madonna appeal more strongly to the men and women in constant confrontation with those perilous waves.

We found many relics of monastic times, huge bells, stone carvings and stairways, ruined arches and vaults. There was a sense of waste and pain. Trees tapped the shattered windows

where the white habited Bernardines had looked out from headland to misty headland of their dramatic coast. How the ghosts of history clamour! Once more we re-lived the eighteenth century scene when the monks, dedicated agriculturists, owned all these lands and brought prosperity and charity to the inhabitants. Beckford witnessed to the well clad happy peasantry who told him, he says, of their good overlords and general content, a contrast with the tenantry of the Bird-Queen.

The journey was nearly done and the party pushed on their homeward way through Alfezeirão to Caldas da Rainha. We followed on their trail where a chance remark of Beckford's led us to think that we had at last caught him out romancing. He writes of «a moorish castle standing proudly on an eminence» (p. 170) which, although we had often passed this way before had entirely escaped our notice nor was it to be seen now. From Beckford's description it should have been easily observable and once more we drove and plodded in all directions using binoculars to spy out even a heap of stone which might vindicate him. In the event his castle had to be literally unearthed. The parish priest to whom we finally appealed explained at once the reason for our fruitless search. The castle was now flattened and completely buried in thick undergrowth, the eminence not being very high, and if we wished he would send us with a guide. We accepted with pleasure and were forthwith escorted to the vestiges of the ruin, a few steps only from the village of Alfezeirão where the remains of the old walls, springs and cisterns could indeed be seen through the undergrowth.

At this moment another providential old man appeared, a local historian apparently, who enlightened us with much interesting information. The Moors he told us, had juggled with the waters (he gave a technical exposition of this) and as late as 1560 the sea washed the walls of the castle under which sixty sea-going vessels had been anchored in that year. Proof lay in documents to be consulted in Leiria. Moreover, if we wished to know what the fortress had looked like we should visit the

village hall where a drawing of it could be studied. This on inspection proved to be dated 1755, thirty nine years before Beckford described it. He was not then, painting pretty scenery suited to the landscape.

The last days of the Excursion are not so verifiable and it seems that Beckford has twisted the truth again for purposes of his own. The incident of the Bird-Queen, events at Alcobaça and others like them could well be, as Mr. Alexander has pointed out, elaborations of true experiences in various places collected and put together in literary form. But in the closing pages of the Book of the Excursion there is such a startling diversion from the Journal that suspicions of his veracity are bound to arise, loth as one may be to admit them in the case of well known and pleasing stories.

The party travelled southwards on the tenth day of the journey, June 12th and were entertained again at Cadafais after passing through Obidos and Cercal (p. 177) both correctly remembered and recorded in the Journal, Caldas having been dismissed as ugly and monotonous. At Carregado and Cadafais the fabrications begin. From the monastic grange the expedition to St. Anthony of the hill-top was made on the 13th and described earlier. Beckford now says that the two Priors were summoned to Queluz by the Prince Regent to give an account of their supposed mission to Alcobaça. Beckford himself rode across country to the royal Palace to which he surprisingly had *entrée*, there met Carlota Joaquina and had an audience of the Prince while the poor mad Queen cried out in her dementia. All this is graphically described and has become a well known feature of Beckford's supposed visit to Queluz. No one thought of questioning these facts.

But the events of this doubtful twelfth day are not mentioned in the Journal and Mr. Alexander is certain that they never happened. The Journal states that the Grand Prior of Aviz proceeded alone to Lisbon from Carregado leaving Beckford and his retainers to be the sole guests of the Prior of São Vicente

at Cadafais, ending at this point. Further, that since Beckford's official presentation had not taken place he could not have been received by the Prince and Princess Regent. These objections are so plausible that it would be difficult to counter them. But it can be said that in spite of other gaps and omissions in the Journal itself and of Beckford's manipulation of the text, there is no intrinsic reason apart from this, why the two Priors on their separate occasions should not have travelled to Queluz independently and met Beckford there after his cross country ride as he said they did. It is certainly a baffling incident.

With regard to his alleged audience, since his later official presentation took place without benefit of protocol, it is also possible that the easy going Prince simply did what he liked in his own house on the spur of the moment or through an oversight. It is also possible that Beckford was not actually admitted to the Palace on this doubtful twelfth day but had to wait outside imagining what might have been. Yet the date is certain, the descriptions vivid, the personalities named with precise details given. It would have been dangerous even years afterwards to publish tales about the Royal Family and courtiers which could so easily be disproved and Beckford accused of a particularly absurd form of lying. These aspects are very puzzling.

And so at Queluz, the Excursion ends with a doubt and a question. Beckford himself remains an enigma defying solutions and historical certainties but ever the Atlas of Enchanters and Vathek the Splendid.