

THE OLD ALLIANCE: ENGLAND AND PORTUGAL

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"I HAVE an announcement to make to the House arising out of the treaty signed between this country and Portugal in the year 1373 . . . reinforced in various forms by treaties of 1386, 1643, 1654, 1660, 1661, 1703 and 1815, and in a secret declaration of 1899." So the Right Hon. Winston Churchill on October 12, 1943. He went on to recite Article 1 of Edward III's treaty of 1373, and then came to the point by informing the House that Portugal was to allow the Allies to use the Azores as a base against German submarines.¹ Churchill had a strong sense of history, and no qualms about turning pseudo-history into claptrap. Earlier in the War the dictator Salazar had a long confabulation one day with the Nazi envoy at Lisbon, and, the latter reported to Berlin, "was more emphatic than ever in embracing the cause of the re-organization of Europe" by Hitler; he expressed his disgust at Britain's refusal to realize that the democracies were finished, and his resentment at British pressure over the Azores: he was reinforcing the islands' defences in case of a British attempt on them, and called this "his contribution to the defence of Europe".² It was 1941, when there might be the excuse of Salazar feeling compelled to kowtow to the Nazis; but as late as 1944 the Foreign Office was engaged in a wrangle with him because he was still supplying them with wolfram, and Smuts of South Africa was called in to reason with him as an old friend.³

The notion of six centuries of unbroken friendship between two sea-faring nations of Europe's western fringes has a romantic savour, and would be charming if true. Interaction between them certainly goes very far back. The waves linked them, while sterile mountains divided Portugal from the rest of Iberia. It began as a fragment of land too narrow to form the basis of a nation: the nation grew, like Venice or Catalonia or Holland, cradled on the sea, fostered by maritime trade and intercourse, with a merchant class taking the lead earlier than the landowning feudalism which later supplanted it. Its small original land area was able to expand southward, and achieve its present limits, with a great deal of foreign, including English or Anglo-Norman, collaboration, which helped it to push back the Moors without being absorbed by its bigger neighbour, Castile. In the age of the crusades Portugal lay on the sea-route from northern Europe to

the Holy Land, and warriors were happy to pause there and rehearse the holy work awaiting them.

Some from England were there in 1111, killing and raping and burning churches instead of **mosques**:⁴ their enthusiasm was always hard to keep under control. Lisbon was captured from the Muslims in 1147 by a crusading force, Anglo-Normans again to the fore, whose reward was to be allowed to sack the city, massacring Christians as well as infidels; some of the conquerors then settled in the country, and were given **estates**.⁵ Portugal was coming into existence in fact as part and parcel of a general effort by feudal Europe at expansion southward and eastward against the world of Islam; as with Castile and Aragon, what was being bred in the bone was to come out in the flesh. Commercial growth meant also being drawn into European politics and power-struggles. Anglo-French relations were already in the 14th century, as they were to be until the 20th, a matter of concern to Portugal; while the Anglo-Portuguese alliance brought Portugal at once into English dynastic ambitions in Castile, which were mixed up with Castilian designs on Portugal. In 1385 a Castilian army was defeated with the aid of English mercenaries and loans from London merchants, but there was the usual story to tell of these auxiliaries. "The English soldiers' conduct towards the Portuguese women was such that there was almost as much war between the allies as with the Spaniards."⁶

In 1415 came the decisive first advance beyond Europe, the seizure of Ceuta just across the Straits of Gibraltar. In this heroic enterprise volunteers from many lands took part, English among them: there would have been more Englishmen if Henry V had not been engaged on similar business of his own at Agincourt, but he allowed lances and other weapons to be exported to Portugal, distant precursors of the NATO guns and bombs that equip Portuguese forces in Africa today. From now on they were committed to adventures in other continents, which meant renunciation of legitimate trade in favour of piracy and parasitism. They were the vanguard of the white man's conquest of the world, and their doings always had a partly cosmopolitan character. They were financed in the early stages by Italian and German bankers, and most of the emigrants who poured out of the country, in such numbers as gravely to reduce its population and vitality, came from the racially mixed provinces of the south, and were swollen by crowds of foreign adventurers.⁸ Meanwhile Portugal's colonies and colonial ambitions were becoming, what they always remained, hostages to fortune, further jeopardizing its precarious position at home. In 1578 the defeat and death of King Sebastian in north Africa led to the take-over of his country by Spain two years later.

