

**THE BRITISH  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF PORTUGAL**

**TWENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT  
AND REVIEW 1993**

**13, Rua da Arriaga,  
1200 LISBON**

Most Excellent Sir.

When once Your Lordship had sent that swaggering Junot scuttling off back to France after drawing his troops into your web on the fields of Vimeiro; when once Your Lordship had blown sly old Soult out of Oporto with a gale at his backside, forcing him to scurry off, clutching his breeches in his hand, all the way back to Castile; when once Your Lordship had said to that crosseyed villain Massena, "Stop right there, smart alec!", and, by boxing clever, showed him just how neatly stitched up he was, making him shamle off again and end up loafing around because he'd been given a bloody nose; when once Your Lordship had bounced Berrier out of Ciudad Rodrigo and sent that old sardine-head Phillipon blustering oafishly out of Badajoz, like somebody begging, "Just make out you haven't seen me", and getting the answer, "Mind you don't fall, Mary dear", and, last of all, when once, on the fields of Arapiles, crash-bangwallop, get out of that, Your Lordship had clipped the wings of that gloomy devil Marmont and forced him to tell the tale of his defeat in every last piffling detail; then it was, most excellent sir, that all of us, old Portuguese sweats that we are, declared, "This man's no mean general; he's down-to earth; he doesn't fool about nor let the grass grow under his feet; very wisely, he sometimes goes off on the attack and sometimes lies in wait; now the time has come when we can sleep soundly at night; we've tossed away the last shred of fear; for the enemy will show up on the afternoon of the umpteenth day of Never. So it only remains for us to thank Your Lordship for the visit you paid us, which we trust was no mere doctor's call nor just a stop to change horses; indeed we would point out that such hopes are no empty blather, borne away on the wind, but the straightforward wishes of faithful and thankful hearts, high up in which Your Lordship has so justly placed a throne of love and respect.

Your Lordship's faithful servants, etc.

The People of Vimeiro.

## TYPHOID FEVER: THE ROYAL SCOURGE OF 1861

In the autumn of 1861, there was a severe typhoid epidemic in Lisbon and by that time, the medical profession knew something of the infective and contagious nature of the disease. The Salmonella bacteria usually enters the body through the mouth, in contaminated food or drink and its presence in the faeces of ill and convalescent patients could pollute public water supplies, in the absence of proper treatment of sewage. Milk and food can become contaminated by flies carrying the organism and vegetables and shellfish cultivated with water containing the untreated sewage increase the hazard of catching the disease.

During the incubation period which averages 10-14 days, but may be shorter or longer, there are few or no symptoms. Persistent fever gradually develops over 7-10 days reaching a high of 104° and continuing another 10-14 days. During the second week of fever, when the typhoid bacilli are present in great numbers in the blood stream, a skin rash usually appears. This may last until the end of the fever but normally the spots fade away, leaving a brownish stain at the site. In favourable cases, about the beginning of the fourth week, the fever declines and there is a return to normal. With continued high fever the symptoms increase in intensity. Mental confusion and delirium appear, with jerking of the muscles and convulsions. By the end of the third week the patient appears prostrated and emaciated, the tongue is dry and brown, prominent. Death may result from toxemia, general debilitation or from one of the complications of the fever. The mortality rate varies widely and is influenced by the quality of nursing and medical care, the treatment formerly being entirely supportive until a specific drug became available in 1948.

On a journey to the Alentejo, the King Dom Pedro V<sup>th</sup> and two of his brothers, Dom Fernando age 15 and Dom Augusto age 14 were stricken with typhoid fever. There is no record of anyone else in their entourage or at Court contracting the disease at that time. It would seem likely that some contaminated food or beverage consumed by only these three Infantes was

the cause. Their other two brothers, Dom Luis, the heir to the Throne and Dom João had gone to Germany for the wedding of their sister the Infanta Dona Antonia to Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen on 12th September 1861. Afterwards they visited London where they learned that their brother Dom Fernando was seriously ill. On the 31st October, on the eve of their departure they dined with Prince Albert, first cousin of their father, Dom Fernando II, King Consort of their mother Queen Dona Maria II, who had died in 1853 giving birth to her eleventh child. Dom Luis and Prince Albert are alleged to have changed places at the dinner table. Before they reached Lisbon they knew Dom Fernando had died on the 6th November and that the King Dom Pedro was also ill. When they saw flags at half-mast they thought that mourning was continuing for the anniversary of their mother's death on the 15th November. It was only when the President of the Council, The Marquess of Loulé, addressed Dom Luis as 'Your Majesty' that they knew that the King had died, having succumbed on the 11th November.

Dom Pedro had lost his mother and became King at 16, then lost his life at 24. Handsome and popular, a model of a Prince and King, his early tragic demise was widely mourned. The sad news particularly grieved Prince Albert who according to Queen Victoria, loved Pedro like a son - no doubt at times wistfully when contemplating the wayward Edward, Prince of Wales. The Prince Consort was troubled and over-worked, having been seriously ill previously with violent attacks of sickness and shiverings. Dr. Jenner, who had done experimental work on typhoid, had been appointed Royal Physician. Later in November, Prince Albert learned of the liaison of an actress with the Prince of Wales whilst stationed at the Curragh, in Ireland. He wrote to his son on the 16th November 'with a heavy heart upon a subject which has caused me the greatest pain I have yet felt in this life'. Although from the 22nd November his health had taken a sharp turn for the worse, he went to admonish his son on the 25th at Madingley, Cambridge and on return to Windsor, was obliged to rest. The Queen blamed their son for his father's last fatal illness. Although she was distressed by the brown colour and dryness of the Prince's tongue at the end of November, the illness was declared to be a gastric fever. On the 7th December, a light rash appeared which was a certain indication to Jenner that typhoid was the fever. Sir Charles Philipps, Prince Albert's Equerry wrote 'He is extremely low about himself- there is no doubt that the death of the King of Portugal not only grieved him very deeply, but would make him exceedingly nervous if he had any idea that his illness bore any similarity to that of which the King died. Any alarm or further depression might have a very injurious

effect upon the Prince in his present state'. So the nature of his illness was concealed but when Prince Albert died on 14th December, Jenner had no doubt that the cause was that he had contracted typhoid and the drains of Windsor Castle were held to blame. Typhoid was responsible for many deaths at this period but there is no record of anyone else at Court so stricken at this time. No doubt the precautions taken by Jenner and the skills of the nurses saved the other members of the Royal Family from contracting the disease.

