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THE BRITISH FREE SCHOOL IN LISBON

Part II

(Contributed by Mrs. M. S. Jayne)

Readers of the earlier history of this school, which was published in the last report, will remember that after several removals and a final and more than usually unsatisfactory attempt to rent premises, the momentous decision was taken to buy and build.

At a meeting of the Committee on February 23rd, 1854, Mr. Roughton was accordingly authorized to negotiate the purchase of a piece of land near the church in the Rua Saraiva de Carvalho, or as it was then known, the Rua Direita de Santa Isabel. The price was not to exceed 500\$000, at the exchange of the day, roughly £ 100.

Far from declining in usefulness the school was now asked to meet the needs of a large influx of British workmen, who — says the Report for 1855 — had recently arrived to supplement the then scanty supply of skilled labour in the factories, and in the construction of the new roads and railways. These last may account for the presence in Portugal of Mr. Valentine, a Civil engineer, who was later of great assistance in advising on the building of the school.

Many of the workmen brought their families with them, or married after they had been some time in Portugal. Applications for admission to the school increased for which credit

must also be given to the master, Mr. Hardman, «who diligently employed himself in seeking out and investigating the suitability of candidates».

At length the ground was bought for the sum of 450\$000 and a contract made for the building to be erected at a cost of 4.000\$000 about £ 800. The proposal met with immediate and generous sympathy. When it was decided to raise a loan at 4 % Mr. Carruthers, a leading merchant, offered to advance the whole sum of 4.000\$000. Another gentleman Mr. Hancock signified his readiness to devote to the building fund the proceeds of the fees for letters carried by the ships for which he acted as agent. (I have been unable to find out the exact meaning of this but «Per S. S. — » occurs frequently on old letters. Possibly this was a safer means of conveyance for which the shipping companies were allowed to make an extra charge over and above Government stamps.) Mr. Hancock's offer, which was conveyed by Mr. Creswell, was gratefully accepted.

The next point to be considered was security of tenure. Accordingly a letter was addressed by the Committee to Sir Richard Pakenham, H. B. M's Minister, asking his intervention to obtain from the British Government permission to appoint the Consul, Mr. William Smith and the Chaplain Mr. Prior to be holders of the title deeds, and further that their successors in these offices should be their legal successors to the property, thus obviating difficulties which might arise with the executors of private persons. It was confidently added that no one could doubt that all future Consuls and Chaplains would be as ready as Mr. Smith and Mr. Prior to take over these offices.

Meanwhile Mr. Valentine was busy with the plans and estimates, and was keeping an eye on the building as it progressed, a very valuable service in the absence of an architect.

Unfortunately at this juncture a misunderstanding seems to have arisen between Mr. Carruthers and the Committee. As has already been related he had offered to take up the whole of the loan of 4.000\$000. No conditions appear to have been

attached to the original offer, or they had not been clearly stated. Now, he informed the Committee that he wished the income arising from the 4 % interest to be paid towards the maintenance of two other schools which he had founded, one at Cabo Ruivo and the other at Camerote. This plan the Committee at once declared to be «highly objectionable», not from any jealousy of possible competition but, as they quite frankly state, to default in paying interest to Mr. Carruthers was one thing, and to charitable institutions quite another, and this might very well happen either by a falling off of subscriptions or «some incident having involved them in a collision with the authorities of this country».

This last was an ever present contingency as the Portuguese and British Catholic clergy kept a perpetual watch on any symptoms of proselytizing activity. Should such a charge be capable of substantiation, the school would almost certainly have been closed. In the Rules of the School, N.º 23 states: «That all children admitted into the Institution shall attend Divine Service every Sabbath when practicable at the British Protestant Church, and that the religious instruction be in conformity with the precepts and doctrines of the Church of England».

Rules 24 lays down that the above Rule is to be printed upon the form of application for admission into the School and that the Committee do not admit any child into the School until assured that the aforesaid Rule has been fully explained to the parents or friends of the candidates for admission.

