

THE TRIUMPHAL ARCH RAISED BY THE BRITISH
COMMUNITY IN LISBON IN OCTOBER 1708
TO CELEBRATE THE WEDDING OF KING JOHN V
OF PORTUGAL AND THE ARCH-DUCHESS MARIANA
OF AUSTRIA.

by

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A detailed description of the arch in all its gilded splendour with a wealth of allegorical figures and Latin inscriptions was published in Portuguese soon after the event (1). The donation of the arch was an early Lisbon Factory undertaking and the published description is typical of the kind of work favoured by Portuguese Academicians. They were soon to be grouped together by the foundation of the Royal Academy of History in 1720. No cost was spared to produce work glorifying the Royal House, and the Portuguese church and nation. It is significant that even such a work as this required the licence of the Holy Office for publication, a second licence to print, and a third — given by a board of four, headed by the Duke of Cadaval — to enable the work to be sold to the public, provided that the proper taxes were paid. The recommender of the work to

(1) *João V. Descrição do Arco Triunfal. Lisboa. 1708.*

the Holy Office was actually Antonio Gaetano de Sousa, later a famous Academician and historian of the Royal House: he may well have had a hand in the authorship. The works of the Academicians were plentiful and not without scholarship, but much subject to guidance from on high.

The wedding of the royal couple had already taken place by proxy in Vienna, so the triumphal arch formed part of the ensuing celebrations and principally of the procession for the State Entry of the king and queen into Lisbon to attend a solemn service in the cathedral. The queen had been landed by the Royal Navy on October 27 but the entry was delayed for some weeks because the elaborate coach, built specially for the occasion at a cost of 40,000 crowns, was not yet ready. There were seventeen arches in all, erected by various Lisbon institutions including the British, Dutch and German Factories, the Goldsmiths' guild and probably the Lisbon Senate, which perhaps had stimulated the generosity of the foreign communities by a directive. Certainly it did so twenty years later upon a similar occasion, that of the wedding of the heir to the Portuguese throne, the Prince of Brazil, to the daughter of King Philip V of Spain. The Factory staunchly replied that they were not vassals of Portugal, and could not be obliged either to erect an arch or to supply mules required for the procession, and the Dutch consul joined them in this protest. But they went on to say that they would be very glad to put up such an arch as a testimony of their joy. On the 1708 occasion the arch donated by the Germans was a very splendid affair, as was fitting to honour a German (Austrian) princess, but the British Arch, which cost five thousand crowns or more, was allotted the most favoured position.

It would be tedious to quote the whole description, but an excerpt can give an idea of the language and style and the main features can perhaps be summarised. The description begins: «The English Nation always lives up to its reputation on great occasions and does credit to its glory by splendour and profusion. It had desired therefore to continue its ancient

custom of honouring with a triumphal arch the Royal Entry of Queens into this famous metropolis and emporium of the world, and wishing to celebrate the entry of the two Portuguese sovereigns on their way to the cathedral church to render thanks to His Divine Majesty, they determined to construct an edifice of a magnificence appropriate to the occasion, to mark not only the royal wedding but the strength of the ancient alliance between Portugal and England; as the arch would have two façades, they decided to dedicate one side to the glories of Her Britannic Majesty, who contributed so largely to this triumphant occasion by affording the use of her ships to bring the queen royally in a splendid manner worthy of Britain to accomplish the desired union of the royal spouses; so once more her fleet assisted the felicity of this kingdom. Among the numerous and celebrated achievements of Her Britannic Majesty they chose to celebrate specially an act which will serve the eternal duration of the British Empire, the Union of the Kingdoms of England and Scotland, an enterprise many times attempted by her most illustrious predecessors, but only now achieved by her admirable prudence, irrefutable proof of the benevolence of her government and the applause of her people.

«For the erection of their arch the British were accorded the accustomed favoured spot, where the Pelourinho debouches onto the Terreiro do Paço, the place where in olden times the gate of the city was situated; because there is not much room, because there are only twenty eight feet there between two rows of tall houses, they were obliged, in order to preserve the right proportion and symmetry, to construct an arch in three tiers of different architectural styles; these were ornamented with allegorical figures, nearly all based on ancient models and illustrated by quotations from the most famous classical authors.

«To do justice to the liberal greatness of the nation the architect chosen for the arch was Carlos Gimac, a son of the valiant isle of Malta, a man of admirable talent; he had already displayed this by his admirable plan for the great firework display

in the Terreiro do Paço, and also by the publication of many poems his gifts as a first-rate poet and classical scholar and Latinist.

«The arch was 70 feet or 105 palms high, in two tiers, one of 24½ feet, the other of 16½ feet; the third tier consisted of a frontispiece fourteen feet high, surmounted by an equestrian statue of St. George, patron and protector of England and Portugal, rising a further fifteen feet.