Meanwhile Dom Fernando II in Portugal had appointed Dr José Caetano Pereira to treat Dom Augusto and the Infante recovered. Unfortunately Dom João then contracted the disease for which there seemed no logical explanation. On the 24th December a special commission of doctors and public health officials was appointed to investigate the Royal Palaces to see if there were any insanitary conditions relating to the illnesses. The public were so concerned that riots broke out in Lisbon on the 25th and 26th December. There were suspicions of poison being the cause of the Royal deaths and the windows of the house of the Marquess of Loulé were broken, as the mob considered the Government had not acted sufficiently. There were rumours that Dom João was already dead but three representatives were allowed into the Paço das Necessidades to witness the dying Infante. They left weeping, saying that the illnesses of the King and the Princes had been mysterious and very badly treated.

Dom João died on the 27th December, age 19 but before he had become seriously ill, he had started to smoke a cigar and not liking the taste, he put the cigar in an ash tray. A black servant of his came into the room after he left, took the cigar from the ash tray, smoked it and died a short time later. This is the only recorded death at the time outside the Royal Family but within the Royal entourage.

Nine doctors had carried out the autopsy on the King's body; now twenty-one assisted with the autopsy on the body of Dom João. A report on the question of cause of death and the possibility of being poisoned was published on 22nd February 1862. It was declared that the Infante had died from typhoid fever, having had characteristic symptoms, and that the body had the lesions associated with the disease. A complete list of medication administered was cited, including Port Wine. No toxic substance had been found and there were no suspicions that any of the servants could have administered poison. On the 11th June the report of the special Commission was published stating that the Royal Palaces were not considered to be insanitary. However in future the Royal Family avoided staying during September at the Paço das Necessidades.

Yet four brothers had contracted typhoid, one seemingly inexplicably so, and three of them and their father's cousin had died from the disease within eight weeks. There were those who still suspected foul play and believed in some plot to murder the Portuguese Royal Family. It was implied that Dom Luis had been saved by changing places at dinner with Prince Albert. What sort of typhoid epidemic was it that attacked only Saxe-Coburg Princes? Understandably after the Regicide in 1908, these suspicions were strengthened into convictions.

Dom João had died 57 days after dining with Prince Albert and some 45 days after arriving back in Portugal in good health. Death from typhoid fever occurs between 27 and 28 days of infection on average; so it is likely that Dom João became infected after his return.

Prince Albert died 44 days after that dinner, having been concernably ill for 23 days. However if the symptom of the rash that appeared on the 7th December marked the second week of the fever, it is most unlikely he was infected at the time of the dinner. He had never been robust, suffering from delicate digestion and insomnia; he was easily exhausted, prone to illness, frequently feverish; he over worked and continually worried. During his last fatal illness, he forced himself to his desk to make important amendments to a bellicose Government despatch to the United States of America which might well have provoked war if the Prince Consort's conciliatory terms had not been adopted. He would have had little natural resistance to contracting or combatting the disease. Shortly before he became really ill he told the Queen 'I do not cling to life... I set no store by... I am sure if I had a severe illness I should give up at once, I should not struggle for life. I have no tenacity of life'. No wonder then that neither he nor Jenner had much of a chance.

It wasn't until the 1890s that the medical profession clearly became aware that many persons who recover from infectious diseases continue to harbour the causative microbes in their bodies after they have recovered from the disease. Such persons are termed carriers but not all carriers are equally capable of disseminating infection. The personal habits of a carrier undoubtedly play a role in determining whether or not the germs he harbours will be transferred to another human being. Epidemics of typhoid have been traced to common single sources among cooks and food handlers. The germs are harboured in the small intestine or gall bladder and discharged, thence becoming present on the hands. One infamous carrier in New York City, became known as "Typhoid Mary" as she worked as a cook under various assumed names, moving from household to household and from institution to institution spreading the fever until she was apprehended

and detained for 23 years until she died, 31 years after she was first recognized as a carrier. It is reckoned that about 30% of typhoid cases become transient carriers for several to many years.

On the balance of probabilities it seems likely that the 'recovered' Dom Augusto had become a carrier and transmitted typhoid to his brother Dom Joao on his return to Portugal. They lived in close proximity; there were five years between them and they had lost their eldest and their intervening brothers. Dom Luis having succeeded as King would have been preoccupied with affairs of state whilst perhaps they sought fatal comfort from each other in their bereavements. One may ask could it have been a fond fraternal embrace, a traditional Portuguese 'abraço', that transmitted the lethal infection? We will never know but significantly Dom Augusto never married and died age 41, in 1889, before there was a clear scientific understanding about carriers of typhoid. The specific test which provides accurate diagnosis in the first week of the disease was discovered in 1896.



PRÍNCIPE REAL D. PEDRO



INFANTE D. LUÍS



INFANTE D. JOÃO



INFANTA D. MARIA ANA



INFANTA D. ANTÓNIA



INFANTE D. FERNANDO



INFANTE D. AUGUSTO