By this time England and Portugal were in the opposite camps of Reformation and Counter-reformation, and religion has been a stum-

bling-block between them ever since. An English seaman might easily find himself languishing at Lisbon in the cells of the Inquisition. But the argument so often heard in later days, that Britain had a vital interest in Portuguese independence, second only to Belgium's (or to Ireland's lack of independence), had some warrant from the fact that throughout the sixty years of Portugal's enforced union with Spain, England had reason to fear their combined naval strength. In 1588 Portuguese warships formed part of the Invincible Armada; next year an English armada attacked Lisbon. English ships harried Portuguese as well as Spanish possessions in America, and, along with the Dutch, followed the Portuguese into the Indies, preying on them as they had preyed on the ill-armed shipping of Asia. An assault by an Anglo-Dutch squadron in 1621 on the homeward-bound flotilla from Goa was a typical episode.

After 1640 Portugal was breaking away from Spain, with first French and then English assistance, and thus becoming in the end the only one of many distinct linguistic and cultural regions of the Iberian peninsula not joined, willingly or by force, with the rest. It was practically the only small nationality in Europe that regained its independence after once losing it, at any rate before the 20th century. It was an anomaly in a modern Europe where there was little room or safety for small weak States. English protection enabled it to cling to its freedom, really in many ways a nominal one disguising an English overlordship; to say nothing of the fact that there was no sort of freedom for the peasant masses from oppression by the big landowners who had emerged as the dominant class while the once flourishing merchantry fell into the background. Their long connection was undeniably to do much harm, to Portugal in particular. Such a tie, between a strong advancing country and a weak, backward one, is always likely to retard the weaker still more, as the protectorates exercised today by the US do. And the stronger partner can always push the weaker in wrong or reactionary directions far more easily than towards progress.

Under cover of Britain's role of "protector" it rapidly acquired a stranglehold over the Portuguese economy. At the same time as England started its search for a colonial empire it began to build something very like a "neo-colonial" relationship with Portugal. Colonialism and neo-colonialism do not necessarily belong to distinct epochs: they have grown in the modern world on parallel lines. In 1642 when Portugal was just getting back on to its feet England secured an advantageous trade treaty with it; in 1654 Cromwell—who next year was to seize Jamaica from Spain—secured another, conferring sweeping commercial privileges on England, with a "Juiz Conservador" or spokesman of the English merchants to uphold them. Portugal could

be got to submit more easily because it was not simply trying to assert its independence from a now feeble Spain, but was also struggling to hang on to the large colonial territories it had won by being, with Spain, first in the field. They were based essentially on slavery and slave-trading, and it was a misfortune for Portugal to be still in possession of them now, with the temptation to depend parasitically on them in order to make up for its insignificance in Europe. Other minor Western countries have been drawn into colony-hunting partly as compensation for their smallness, so as to be able to face their bigger neighbours on more equal terms. Denmark did this, and Holland, and later Belgium; one of Scotland's last acts as a separate State was to try to do the same, by means of the disastrous Darien scheme of 1698. But if any nation's colonies have been, in Disraeli's phrase, millstones round its neck, they are Portugal's.

Dutch imperialism was trying to establish itself both in Brazil and in Angola, whose function was to supply Brazil with African slaves. This made the protection of a strong naval power like England the more indispensable. In 1661 when a marriage was agreed on between a Portuguese princess and the newly restored Charles II, Bombay and Tangier were handed over to England to cement the overseas partnership: in return, by a secret article England pledged itself "to defend and protect all conquests and colonies belonging to the Crown of Portugal against their enemies". In spite of this relations in the colonial field were not uniformly smooth, any more than those between the Merry Monarch and his consort: there were frequent quarrels in India, and in the Mozambique region there was a threat of the Portuguese being supplanted by the English, through "peaceful penetration" or otherwise, which kept the local authorities in a state of alarm. Slave-trading there, still and for many years to come the sole manifestation in Africa of Portugal's "civilising mission", proved not lucrative enough to tempt the English seriously, and they left the region to their allies and helped them to keep out the Dutch, now established further south at the **Cape.**⁹

If Portugal regained its autonomy and kept its empire, it was winning or winning back little in the way of constitutional liberty at home, and its ties with progressive England had no liberalizing influence. On the contrary England found it simpler to exercise pressure or control through a monarchy feeble externally but despotic at home, and always ready to put imperial profit or prestige before the national interests, with which they had, then as now, very little connection. A less unfettered government would scarcely have been able to sign away so many commercial concessions to the English and other foreigners, culminating in the famous Methuen treaty with England in 1703. This was flanked by a fresh political alliance. The long-drawn War of

the Spanish Succession had broken out in 1701: a French prince on the Spanish throne was eager to revive old Spanish ambitions, and Portugal was fending them off by letting itself be used as an English base. But its colonial ambitions came in here too, for England and Holland, allies now, were ready to promise gains of territory from Spain, in South America as well as at home. At the end of the war in 1713 Portugal did receive some additions beyond the Atlantic.

