ROBERT SOUTHEY, THE REV. HERBERT HILL AND THE BISHOP OF BEJA

(contributed by Mr. S. George West, O.B.E., M.A.)

The Reverend Herbert Hill, M.A., who was Chaplain to the British Factory at Lisbon from 1782 to 1808, is chiefly remembered for his connection with Robert Southey, the poet, who was his nephew. Hill paid for Southey's education at Westminster and Oxford, and it was with Hill that Southey stayed during his visit to Portugal in 1795-6 and again in 1800-1. He was a scholar of some parts and it was largely through his collection of Spanish and Portuguese books that Southey's interest was aroused in the literature and history of the Peninsula. A passage in the poet's *Dedication of the Author's Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society to the Memory of the Reverend Herbert Hill* records his services to British residents and visitors alike:

«What Englishman,
«Who in those peaceful days of Portugal
«Resorted thither, curious to observe
«Her cities, and the ways and works of men,
«But sought him, and from his abundant stores
«Of knowledge profited?»

An examination of manuscript letters preserved at the Évora Public Library shows that Hill was also in contact with the Portuguese scholars of his day, notably the Bishop of Beja.

D. Frei Manuel do Cenáculo (1724-1814), who took a doctor's degree in theology at Coimbra University in 1749, was appointed Bishop of Beja in 1770, becoming Archbishop of Évora in 1802. A savant of international repute and an expert in oriental languages, he is still honoured in the provinces of Alentejo and Algarve for his local philanthropy and patronage of learning. On his advice the Marquis of Pombal opened to public access the library of the «Mesa Censoria», from which the National Library of Lisbon took its origin; and he it was who helped to found the library of the Convento de Jesus, today that of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences. In the Bishop's Palace at Beja he established a library of some 9,000 volumes, and later founded two libraries at Évora. He maintained an epistolary correspondence with the most eminent Portuguese men of letters of his day and with many other persons of various categories. Among the 5,000 letters addressed to him, which are now preserved in the Public Library at Évora, there are a number from English, Irish and American residents in Portugal. Drafts of many of his replies are also preserved, but the calligraphy is crabbed and frequently indecipherable.

As might have been expected, there are to be found in the collection letters from the Catholic fathers at the Lisbon Colégio dos Inglesinhos and at the Lisbon Church of Corpo Santo. There is one letter, written from Dublin in 1774, from Father Michael Daly; another from Father Jerome (Jeronymo) Allen, who was professor of theology at the College from 1774-6 and from 1777-80, with reference to an «Appeal for a Chapel for the Catholic Seamen in Greenwich Hospital»; another, dated 20th October 1804, from Father William Fryer, who was President of the College from 1782 to 1805; and five letters, written between 28th February 1807 and 22nd March 1809, from Father James Buckley who was «reitor do collegio de S. Pedro e S. Paulo de missionários inglezes» from 1806 to 1819.

Correspondence with laymen includes letters from the Hon. Robert Walpole, British Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Portugal, dated «Lisboa, Santa Martha, 26 de Abril de 1776»; from Hugh Beatty, Lagos, 3rd December 1780; from Thomas Bradley, Lisbon, 1782; and from William Stephens, the founder of the glass-factory at Marinha Grande, dated from Lisbon, 11th September 1792.

From the Rev. Herbert Hill there are eight holograph letters, all written in Portuguese, dating from 1st August 1791 to 5th April 1801 (1). The first four (2) relate to a collated edition of manuscript versions of the Septuagint, which was being undertaken by Dr. Robert Holmes at the request of the University of Oxford. Holmes sought the aid of Hill in ascertaining whether any manuscript versions existed in Portugal, and Hill forwarded the inquiry to the Bishop of Beja, «as I know of no other Person more capable of giving me this information about the MSS.» The Bishop replied to Hill, in Portuguese, from Sines on 1st October 1791, and to Holmes, in Latin, from Beja on 1st January 1792, (3) that the library of the Convento da Cartuxa at Evora was the only one in the kingdom where he had found MSS. of this kind.

The fifth letter from Hill, dated 13th November 1792, (4) covered a prospectus of Murphy's *Plans, elevations, sections and views of the church at Batalha*, which was issued, rather surprisingly, in parts, publication being completed only in 1795. Hill was stricken with fever at the beginning of 1793, and on the advice of his doctors returned to England to recuperate. But we find him writing again from Lisbon on 25th October 1793 (5), explaining to Cenáculo the reason for his long silence and sending by his friend, Father Gregorio, the second part of the «*Estampas de Batalha*.» «This work», he concludes, «is proceeding very slowly, but the delay does not diminish the merit of the performance — which you will find worthy of the original which it represents.»

