

X

COLONIAL PORTUGAL IN OUR TIME

“ God sifted a whole nation (England) that he might send choice grain into the wilderness. (New England, 1620.) ”—WILLIAM STOUGHTON, Election Sermon, 1688.

Some Personal Notes on Delagoa Bay—Macao—The Moluccas—
The Portuguese Slave-trade and Missionary Enterprise

THE Portuguese have in Delagoa Bay the best—I had almost said the only—first-class harbor between the Zambesi and Cape Town. It is the nearest port for the Transvaal gold-fields, and, under ordinary conditions, the visitor would be justified in expecting here a settlement rivalling Cape Town in commercial activity. For more than four centuries Portugal has enjoyed possession of these coasts, and here, if anywhere, Providence seems to have thrown together pretty much all the conditions of colonial success—save the one without which no community can prosper, not even at Delagoa Bay—I mean honest government.

On the occasion of my visit (1896) the approaches to the harbor were so marked by the authorities, that mariners who knew the place treated it as one where charts ceased to have value. The signs which in other ports help the navigator to his anchorage are here

COLONIAL PORTUGAL IN OUR TIME

regarded as snares for the unwary. Buoys were sometimes placed correctly, sometimes not—and sometimes they disappeared mysteriously. The commander of a mail-steamer requires reasonable certainty in these matters, and prefers many hours' delay rather than the chance of going to pieces on an uncharted bank. Shortly before my arrival, an American four-masted sailing-ship had gone ashore in water marked abundant by the symbols of Portuguese maritime administration. The captain of that ship was on his *first* voyage to Portuguese East Africa, or he would have known better than to trust anything but his lead-line.

Merchants on shore told me of a Portuguese governor who, in an outburst of ambition, induced his Government to furnish a light-ship that might simplify exit and entrance during the night. In the course of time this useful vessel arrived, and it was hailed by the trading community as the dawn of a new era, worthy of the nation which had produced a Vasco da Gama.

The Governor not only recognized the value of a light-ship at night, but utilized it also by day as well, for cargo purposes. This craft—half lighter, half light-ship—gave unbounded satisfaction to *official* Portugal.

Lighterage rates were high, and the Governor soon had the satisfaction of learning that he had outdistanced all other maritime countries by making his light-house service not merely inexpensive, but actually a source of profit. The day seemed to have dawned when the Nore Light-ship would commence to earn its living by taking bricks from Southend to the Medway, or the Sandy Hook light operate as an excursion barge between Coney Island and Long Branch.

THE CHILDREN OF THE NATIONS

Our thrifty Governor of Delagoa Bay, however, had barely time to receive the thanks of his Government, before a succession of wrecks off the port warned him that his invention lacked one or two features to make it complete. The beach combers and wrecking companies had no fault to find, but the owners of ships complained because the light-ship, when it finished its work as a lighter, was wont to anchor in that part of the bay which was most convenient for the next day's job. The triumph of the Governor was complete so long as the sun was shining, but when ships after dark sailed in by the light of a jack o'lantern, the result was more startling than satisfactory.

The law compelled me to land at the custom-house. The same law had forbidden an enterprising American company from building a wharf at which ships could have loaded and unloaded. To-day passengers and goods are first dumped over the side in small boats, then rowed ashore to the sandy beach, then once more unloaded, then transported to the custom-house and there inspected. Then they are sent off by rail, to escape death and demurrage; for Delagoa means death to all but those who thrive on swamp microbes.

On landing I found myself walking amidst what seemed to be the ruins of some vast "department store" of a "universal provider." A cyclone seemed to have suddenly blown away roof, sides, and supports, and spattered the sands of East Africa with samples of nearly every commodity known to man or woman.