The Methuen treaty itself was "the most significant and typical" stroke of the commercial diplomacy of the 18th century, aimed like the wars of that epoch chiefly at market monopolies.¹⁰ England agreed to buy Portuguese wine ("port" from Oporto) in preference to French; Portugal threw open its market to England's more efficiently produced woollen cloth, with which its own could not compete. It thus condemned itself, partly in the hope of richer colonial spoils, to neglect of its manufactures and dependence on foreign products. This also meant benefits for the feudal landowning class and the crippling of the small industrial middle class, with blighting effects on Portugal's subsequent political evolution, or rather its failure to evolve. It was not, however, the Portuguese home market alone that British enterprise was now in a position to dominate, but the Brazilian too. Hitherto much of the tobacco and sugar extracted from slave labour in Brazil had been sold to England, but England now had its own slave-plantations in the West Indies and Virginia. On the other hand the brief sensational mining bonanza in Brazil had begun shortly before the Methuen treaty was signed; about 1720 a gold-rush was setting in, in 1728 diamonds were found. Like most such discoveries, these had catastrophic effects, on Portugal's west-African territory of Angola, now laid under heavier contribution for slaves to work the Brazilian mines, and on the home country, where the inflow of wealth fattened an already bloated and over-powerful Church and a profligate Court. Brazilian gold enabled them to extinguish freedom at home, it has been said,¹¹ or what remnants of freedom still lingered. Even in England, later in the 18th century, there were fears that a flood of ill-gotten wealth from Bengal would end by subverting the Constitution.

A hundred million pounds' worth of gold are estimated to have entered Portugal between 1696 and 1726.¹² They did no good to the inert economy, and a large proportion of the slave-mined gold was quickly drained off to England, where it contributed to the gestatory period of the Industrial Revolution. It enabled English goods to provide the bulk of the export trade from Portugal to Brazil, so that this rich colonial market was in effect part of England's empire at second-hand. Adam Smith in his judicious discussion of the Methuen treaty was to condemn the "silly notion" it gave rise to that England would be ruined if it lost its Portuguese trade, especially on account of the

gold this brought in; here was a standing inducement to England's enemies, he pointed out, to try to destroy it by attacking Portugal, which in turn meant that England was saddled with the load, far outweighing any profits of the trade, "of supporting a very weak ally".¹³ For Portugal this meant that much of the danger England was supposed to be sheltering it from only arose because Portugal was England's satellite; while to a further large extent it arose from its colonial empire, which without the British partner it would have been compelled, to its own benefit, to renounce.

In reality Portugal was not too small to defend its own homeland against most of the external threats of its modern history, Spain being always feeble and invasion routes few and difficult, if it had developed a genuine national solidarity. But the country could not pay, as France and England did, for a big army of largely foreign professional troops; and a popular defence-force would have to be a relatively democratic one, and this would have compelled the ruling classes to make some concessions to their subjects. Rather than do this they preferred to rely on England's armed forces, under cover of which the national life could be kept comfortably fossilized, and such troops as there were could be employed for subjugating primitive tribes far away.

With Portugal as its safe continental foothold and naval base, England was the more willing to embark on foreign adventures, with colonial conquest as the chief prize. Its navy was accustomed to make itself very much at home in Portuguese harbours and waters. In 1759 it destroyed a French squadron in Portuguese waters off the southern coast, without regard to their neutrality; this for once provoked a loud protest from Lisbon and a handsome apology from London. But within two years Spain—tied to France by the Bourbon "family compacts" as Portugal was to England—joined with it in demanding the occupation of all Portuguese harbours by their forces, in order to close them to English shipping. They had their eye on the colonies as well, and Portugal at once called a British army to its assistance. Once at least in that epoch John Bull was called on for succour of another kind, as Uncle Sam often is nowadays by his clients, and responded generously enough, as Uncle Sam often does. This was when Lisbon was destroyed in 1755 by the great earthquake that Mr. Croaker in Goldsmith's comedy was always expecting to come back and destroy London. England gave help worth nearly £100,000.

Ordinarily it was English greed that Portuguese were conscious of, the habits for instance that might well have made Napoleon talk of a nation of smugglers instead of a nation of shopkeepers. A great deal of gold was conveyed out of Portugal, British goods into Brazil, illegally.¹⁴ It was this kind of thing that fixed the attention of the Marquis of Pombal, virtual dictator from 1750 to 1770. He had lived in London,

as a diplomat, without learning much English and without assimilating many of the ideas that were helping to put England ahead of Europe. A country's good ideas and qualities are far less readily appreciated and emulated than its worse ones. Pombal's culture was French, his temper authoritarian, and his mode of governing a perfect example of what Mao would call commandism; hence it was for the most part a perfect failure, from which he might in some degree have been rescued by learning a little political philosophy while in England.