«At ground level there were three arches, the middle one ten feet wide for coaches, and the two side arches for pedestrians four feet wide. The side facing the Pelourinho through which Their Majesties would pass on their return from the cathedral was dedicated to the union of the royal couple and had on it a green panel (the colour of Portugal) bordered with gold and supported by flying angels carrying a Latin inscription dedicated to the royal pair.» Two Ionic pillars supported the sides and above was a veranda supported by four pillars; the surrounds were decorated with festoons of flowers, especially red and white roses for the houses of York and Lancaster and with flying cherubs with their bows dedicated to Venus and Hymen. Two medallions of silver depicted King John I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster, the founders of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, and bore a suitable Latin inscription. Another medallion represented King Charles II and Queen Catherine of Braganza whose union prevented new wars with Spain. The tier above contained a veranda with three crowned female figures representing the House of Braganza with necklaces of medallions showing the genealogy of the royal family. Another winged figure showed the glory of Portugal with a globe in one hand and in the other a palm, while at her feet was a compass signifying the power of Portugal circling the world in fulfilment of the prophecy made on the field of Ourique, now to be long extended by the new royal marriage; the third female figure with an olive branch in her hand represented the future hopes of Portugal as renewed by the royal espousal. Further symbols glorified the royal pair

and above flew the Austrian eagle, who alone could gaze undazzled on the brilliant sun of Portugal. The climax of these heavily burdened allegorical figures were those of the king and queen driving in a chariot above the clouds with Hymen for their guide and a serpent and an eagle for their carriage horses. Both wore trailing royal gowns; the king held a general's baton and the queen a sceptre. They were assisted in their progress by a bevy of flying genii, images of truth and virtue, and by the insignia of the three orders of military knights of Portugal. The arms of the queen also figured largely, while the motto *ultra Guermantes et Indos* signified their eastern domains, and a figure holding a cornucopia was an emblem of the riches of the Portuguese conquests and of the treasures newly discovered in Brazil, all under the prudent and catholic government of the kings of Portugal.

The whole arch was surmounted by the statue of St. George on horseback trampling on the prostrate dragon.

The British side of the arch, facing the Terreiro do Paço, bore the arms of England in honour of the glorious queen who had lately achieved the union of England and Scotland so long sought in vain. Queen Anne had an equal escort of tutelary deities, the insignia of the garter paralleled those of the three Portuguese orders of knighthood, and the union of England and Scotland was recalled by a plenitude of roses and thistles. Britannia herself was represented as a majestic matron in a long royal gown with a sceptre in her hand, and also a rose and a thistle; by her side was a figure of a winged Mercury symbolising perpetual vigilance, having a purse in one hand and in the other a trident encircled by two serpents representing the maritime trade on which the kingdom's wealth depended; on her left a figure of Mars ready for war stood, sword in hand, and holding a shield, marking the warlike temper of the English nation. The name of Queen Anne was further signalled by the letter 'A' inscribed on a blue medallion circled with gilded laurels. Near by were the royal arms, the lion standing for the valour

and power of England, the unicorn for candour and sincerity, free from the venom of evil intentions in all affairs, public and private, at home or abroad, as symbolised by the motto, *VIRES NON VIRUS*, 'strength rather than guile'; meaning that England looked to the valour of her soldiers and generals, rather than to the wiles of cunning ministers. On a large medallion was Queen Anne herself, robed, throned and crowned, with England and Scotland kneeling at her feet with their emblems of the rose and the thistle. Supporting the queen were figures of Concord, Prudence, Minerva, Ceres and other allegorical figures. The naval glories, which Portugal shared with Britain, were represented by a Triton blowing a conch shell and by Victory seated on the prow of a ship. Another fresco depicted Queen Anne's navy, guided by Neptune and escorted by dolphins, with the favour of the winds escorting the royal couple into the Tagus, whose Naiads rose from their depths in festive greeting.

So much for the allegory. It was not entirely untrue. Portugal could indeed look forward to an age of gold and diamonds; while the British navy would indeed ensure its safe carriage, and the protection of Brazil from others. For the negotiations at Utrecht the wiles of cunning ministers were to prevail over the sincerity of Queen Anne, but Portugal and her overseas domains were yet to be preserved. It is true that Hymen and Venus reserved their smiles; the king was a timid boy still and the queen perhaps a little forbidding; it was some time before the plight of a king without an heir and the conscience of the queen brought them enough together to breed a daughter; but five sons followed and though it was never a close union, it was an enduring one. Years without war were at least to follow, and if the outward prosperity and royal splendours of Portugal were hollow, in so far as they depended on the growth and opulence of Brazil rather than on Portugal herself, and if the common people went short of bread and the charities of the Church, though very large, were no substitute for the Welfare State, there is no doubt that the Portuguese people approved. King,

nobles and people were united in preferring circuses to bread; of the former they had plenty in the splendid ceremonies of the Church, the glories of the new Patriarchate, and the king's programme of church building. Many of the *fidalgos* lived poorly enough in their homes in order to appear nobly in the street; the king himself was personally frugal in spite of his extravagance in all public ceremonies. He was certainly an autocrat but he undoubtedly represented the feelings of his people.

It is uncertain what the triumphal arch really looked like when the great day came on 22 December. The previous day had been marked by a tremendous thunderstorm and deluges of rain, which had proved a great set-back to the mammoth firework display. How far the gilt and plaster of the arch stood up to it we cannot know. But the king and his great coach, at last completed, successfully passed through it and no doubt the people rejoiced.

The Factory paid the bill for the arch without as far as is known any government aid. It was a prosperous body at this time consisting of about sixty principal members. In the previous thirty years trade was said to have increased by about two thirds. 1708 was actually a poor year in spite of the inflation caused by the war, but it was sandwiched between two good years, and for the next generation, and after the war ended (with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht) trade flourished. This was largely due to the growth of Brazil and to the development of the goldmines there which resulted in a continued increase of trade.