There were bags of rice, whose contents were mingling with the leakings of petroleum kegs; Waterbury clocks, electrical machinery, ladies' bonnets, boots and

COLONIAL PORTUGAL IN OUR TIME

shoes, cigars, patent medicines—these and others too many to mention were scattered about in most distracting profusion. Amidst this wreck of material civilization there strolled listlessly many ginger-colored manikins representing the Rule of Portugal at this port. There were also big naked black porters of the Zulu type, who made the Portuguese officials look even smaller.

The ginger-colored officials and their black porters could afford to smile at the commercial havoc round about them. The one who did not smile, however, was the white merchant seeking distractedly amidst the sand-swept spaces of this so-called custom-house for the different parts of a steam-engine, a hoisting gear, or the contents of a new drug-store. The many little Portuguese officials were living mainly upon illegal fees extracted from these wretched white merchants of Johannesburg. The Transvaal Government was also a good customer of the Delagoa Bay officials, who, in consideration of money paid, connived at extensive importation of Boer War material which was ambiguously labelled: "Machinery"—and which made itself felt in the winter of 1899-1900.

During my stay, the Foreign Minister of the Transvaal, Dr. Leyds, appeared mysteriously one evening by train from Pretoria, pulled out at once to a German man o' war which had arrived that morning by a curious coincidence, and the next morning early returned to the Boer capital. No papers mentioned this strange visit. There was merely an official paragraph in his Government organ stating that Dr. Leyds had left town for his health!

THE CHILDREN OF THE NATIONS

Yet Delagoa Bay is not by nature doomed to be a white man's terror. To-day it is pestilential merely because it is Portuguese. The port of Durban, which the British once regarded as dangerous to health, to-day is not merely a good all-round place of residence for the white man, but is frequented as a health resort by visitors from other parts of South Africa. Anglo-Saxon enterprise has drained its swamps, built broad macadamized roads, introduced a sewage system and provided plenty of good drinking water. Durban by nature is a much poorer port than Delagoa, but thanks to good administration she has in forty years accomplished more than Portugal in four hundred.

It would be a blessing to every white man in South Africa if to-day England would administer Delagoa Bay in trust for the commerce of the world, as she governs Hong-Kong and Singapore. The German and Boer merchants yearn for this no less than the American and the English, but official red tape and national jealousies intervene.

In Delagoa Bay I found only a few houses fit for residence, and they were, as might be expected, the official residences of consuls or high Portuguese officials. The rest of the town was a shabby gathering, measured even by the low standards of African coast towns. I was shown an official map of the place which depicted broad and extensive boulevards, public parks with fountains, handsome embankments along the cool river front, and public buildings on a scale to rival those of Cape Town. This map was intended for Lisbon and Lisbon only. In South Africa it was regarded as a joke on the part of the Governor; for it reminded

COLONIAL PORTUGAL IN OUR TIME

one of the famous city of Eden described by Dickens in "Martin Chuzzlewit."

Though this country is populated by an excellent race of negroes, labor of any kind was difficult to obtain because of the bad reputation of the Portuguese. Every road leading to the town was infested by dram shops; and beyond debauching them and taxing them, I could discover no interest taken by the Government in a race singularly helpless and remarkably amenable to white man's influence.

The Roman Church did much to strengthen Portugal in Africa. Her missionaries organized the natives into missions and encouraged respect for Portuguese law long after Portugal had ceased to show herself capable of enforcing it. But as the Church sank in public esteem in Europe, her powers diminished in the colonies, and throughout the eighteenth century one can mark a steady decline of clerical as well as political influence on the part of Portugal.

The loss of all her missionary prestige has been attributed by competent judges (notably by Theall) to the fact that in Africa, at least, the Roman Church admitted negroes to Holy Orders for the purpose of sending them as missionaries to their fellow blacks. The experiment was disastrous, for in the great majority of cases the native proved incapable of resisting the many temptations surrounding a celibate clothed with the powers of priesthood.