The task he set himself was to modernize Portugal and restore its prosperity. As he recognized, one great obstacle was the British economic ascendancy. The British merchants entrenched at Lisbon and Oporto constantly irritated government and public by the exorbitant privileges they claimed, while native enterprise was so feeble that even Lisbon's retail trade was chiefly in foreign hands.¹⁵ It was a situation not unlike that imposed on China and Japan in the 19th century by the "Unequal Treaties", or on Turkey, when it grew weak, by virtue of the "Capitulations" or trading rights it had carelessly granted to foreigners. Pombal was able to give some small impetus to native manufactures, and he thereby managed to reduce imports from England; he set up also a Wine Company to challenge the British monopoly. This patriotic programme earned a crop of violent pamphlets against him in London. As with countries like China and Japan in later days, Britons were fond of deriding Portugal's backwardness, but very unwilling to see any serious efforts to throw this off, since their own vested interests were bound to suffer. Pombal was not far out when he wrote bitterly that powerful governments did not want to see weaker ones making progress, because they preferred nowadays to rely on keeping control over them by quiet manipulation; instead of by open violence. One way or the other, "the law of the strongest will always govern the world".¹⁶

He was giving no bad description of neo-colonialism and its methods. But he fatally compromised his own chances of shaking off the British commercial straitjacket by his refusal to forfeit the political and military alliance. He continued the old neglect of national defence, except for sporadic efforts to collect soldiers by a brutal and much-hated kind of conscription, and some attempt to restore the navy by employing English dockyard workmen. Instead of enabling Portugal to defend itself, he was clinging to the alliance very much as a means of getting Britain to underwrite the colonial empire. This he wanted not only to keep, but to enlarge and make more lucrative. He wanted to develop Macao and compete with English trade in the Far East. Subsidies were lavished on the Portuguese Jesuits at Peking, now outstripping the neglected French mission.¹⁷ (Characteristically they included Italians and Germans as well as Portuguese.) But he felt at the same time the

need for collaboration in India, where discords between Bombay and Goa had persisted, and where the **Mughal** empire was now crumbling into chaos. In Brazil he organized State-directed companies to challenge the British hold on the market, another move not likely to conciliate his London critics. In the course of his subsequent conflict with the Jesuits, ending in their suppression, he went into partnership with Spain to overrun their Paraguayan settlements, with much resulting slaughter of the Indians there and loss of life of Portuguese troops through fighting or disease. Later on frontier fighting broke out in South America between the two European occupants: Britain was engrossed in its North American troubles, and for once, to Pombal's indignation, would not assist. His forces came off worst. All these costly endeavours helped to empty the exchequer at home, and cancel out most of any good effect his domestic programme might have had.

When the American War of Independence broke out a few years after Pombal's fall, official Portugal was virtually England's only well-wisher in Europe, as it was again two centuries later when England was fighting the Boer War; official England's sympathy with Portugal's wars in Africa today may be regarded as a suitable return. Its overseas possessions, worse than useless to itself, continued to make neighbouring mouths water, as the next round of European wars showed. Both the French Directory in 1796 and Napoleon in 1800-03 demanded cessions in Brazil, and in 1806 when planning a partition of Portugal Napoleon intended to reserve the colonies for his own share.¹⁸ A familiar pattern of events repeated itself when next year a French army based on Spain entered Portugal in order to seal it off from Britain. It could at first, like French armies elsewhere in Europe, figure as liberator from misrule, corruption, backwardness, but as everywhere else this was soon wiped out by its high-handed behaviour. A British army promptly arrived as counter-liberator, but also, in line with Britain's attitude everywhere in Europe, as prop of reaction and despotism, and therefore with the disapproval of the Whigs as the less reactionary of Britain's two parties. On balance Portugal, like Spain, had more to gain from occupation by Napoleon, which would have been burdensome but would have brought useful anti-feudal, anti-clerical reforms, than from occupation by Wellington, which was burdensome without holding out any chance of progress.