The seventh letter, which incidentally refers to the third and fourth parts of Murphy's monumental work, provides further evidence of Hill's activity in promoting cultural interchange a hundred and forty years before the British Council established a British Institute for that purpose in Lisbon (6). In response to an inquiry by the Bishop, Hill managed to secure a copy of the University of Cambridge's edition of the *Codex Bezae*, the Greek and Latin manuscript versions of the New Testament, — despite the fact that the edition was apparently limited to subscribers. Father Gregorio was entrusted with the mission of transporting this valuable work to Beja.

It is, however, Hill's last letter to the Bishop which is most interesting for its literary association:

(Translated)

«Lisbon, 5th April 1801

«Dear Sir,

«Mr. Southey, the Bearer of this letter and a nephew of «mine, is making an expedition to the Alentejo and Algarve — «those parts of Portugal which he has not yet visited — and, «as the sole object of his Travels is to extend his education, I «have strongly recommended him not to fail to meet and speak «with the venerable Bishop of Beja; for the purpose as much of «informing himself of the things which are worthy to be seen «in that neighbourhood as of sending me news of Yourself.

«I am, with the greatest respect,
«your most grateful Servant
Herb. Hill» (7)

Southey's second visit to Portugal dates from 1st May 1800 to June 1801. In March he and his wife Edith, with a few friends, went on a journey of some 350 miles to Coimbra and back, visiting Alcobaça, Batalha and Pombal on the way. Scarcely were they back in the house which Hill had taken for them in Lisbon, when the poet, together with a British resident, Mr. Waterhouse, set out on an even longer tour of the Alentejo and Algarve, and this at the moment when his uncle was packing his books and otherwise preparing for probable expulsion before the threat of invasion. «The critical hour of Portugal is «probably arrived. No alarm has been so general; they have «sent for transports to secure us a speedy retreat; nor is it «impossible that all idlers may be requested to remove before «the hurry and crowd of a general departure.» (8) It is, perhaps, characteristic of national imperturbability that, having written these words to Coleridge on 28th March 1801, Southey should have deliberately embarked on an expedition which would cut him off for nearly a month from contact with Lisbon and the outside world.

Their route appears to have been from Cacilhas, where — the price of mules being too high — they hired donkeys, through Azeitão to Setubal; thence to Alcácer do Sal by boat, then by mules to Monte de Moneros and Évora. «From Évora we took «burros to Beja, — a day and a half; we slept at Villa Ruina: «from Viana to that little town is a lovely track of country, «and, except that little island of cultivation, we have seen «nothing but charrecas *(sic)* till we reached Tavira.» (9)

Southey duly presented his uncle's letter of introduction, «the bishop gave us cheese and incomparable wine, and a letter «to Father John of the Palm at Castro: to Castro a day's jour- «ney: on the road there was a monumental cross, where a man «had been eaten by the wolves. John of the Palm is a very «blackguard priest, but he was useful. We had a curious party «there of his friends, drinking wine with us in the room, or rather between the four walls where we were pounded, not «housed, for the night; a deputy judge, with a great sword, old «as the Portuguese monarchy, smoking, and handing round his «cigar out of his mouth to the rest of the company; our muleteer, «that was to be, hand in glove with the priest and the magis- «trate; and another pot companion.»

Southey's appreciation of the Bishop's hospitality found expression in the formal letter of thanks which he wrote before resuming his journey. As this is possibly the only surviving letter which the poet wrote in Portuguese, it is here reproduced in the original language:

«A Sua Excellencia O Bispo de Beja, Q. G. D. M. A.

«Muito excellente Senhor, Não podemos certamente deixar «passar esta occasião; para exprimir á sua Excelléncia, quanto «sentemos os favores recebidos em Beja, tambem a grande van- «tagem, que achamos da sua recommendação, tendo sido muito «bem servido hoje; e o Snr João da Palma nós tem procurado «bestas, e nós mostrado as curiosidades deste sítio. Outra mercé «ainda pedimos, isto he, que os erros na forma, e na linguagem «sejão escusados, esperando que Vossa Excellencia goze por mui- «tos annos todas as felicidades possibeis: Eu e meu amigo fi- «cando sempre

Seus criados obrigadissimos

«Castro. Abrile 11.1801 R. Southey.» (10).