In spite of this very just and sensible provision there is more than one entry in the minute books to the effect that a child has been sent away because it was discovered that it had been baptised a Catholic and the mother or father had withheld the fact.

Public education in Portugal of the '50's had not made any great attempt to keep abreast of the general European standard, so the British school must have offered a very serious temptation to poor parents to whom it opened the prospect of a sound education for their children in healthy surroundings,

and a mastery of the commercial language most in demand. The committee give no sign of having been more liberal minded than their times but they were far too shrewd and prudent to allow zeal to outrun judgement. Finally Rule 29 was added which provided that every child must bring a certificate of baptism. This often presented difficulties to people like engineers who trekked from country to country without a settled home and did little to strengthen rules 23 and 24, but it helps to show a genuine endeavour on the part of the School Committee to meet the charge of trespass which was sometimes levelled at them by the uninformed.

At the General Meeting of 1855 the building was sufficiently advanced for the proposal to be put forward that a stone tablet should be placed in a conspicuous position on the wall of the schoolroom bearing the following inscription:

«British Free School»

«Supported by Voluntary Contributions»

«Established in 1837, principally through the exertions of Mess^{rs} Edward Potter, John Cassels, and George Ashworth, who were at that time British Residents in Lisbon.»

«In 1855 — 56 this School-House was built by the following subscriptions, viz:»

To the above were to be added the names and amounts subscribed according to the space available for the purpose.

Mr. Potter who was then living in England wrote protesting that his name should more properly have been placed last as he had had less to do with starting the school than either of the other gentlemen. His account is not without interest:

«To your question about a *Lady* having *first* suggested the idea of the school», he wrote to Mr. Knowles, the Hon: Secretary, «Mr. Ashworth nor myself can give any other answer than that we have never heard of it before. The history of the School's commencement is as follows: i. e. so far as we know,

the idea first arose in the mind of Mr. Cassels, who suggested it to Mr. Ashworth: this what Mr. Ashworth tells me he well remembers. One Sunday they accompanied me and my departed wife on our way home from Church, and I mentioned to them that we had frequently lamented the want of a school for Poor Protestant Children. Mr. Cassels' countenance at once brightened up and he replied that he and Mr. Ashworth had also been discussing the subject. He asked me if I would join with them in attempting to establish such a school. I replied that they might reckon on it. In a day or two they came to me and said it was determined on... You know the rest».

Various attempts had been made to come to a satisfactory arrangement whereby poor British children in Porto could attend the school but the difficulties proved insurmountable. At the General Meeting of March 31st 1856 the Committee announced that they were gratified to learn that Porto was making efforts to start an analogous establishment but added that this in no way closed the Lisbon school to children sent from Porto.

In July of the same year there was a serious epidemic of cholera and two of the day scholars died «at their father's residence at the British Naval Hospital». It was therefore decided to close the school earlier than usual and to hold the end of term examinations at the beginning of the next term. Mr. Hardman would meanwhile move into the new schoolhouse.

The news that the School was really going to leave his house produced a letter from Senhor Lemos, the proprietor of Rua de Buenos Ayres 5 complaining bitterly of the «estragos extraordinários que os Escolares tem feito na propriedade, como é bem fácil de se ver (he continues) porque a casa estava muito bem arranjada segundo o gosto de uma briosa família inglesa que a tinha habitada». The damage he complains of seems to have been mainly due to his own prolonged neglect of the roof, but rather than incur an interminable wrangle the Committee agreed to meet him in the matter.

Perhaps on account of the cholera, which may have made the date of reassembling the school uncertain, there does not seem to have been any formal opening of the new Schoolhouse,

but from an allusion in the minutes of a meeting held in the following year it appears that the school reopened in the new building in October 1856.

In the new house the girls were to have a playground. In a letter from Mr. Knowles to Mr. Creswell the former says that the builder has been instructed to pull down a house situated between the new school and the Chaplain's house, and asking that Mr. Creswell should send him the title deeds in his possession giving the exact limits of the Jews' burial ground, etc.