Before the end of the long, murderous Peninsular War its population had fallen heavily. French conduct was often savage; and what a British officer wrote of the Spaniards could equally have been said of the Portuguese: "on numberless occasions, our soldiers robbed and ill-treated them without ceremony".¹⁹ Multitudes of peasants were left to starve in the winter of 1810-11 in the devastated area outside the lines of Torres Vedras; it was one of the first large-scale exercises

in "scorched earth" tactics. All this is reminiscent of how in the nation's infancy the crusaders from the north came to liberate and to rob and kill. Meanwhile, the wretched royal family having removed itself to Brazil, the British practically took over the running of the country. Its own ruling class was too effete to provide leadership, and a pillar of Anglo-Irish landlordism like Wellington could have no desire to encourage a popular leadership to emerge from below. Portugal had to provide a great deal of manpower, which for him belonged to much the same category as the sepoy troops he had lately been posted with in India.

British forces were in occupation of Ceuta and the Madeira islands as well, and many in Britain were coolly talking of keeping them after the war.²⁰ They were in fact handed back, but British ascendancy over the whole country was maintained. Lord Beresford, who had commanded the Portuguese troops as Wellington's lieutenant, and much disliked them, was for some years viceroy for the absentee monarchy, until revolt broke out and confusion reigned instead. A British historian points to the Miguelite reign of terror of 1828–29 as the logical outcome. He adds that Tories viewed this reactionary régime complacently, being always ready to look with approval at "strong" government.²¹ England produced in Cromwell one of the earliest, and the best, of modern "strong men"; since then it has avoided them, but its upper classes have always had a hankering for them, as for hanging and flogging as safeguards of law and order. They have worked it off by admiring strong men of the Kipling–Kitchener type in their empire, and similar leaders abroad, the sort that nowadays Americans so often admire, and sometimes manufacture. Constitutional rule was no good in Portugal, one British writer exclaimed. "Portugal cries aloud for a political saviour, an unflinching patriot", to rise above party and rally the nation²²—a recipe in advance for all our modern dictators.

Pro-Miguelite policies were reversed before long, and English backing given to the liberals against the royalist extremists. As a result an English traveller could find himself in peril from a Miguelite mob, "rather resembling enraged wild beasts than rational beings", who were breaking into enemies' houses and presently raised a shout of "Death to the English!"²³ It was unwholesome for liberalism to appear dependent on the patronage of a foreign country which was for many other reasons, good or bad, unpopular. Opponents of progress could deflect mass discontent by directing it against the English heretics and meddlers. It was too obvious, besides, both there and in Spain, that England's interventions on the side of freedom were as little disinterested as America's nowadays on the side of "free enterprise". "London speculators financed a fresh series of civil wars for the thrones of those unhappy countries."²⁴ In 1847 when Britain and Spain for

once joined hands to exert armed pressure, at a moment when Portuguese affairs were more than usually chaotic, Lord Malmesbury in London could not help noting in his journal: "This will probably put an end to the civil war, but it is very tricky and unworthy of England."²⁵ The best that can be said is that British representatives tried on occasion to exercise some restraint on feuds and proscriptions, to persuade politicians to learn the rules of the game, and they often gave asylum to the losers. Still, the precocious young king Pedro V, who was a favourite with Queen Victoria and whose Coburg father was a nephew of her uncle King Leopold, could not help at times resenting the overbearing egotism of "our old and loyal, but also self-interested ally", and the weight of "the English alliance, converted into voluntary slavery".²⁶

Spaniards were wont to express pity for their unfortunate neighbour, helpless in the British grasp. If things went on like this, one wrote, Britain would soon discard a useless mask and reduce Portugal to the status of Canada.²⁷ Portugal would have fared less badly, another declared, if actually incorporated in the British empire.²⁸ Such Spaniards held out as Portugal's salvation the idea of "Iberian Union". It found some measure of support in Portugal, if less than in Spain, and only among the educated classes. It was taken up at Lisbon in the 1860s as a vent for public dissatisfaction with a sterile government and its British mentor.²⁹ Supporters of the idea always maintained that England—and France at times—played on and fomented divisions between Spain and Portugal in order to keep them both weak and helpless. Hence England could be expected to oppose Iberian unity, for selfish motives, even perhaps by armed force. "The word Liberty which that nation proclaims", one Spaniard wrote, "nearly always vanishes, unhappily, when it would oblige her to sacrifice her interests", and he pointed to British misrule in Ireland and India.³⁰ Undoubtedly England wanted to keep its Portuguese foothold on the Continent, and feared that a united peninsula would fall into the political and commercial orbit of France.