On the following day Southey and Waterhouse adventured across the field of Ourique, thence over the mountains to Tavira «seven leagues, — in the bishop's language, — long lea-«gues, terrible leagues, — infinite leagues ..... At last the «sea appeared, and the Guadiana, and the frontier towns Aza-«monte and Castro Marini *(sic);* we descended, and entered the «garden, the Paradise of Algarve.» On 16th April, 1801, they reached Faro, where they were «hospitably and kindly receiv-ed» at the house of John Lemprière, the British Vice-Consul. Four days later they had ascended Mount Foia on asses and eaten roast fowl at Monchique. The return journey to Lisbon took nine days via Lagos, — where Southey was arrested by a guard of eight soldiers and a corporal, — Sagres and Cape St Vincent. «I and Waterhouse», he wrote to Charles Danvers on 6th May, 1801, «have accomplished our tour in Algarve. We «have seen the whole of that kingdom, and half the province of «Alentejo, a labour of 530 miles — 23 days, during which we «endured some hardships from the miserable state of the coun-«try, sometimes being able to procure neither bread nor wine, «and four times reduced to beg a night's lodging for want of «*estalagems*. In compensation we have seen much, and acquired «some knowledge.» (11).

In fact the impressions of the scenery, customs and people of Portugal which Southey acquired during this second visit undoubtedly coloured his future writings on Portuguese history. The memory of this expedition to the Alentejo and Algarve remained with him years later, and, indeed, the hospitality, of the Bishop of Beja cannot have been far distant from his thoughts in 1815, when he wrote

«And, as I once had journey'd to behold
Far off, Ourique's consecrated field,
Where Portugal, the faithful and the bold
Assumed the symbols of her sacred shield.» (12).

No further reference to Southey's visit to Beja appears to have been preserved in the Évora papers. But it is pleasant to think that a meeting between the Portuguese Maecenas of the time and the young poet who was to become the greatest English lusophile of the nineteenth century was contrived through the good offices of the Chaplain to the British Factory.

NOTES

(1) Cod. *cxxvii* 1-10

(2) *Id.*, Nos. 338 (1st August 1791)
340 (27th December 1791)
342 (19th March 1792)
344 (28th August 1792)

(3) Cod. *cxxviii* 2-11 Nos. 52 and 54

(4) Cod. *cxxvii* 1-10 No. 346

(5) *Id.*, No 352 (25th October 1793)

(6) *Id.*, No. 354 (19th May 1795)

(7) *Id.*, No. 347 (5th April 1801) The following is the text of the Portuguese original:

«Lisboa, o 5 de Abril de 1801

«Illm.º e Exm.º Senhor,

«O Snr. Southey, o Portador desta, e hum Sobrinho meu, vai fazer «huma jornada â Alentejo e Algarve — aquellas partes de Portugal, «que elle atè agora não vizitou — e, em quanto o unico objecto de suas «Viagens hè de se instruir, tenho lhe muito encommendado que não «deixe de vêr e fallar com o veneravel Bispo de Beja; tanto para que «se informe das cousas mais dignas de vêr daquella vizinhança, como «para que me mande algumas noticias de V. Ex.ª —

«Sou de V. Ex.ª
«o muito venerador
«e o mais obrigado Servidor

Herb. Hill.»

(8) *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. C. C. Southey (6 vols. London, 1849-50), vol. ii, p. 137.

(9) *Id.*, pp. 141-2 (Letter to Edith Southey, dated from Faro, 17th April, 1801).

(10) Cod. *cxxvii* 2-14 No. 11, fl. 20/21.

The following is a translation of the text of the Portuguese original given above:

«To His Excellency the Bishop of Beja, Whom God Preserve «for Many Years.

Castro, 11th April 1801

«Most Excellent Sir,

«We certainly cannot allow this occasion to pass without expressing «to you how sensible we are of the courtesies received in Beja, as also

«the great advantage which we have derived from your recommenda-«tion, having today been very well served; and Senhor John of the «Palm has procured mules for us, and shown us the curiosities of this «place.

«Another favour we still seek, and that is that the errors in cons-«truction and in language may be forgiven.

«Hoping that Your Excellency may enjoy for many years all «possible happiness, I and my friend remaining always

«Your most grateful servants,

R. Southey.»

([11]) *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. J. W. Warter (4 vols. London, 1856), vol. i, pp. 154-5.

([12]) *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo*, Part I, st. 7.

AUTHORITIES CONSULTED

W. Haller, *The Early Life of Robert Southey 1774-1803*, New York, 1917.

J. Simmons, *Southey*, London, 1945.