As early as 1464 negroes were sold as slaves in Lisbon; and though at various times the Church and the Government have condemned it in the abstract, Portugal has tolerated slavery in her colonies, if not at

THE CHILDREN OF THE NATIONS

home, from her earliest intercourse with the black man to our day. And, unfortunately for that country, the blood of her children has become so mingled with that of natives that to-day the name Portuguese carries with it no race distinction. Throughout the colonial world, all who think themselves a peg above mere natives and obviously cannot claim to be white, are entered by courtesy as Portuguese.

Poor little Macao, at the very gates of Canton, was the first European settlement in China—the port from which started a glorious train of missionaries and ambassadors, who first opened the Chinese world to European civilization; poor little Macao lives to-day by nibbling the crumbs that fall from the tables of the neighboring Englishman at Hong-Kong. Her streets are deserted but for a few Chinamen, a few tourists, a few officials, and a large number of mulatto-looking nuns and priests who seem half alive. There are also some little Portuguese soldiers who guard a little fort and mount guard at the palace of a little governor, and carry guns many sizes too big for them, and look altogether barely equal to the Chinese coolies along the water front—man for man. The commerce of the Port has gone, driven away by bad government. It is Delagoa Bay all over again, in so far as in both places man has done what he could to destroy what the Creator had given him to cultivate.

During my visit to Macao (1898) there was momentary prosperity, owing to the large number of priests that had taken refuge there from the wrath of the Filipinos. They created a boom in hair restorers as well, for they intended to go back as soon as their ton-

COLONIAL PORTUGAL IN OUR TIME

tures should have ceased to betray them to the followers of Aguinaldo.

As the traveller of to-day wanders about the little peninsula of Macao and sees it garrisoned by a breed of man compared with whom the Chinaman appears to be a warrior, it is indeed hard to appreciate that so far back as 1520—one hundred years before the settlement of New England—the name of Portugal was mighty throughout the eastern world, from Cape of Good Hope to India, and from India to the Spice Islands, as far as New Guinea.

The famous Spice Islands, lying between Singapore and New Guinea, were particular objects of Portuguese attention, not only because of the high price which their products commanded throughout Europe, but because of the opportunity for missionary enterprise. It was to acquire these islands that Magellan, after vainly importuning the Government of Lisbon, succeeded finally in persuading Spain to support him in his enterprise. It was on this journey that he first discovered the Southern Cape of South America, and, though he lost his own life in the Philippines, some of his men made the first circumnavigation of the globe, with a cargo of spices which paid for the expedition six times what it originally cost.

When I sailed (1876) through the famous islands that inspired the journey of this great navigator, I looked in vain for traces of Portuguese Christianity, or even government. Among the Moluccas, naked savages armed with spears and poisoned arrows swarmed about our ship, offering us, as their most precious article of commerce, dozens of chocolate-colored babies.

THE CHILDREN OF THE NATIONS

Nothing is more pathetic under any circumstances than a baby, but a canoe full of babies—far away from land, offered for sale by savage brutes at prices varying from the price of a turkey to that of a pig—this made a sad epitome of Portuguese Rule!

That was in the heart of the Portuguese Moluccas, after four centuries of mission work. The natives with whom I came in contact had in many instances been wounded by poisoned arrows, for their bodies showed the frightful marks left by the knife. They had cut the mortifying flesh clean out as though it had been the decayed part of an apple.

These islands are still a favorite resort of pirates, and the ship I sailed on was prepared to fight if circumstances demanded. She mounted two pieces of artillery, besides a full complement of rifles, pistols, and cutlasses.

Now that the United States flag is at Manila, it may reasonably be expected that a serious effort will be made to establish commercial security throughout that part of the world. Holland, it is true, has large interests in the neighborhood, notably Java, but she has so far shown little inclination to become a water policeman beyond her own immediate front door. We may confidently look forward to the time in the near future when the United States of Australia will not merely fall heir to the colonial posts of Portugal in the Far East, but exercise throughout the waters of the East Indies a "Monroe Doctrine" analogous to that which Uncle Sam maintains in the Caribbean Sea.