Meanwhile the old pattern of a strong economy overlaying a weak one continued. "The Douro port district became a sort of hinterland to a British colony",³¹ and one where the British made themselves intensely disliked by rigging and keeping down the prices they paid to the cultivators. Early in the 19th century an English nobleman travelling there was warned to be on his guard against the very hostile temper of the peasantry.³² It was now English cottons, in place of woollen cloth, that were pouring into the Portuguese market, aided as in India by the new steam machinery, and by lower tariffs than Britain was able, despite constant efforts, to get in Spain. Notoriously a good part of the cotton goods imported were destined to be smuggled

across the border into Spain, as other goods were by sea from Gibraltar. Portugal like Spain was heavily in debt, as a result of maladministration and civil broils, and badly in need of both short-term loans and capital for development, which could only come from abroad. Hence a new economic relationship was taking shape, to reinforce the old one. Britain and France were the grand moneylenders and investors; to be sure, those who lent money, in hope of high interest rates, often burned their fingers, and there were always brigades of angry bondholders organizing protest meetings, denouncing Portuguese dishonesty, and wanting their debts collected for them; a task that even the British navy could not readily carry out. In railway-building British and other capital found a more constructive sphere.³³

Most Portuguese liberals of this era could not, any more than their conservative opponents, make up their minds to relinquish the colonies, and they had too little of a social programme to offer the nation anything in place of them. Brazil's peaceful separation soon after 1815, under a branch of the royal family, ought to have been welcomed as a good occasion to escape from colonial entanglements altogether. Over four-fifths of Angola's revenue was still made up of the export tax on slaves.³⁴ Some liberals really would have been content to forget about the musty old empire, but this was not enough to get rid of it. There would always be ambitious men on the spot to keep the raids and expeditions going, and the imperial overcoat, ragged as it was, helped to keep the country warm and quiet. Neglect either to withdraw from the colonies or to reconstruct them was part of the all-round failure of a half-baked Liberalism to break resolutely with the past, except—as notably in the confiscation of Church lands—where its own upper-middle-class pocket was concerned. One obstacle to Portugal's entering an Iberian union was alleged to be fear that Britain would retaliate by snapping up its colonies.³⁵ A colony that England could evidently snap up at any moment was Goa; and especially after the rise of nationalism in India, Portuguese rule there was bound to feel dependent on Britain's good graces.

Unlike the small Indian enclaves, those in Africa had plenty of room for expansion. What had hitherto been not much more than coastal settlements were now pushed far inland. This would scarcely have happened had Portugal not been caught up in a general Western rush for colonies, leading to the partition of Africa at the end of the 19th century. British and other discoveries and annexations stimulated Portuguese competition. Fear grew of being left behind in the race, and even of what Portugal already held being taken from it by others. In 1877 the minister in charge of navy and colonies emphasized this danger. He observed that the explorations in progress could not be "ascribed exclusively to a generous feeling of the human mind"—in

other words to Europe's famous "civilizing mission"—but were essentially inspired by industrial over-production and a scramble for fresh markets.⁸⁶ Without having studied Marx, Sr. Mello Gouveia was a good deal more realistic about the carve-up of Africa than some of its historians have been. Camoens, the national poet himself, when three centuries earlier he contrasted Christendom with an Africa "still grasping after the things of this world, uncivilized, full of savagery", did not forget to observe that there were heaps of gold there for the taking, as well as pagan souls to be saved.⁸⁷ The tercentenary of his death was about to be commemorated, amid much patriotic tub-thumping.

In the course of the 1880s Portuguese hopes in southern Africa came to extend to all Matabeleland and the Lake Nyasa region. They conflicted with British projects of annexation northward from the Cape, and the Scottish mission foundations made Nyasaland a sensitive area; anti-Portuguese sentiment roused by Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* and his denunciation of the slave-dealers was still fermenting. Altogether the religious revival in 19th-century Britain, and its outpouring of tracts and missionaries, made for diminished respect for Portugal as one of the more benightedly Catholic countries. As a market it was of dwindling value in a widening world; and since the Franco-Prussian war the old fear of French ascendancy in Iberia was fading. Late in 1888 Lord Salisbury informed the Germans in confidence that if the Portuguese meddled with Nyasaland he would have to impound some possession of theirs, in India perhaps, as a "guarantee".⁸⁸ A breaking-point was reached in 1890 with a British ultimatum to Portugal to withdraw an expedition headed by an officer named Serpa Pinto. It was very much like the Fashoda crisis between Britain and France eight years later in the Soudan, except that in this case the feebleness of one of the rivals compelled it to climb down at once.