The examinations, postponed from the summer term, were finally held in December. To mark the occasion and to recall the part played by H. M.'s Navy in the original design of a school, an invitation to be present was sent to the Captains and Chaplains «of the Ships of War in the Tagus», to be present. It will be recalled that the British Fleet was still based on Lisbon during the winter, and at that time H. M.'s Ships «Caesar», «Sans Pareil», «Centurion», «Colossus», and «Exmouth» were all in the river. A report and invitation were also sent to the Duke of Wellington, more, one supposes, in the hopes of engaging His Grace's interest than from any hope of his attendance. There is nothing to show how many of the Captains and Chaplains accepted the invitation but the response was sufficiently encouraging to move Mr. Knowles to record his advice that this practice should be continued. Thirty one children, of whom eleven boys and sixteen girls were boarders, performed to the best of their ability under the light of the newly installed «gaz».

A note that one of the older girls, with an excellent record, Charlotte Guillame, had obtained a situation in the house of Mr. Porteous, the American Consul in Porto, adds that she was sent there by steamer, still the easiest and probably cheapest means of transit between the two cities.

The constant loyalty of the British Community in Portugal to the House of Bragança was once more manifested in a holiday granted to the school on the occasion of the marriage of the King D. Pedro to the Princess Estaphania of Hohenzollern, which terminated so soon and so tragically. It

was during D. Pedro's short reign that the British had the opportunity of celebrating a «loyal occasion» in which they took a more personal part. In spite of the close friendship between the two countries, now increased by the marriage of two Queens to two Saxe-Coburg Princes, there had been few royal visits to Portugal. The last had been the Dowager Queen Adelaide who had called at Lisbon on her way to Malta in 1839 when she had been one of the earliest contributors to the Free School. Now it was the turn of the heir to the Throne, best known to most of us as Edward the 7th. The visit was an official one and an hour or two had with difficulty to be found in the crowded three days for a visit to the School.

The dispatches of the British Minister, Mr. Howard, are not accessible, but something may be learned from the School Report for 1859 in which the Managing Committee «have the pleasing duty of recording an event which must ever be held in grateful remembrance by all well-wishers of this Institution; they allude to the visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to the British Free School in June last, during his short stay in this country».

The Prince had hurriedly inspected the Refectory, Dormitories and other departments and had cast an eye on the children, who had gazed round-eyed at a pink-cheek boy looking very little larger or older than themselves. They performed the bows and curtsies they had been drilled in while he muttered something and was respectfully hustled into a waiting carriage with out-riders by Mr. Howard; and so passed out of sight. It was something, they were told, that they must remember all their lives.

The Report says that the Prince expressed his deep satisfaction by bestowing the «munificent donation of Forty Pounds». As a matter of fact Mr. Howard was furnished with £ 100 to divide among the British Institutions, out of which he allotted £ 40 to the School.

Mr. Knowles, the Hon-Secretary, had discovered at the last minute that the Visitor's Book was in no fit state to receive the Royal signature and so had hastily procured a new one in which H. R. H's signature was the first. Not long afterwards

a motion was proposed and carried that any gentleman acting as Secretary to the Committee might retain in his possession any letters or documents of such a nature as he might consider inadvisable for public access. Both Visitor's Books have disappeared from the School archives and it is to be feared that some of the secretaries have given this rule a somewhat wide reading.

The first Mrs. Hardmann had been buried and her successor installed with a hardly perceptible interval. The latter seems to have been all her friends predicted and under their guidance the school slid peacefully into one of those periods of peace and modest prosperity which produces little to record. The school had benefitted by the increased experience of succeeding Committees and the wisdom and vigilance of such men as Mr. Knowles and Mr. Thomas Creswell, who for years gave their time and energies to its successful conduct.

A gap now occurs in the correspondence with the Committee and it is from the Minute Book that one learns of two important changes which came about in 1873. The first was the resignation of Mr. and Mrs. Hardmann. An allusion to «a heavy affliction» suggests that they felt in need of a change of scene and work, and the Committee seems to have agreed to this while expressing «their very deep sense of the conscientious manner in which he has always discharged his duty and of the high moral character which he has always held in Lisbon during a residence of 17 years». In another place they speak of the excellent influence both he and his wife have exercised over the children.