It was thus Portugal's old ally that frustrated its hazy pipe-dream of a continuous band of territory across the continent from Angola to Mozambique; though in fact a good many of its claims were being recognized by the Powers, chiefly because these were jealous of one another and would rather lose a trick to little Portugal than to an opponent.⁸⁹ At Lisbon there was an outburst of indignation against Britain, in which many long-smouldering resentments found expression, and the ministry fell. This helped to promote republicanism, against the Anglophil monarchy, but the link between radicalism at home and imperialism overseas was unwholesome. For one thing it helped to save left-wing politicians the trouble of thinking out a social programme, by diverting discontent into illusions about Africa as a new Eldorado. A few individuals, now as earlier, were prepared to protest against the resolve to hang on to every scrap of overseas territory, and

to advocate the sale of at least some parts of it. It is regrettable that the breach with England did not go further, and end by relieving Portugal both of the British connection and of colonial entanglements, as Spain was relieved of Cuba and the Philippines by their seizure in 1898 by the U.S. In that same year there was a prospect of this coming about, when London and Berlin sank their differences and reached a provisional understanding for the disposal of Portuguese Africa. It turned partly on the likelihood of Portugal, which was close to bankruptcy, having to raise loans abroad, secured on colonial revenues. Loans to shaky governments in various parts of the world were proving a convenient means of getting a stranglehold on them, and the partners had hopes of securing possession like a firm of pawnbrokers. Portugal dodged this noose by borrowing in Paris instead.

Unfortunately for its future the Anglo-German arrangement was frustrated only a year later by the British decision to annex the Transvaal and its gold-mines. This made it vital to prevent arms reaching the Boers by way of the port of Lourenço Marques, and in October 1899 an agreement covering the point was signed. During the preliminaries there was much scrutinizing of ancient treaties, not forgetting the secret article of 1661.⁴⁰ In Portugal public opinion was still heatedly anti-British, but as the British minister there comfortably remarked, there was no need to bother about what the populace thought. "The educated and governing classes, whilst, at heart, sharing the antipathy of their fellow countrymen are too well aware that politically, financially and commercially, they are absolutely dependent on England's friendship and goodwill."⁴¹

In the following decade the military men in Angola were working hard to extend their area of effective occupation, and their campaigns received some assistance, chiefly with supplies, from the British.⁴² British counsels were divided, however. In 1911 Sir Edward Grey referred to the Portuguese colonies as "sinks of iniquity", and lamented the lately-renewed treaty obligations that hindered Britain from hastening a partition of them.⁴³ Late in 1913 Anglo-German discussions with this in view were resumed, and seemed to be nearing success when Portugal was saved by the bell, or by the outbreak of the Great War. It had to make sure of its good--or bad--luck by taking part in this on the Allied side. Whether to do so was a very vexed issue, with Republicans inclined to say yes and Royalists no; it was decided by the government giving way early in 1916 to British pressure and seizing the large number of German ships interned in the Tagus, for handing over to the Allies. Germany declared war. Portugal then went a step further by sending some ill-equipped, ill-led, and justifiably unwilling troops to serve on the western front, where they were overwhelmed in the spring of 1918 by the great German offensive. Their commander

was nicknamed by the British "General Bumface", and their rout invited derision.⁴⁴ Lloyd George was at pains later on to rebut such criticism of his puppet troops. He had seen some of the men, and they looked fine soldiers, he wrote. "But their officers were obviously not equal in stamina or efficiency to their men."⁴⁵ He recalled the prowess of their ancestors under Wellington, when many of their officers were as he said British; he must have thought it a pity that the same arrangement could not be made this time.

Portugal's utility to the Allies was not enough to make it quite sure that it would be allowed to keep its possessions. At the peace conference Smuts, we learn from his son, besides getting hold of S.W. Africa, "considered the annexation of the Belgian Congo and Portuguese East Africa with such seriousness that strongly-worded protests followed from the two governments. The question of incorporation of Southern Rhodesia was also revolving in his mind."⁴⁶ It was indeed a capacious mind, and marked him as a worthy successor of Cecil Rhodes; today his own successors are hoping to reach the same goal by heading a White-supremacy league in southern Africa. But in 1919, as before, Portugal was left with its colonies; one important reason being that they already belonged in effect as much to foreigners, chiefly British investors, as to Portugal itself. Lacking resources to exploit them profitably, Portugal had no choice but to throw them open to foreign enterprise. Half the railway-building that got under way after 1870 was financed by British capital. Most of whatever development took place in Mozambique, in particular, was done by foreign companies, largely British, which were awarded concessions; while settlers from British India played a significant part in its commercial life.