Shortly afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Pitman were installed and it was not long before the difficulties attendant on a change of government ensued. One of the parents complained that his little girl had been too severely punished, and wrote an offensive letter to the Committee. Mr. Pitman on being questioned immediately sent in his resignation upon which the mother without withdrawing her charges asked that the child should be taken back and stated that she wished to send two others to the school. The Committee wisely decided that it was an uneducated person's way of climbing down and the incident was closed.

On Mr. Hardman's retirement it was decided that «the Church Clerkship and the under-taking of funerals by the Schoolmaster will terminate». This strange arrangement had been a source of perpetual discussion, and the office of Clerk at any rate had become a sinecure with the instalment of a voluntary choir.

The title of «Free» as applied to the school had long ceased to have much meaning. The large majority of the children, if not all, now belonged to a class whose parents could and did pay for their education, and at the General Meeting of March 23rd 1874, it was proposed by Mr. MacNicoll and seconded by Mr. J. Clief: «That henceforward the School be named «The British Protestant School in connection with St. George's Chapel», but that nothing in this change of name shall interfere with the original design of the School. The motion was carried unanimously. Rule 20 providing the free admission of children holding the Consular certificate of British nationality, was to continue, but parents who desired to do so might contribute a monthly sum, in accordance with what the Committee considered they could afford. It is perhaps superfluous to record that the parents and the Committee were rarely in agreement on this point.

In February 1876 Mr. & Mrs. Pitman resigned on the score of overwork and left to take up another post at the Cape of Good Hope. They were succeeded by a Mr. and Mrs. Bruce who were recommended by the head of the Battersea Training College, and who exercised their functions for little more than year. In October 1878 the Committee called a special meeting to deal with the emergency arising out of the sudden death of Mr. Bruce. A Mr. Ansell, who had been residing for some time in Lisbon, agreed to carry on till a new master could be engaged. Mr. Clift, a Devonshire man, was chosen, in spite of Mr. Ansell's desire to stay on, as his intended wife, Miss Rooney, had expressed her willingness to come to Lisbon. After some hesitation the Committee, who liked Mr. Ansell, came to the conclusion that he lacked sufficient technical experience, and it was decided to appoint Mr. Clift.

Poor Mrs. Bruce had been left almost destitute by her husband's sudden death and to help her it was arranged that

she should remain at the school as Matron. She, however, preferred to return to England with her three small children.

On the 3rd or March 1879 Mr. Clift arrived accompanied by his wife and daughter. One of the first things he was asked to do was to draw up a prospectus to be sent to England in the hope of inducing parents there to send their children to the school. Though nothing seems to have come of it the suggestion is worth recording. The school was insensibly changing in type and under Mr. Clift's able guidance families of good standing were now sending their children, bridging the gap till they were old enough to go to boarding schools in England. In succeeding minutes of meetings there are invariably references to the improvement in the children and the valuable help Mr. Clift received from his wife who acted as Matron, and his daughter who assisted him in teaching. Games were beginning to be recognized. Mr. Clift asked that the boys should have bowls and nine pins, while the Ladies committee went one better and requested that something called «fly-pole», a see-saw and a swing should be installed for the girls. The Gentlemen hesitated before these proposals: «With regard to the several *Games*, (they record the opinion) the Committee consider the Fly-Pole and Swing rather dangerous, accidents have already happened with the former, but they are willing that the See-Saw and Ninepins should be put up». Providing the cost did not exceed 22\$00 (about £ 5).

The Finances of the School had never ceased to be a matter of anxious concern to succeeding Committees. There was always a deficit in spite of the much larger number of paying pupils: The Forty-Ninth Annual Report (1886) admonishes the parents in no uncertain terms: ...«they ought to feel a pride in straining every nerve to pay the *very highest* rate of charges at the School». Unfortunately there was no sign that the parents felt anything of the kind.

1887 is marked in the memories of those who can go back so far as the apex of the Victorian Age in which loyalty and rectitude mingled with a kind of simple cheerfulness in the lives of ordinary folk. All over the Empire, and equally in scattered communities outside it, the men and women with their many children, as Dickens and Punch have preserved

them, joined in heartfelt rejoicing with the great sovereign who was so very much like them. An account of the doings in Lisbon may be quoted in full.

«The Jubilee of Queen Victoria — whom may God long preserve—was duly and loyally observed at the School. In addition Mrs. Petre (wife of the then British Minister) very kindly invited the School to a special Jubilee Party at the British Legation. The teachers and children were most graciously received by Mr. and Mrs. Petre, and by their Sons, and a most enjoyable afternoon, which will linger long in their memories, was spent in the Legation Gardens, where games and amusements of great variety had been prepared beforehand. The sports, very kindly directed by Mr. Algernon Petre, were engaged in with great heartiness and after doing thorough justice to an ample tea, the children, first thanking their kindly entertainers and singing «God Save The Queen», returned to the Institution».

«A few days later G. Brackenbury Esq. H. M. Consul, President of the School, most kindly invited the same party to spend a long Summer day at his pretty country house, the Quintinha, at Cintra. He kindly arranged vehicles for their conveyance to and from the trains, and also provided all with the necessary tickets. On their arrival the party were met by Mr. Mrs. and Miss Brackenbury and by some friends whom they had invited to assist in the entertainment of the guests, and after a short rest, proceeded to the beautiful gardens of Monserrate, a special permission having been obtained by Mr. Brackenbury enabling the party to lunch in the grounds. Here they found a bountiful *al fresco* repast prepared for them and the results soon showed how heartily it was appreciated by appetites sharpened by the invigorating mountain air, and here too the *kindly host*, who never appears to better advantage, than when presiding with genial courtesy at his own hospitable board, proposed the Jubilee Toast, which was responded to with the heartiest loyalty by all present. Mrs. and Miss Brackenbury also did their utmost to make the occasion a pleasant one, and finally, after a long day spent in the exploration of that lovely scenery, and after partaking of more refreshment in the shape of «high-tea», the visitors returned by train to Lisbon and the realities of everyday life».

The late Miss Lloyd whose death was recently recorded in the A. P. N. was perhaps one of the surviving children who «participated» in the simple pleasures of that long lost summer day.

Under Mr. Clift's guidance the children's dramatic and musical gifts were given scope to develop. There is a marked advance in the programmes of the Christmas Prize-giving Entertainment. In addition there was a good deal of amateur talent in the community at large. It is therefore not surprising that the demand for «a Recreation Room or Parish Hall» should have been voiced at a Committee Meeting as early as 1893. The suggestion was made to erect it on part of the boy's playground and the members of the Committee were unanimously in favour of bringing the matter up at the next General Meeting. Apparently there was less response than had been hoped and the project was not carried out till 14 years later.

In 1896 Mr. Clift resigned the post of Master. It is a tribute to his able conduct of the school that there were no fewer than 20 candidates for the position. Out of these Mr. Frank Piper was chosen who remained in charge of the school till it was finally closed.

Many difficulties both old and new increased with the turn of the century. With easier access to England the more well-to-do began to send their children to the many new preparatory schools which were opening everywhere, while fewer British of the artisan class were coming to Portugal. There had always been reluctance to accept Portuguese children from the fear of religious complications and the feeling that while they were already provided for, the intention of the subscribers was primarily to assist their own countrymen. Numbers fell off and the cost of living went up. Finally the school suffered a severe loss in the death of Canon Pope who had been a vigilant and constant friend for so many years. An attempt was made to carry on on the basis of allowing the master to run the school on his own responsibility but retaining the name and general character. This arrangement proving unsatisfactory the school was finally

closed in 1909 and the building converted to its present use as a hospital.

So ends this scanty record of eighty years faithful, if sometimes fumbling, endeavour, to give little children the great gift of Education in its widest sense.