Since a decade ago Portugal's mounting difficulties with the national liberation movements have compelled it to welcome fresh foreign investment in the colonies, in order to enlist the backing of foreign capitalists and their governments.⁴⁷ Britain's share is still big. Increasingly this has meant that Portugal is left to do the dirty work of empire, and guard strategic positions thought important to "the West" in Africa,⁴⁸ and is supplied with weapons for the purpose, while the finance it lacks slips quietly in from abroad to skim the cream of the profits.⁴⁹ Thus the old indirect British involvement in Portuguese Brazil has been reproducing itself in Portuguese Africa. Having given up direct colonial rule itself, British capitalism finds it convenient to shelter behind foreign colonial rule, and so be able to disclaim responsibility for either military repression or economic exploitation. How lucrative this *modus viuendi* can be it knows from its share of the profits of police rule and starvation wages in South Africa, about which our philanthropic financiers have lately gone through the motions of being highly surprised and deeply distressed.

Britain's historic relations with Portugal have not been of a kind to engender any true mutual regard. Behind the façade of official amity there has been contempt on one side, bitterness on the other. It was an early ingredient in this that so many Portuguese met with overseas were "half-castes", in an age when racialism was infecting Britain and other Western countries; and these men were associated, too often rightly, with nefarious doings like piracy in the Bay of Bengal, or slave-smuggling in Africa. Some distinction in favour of an old ally was made, indeed, by the navy in its patrols against the slave trade. "Although the British seized and liberated African slaves on Arab dhows, they did not take such direct action against the Portuguese."¹⁰ But about the time of the 1890 clash Kipling parodied Portuguese colonialism in one of his swaggering stories, where a preposterous gunboat-captain and a comic-opera governor were made fools of, and then made tipsy by way of consolation, and an outbreak of hostilities averted, by the coolness and humour of a young British naval officer.¹¹

Portuguese at home were often viewed little less satirically. Contacts with them were narrow, not very much less so than those made by sunbathing tourists in our own day. Diplomats confined their attention to Court and political circles, traders to their customers; about the ordinary people neither as a rule knew or cared anything. Other visitors were until lately few, and not always less superficial. "I met the Galley slaves", Southey wrote facetiously during his stay in the country, "and looked at them with a physiognomic eye to see how they differed from the rest of the people. It appeared to me that they had been found out, and the others had not."¹² A traveller was bound to pity the Portuguese, another Briton wrote in 1852. "Leaving the shores of England, in a few days he is transported from the enterprise of the nineteenth century to the semi-barbarism of the ninth."¹³ He could of course have made the same jump in a few hours by transporting himself to Ireland; and it might have struck him that most Portuguese on their side saw few representatives of British civilization except its seamen, who were notorious in Lisbon, he discovered, for their drunken brawls.¹⁴ A fellow-countryman censured those foolish Portuguese who wanted to end the British connection, asserting that this would leave Portugal a prey to invasion or anarchy;¹⁵ the same fate that Britons always predicted for an India deprived of their benevolent sway.

Since the Portuguese were "wallowing in the sty of ignorant and besotted prejudice", and addicted to "ignorant and groundless revolution ~ "they clearly stood in need of firm handling, and there were always Englishmen who boasted of knowing the country well to extol strong-arm government as the right treatment for it, with no nonsense

about democracy. Foreigners often referred to Portugal as a British colony, and British attitudes towards it ran very much in the mould of the imperial conviction that Britain knew what was good for Irishmen, Hindus, and so forth. far better than they knew themselves. Most British interests in Portugal warmly endorsed the royal autocracy that provoked the revolution of 1910.⁶⁷ It must have been partly because Portugal was now a republic that in 1913-14 Britain was prepared to discuss a take-over of its colonies with Germany, solidly conservative under a Kaiser who was first cousin to George V. Only by submitting to some form of right-wing dictatorship could Portugal regain respectability in orthodox British eyes. "The absence of a firm and guiding hand has been much felt in Portugal", an encyclopaedia writer observed sententiously in 1926.⁶⁸

Before the close of that year the army set up an authoritarian régime, whose leading spirit was soon the backward-looking, clericalist intellectual Salazar. In a government of the blind the one-eyed man is king. There was a ready-made welcome for him from conservative Britain, which progressive opinion in Britain did far too little to challenge. In 1936-39 at the time of the Civil War in Spain, Salazar was, after Hitler and Mussolini, Franco's best friend; and British influence either completely failed, or was not seriously used, to deter Portugal from sabotaging Non-intervention and giving Franco invaluable aid. Meanwhile the English public was fed with rosy tributes to Salazar, like Sir Marcus Cheke's picture of him as "a statesman of outstanding ability", "a distinguished public servant in the English sense of that term".⁶⁹

Inevitably in the World War that quickly followed,,Salazar like Franco had no desire for a triumph of democracy. Both feared that after a defeat of fascism they would be removed from power, as they so easily could have been, by the Allies. In 1945 Portuguese liberals were confidently hoping for this. But the Western allies were now headed by American imperialism, which found such right-wing rtgimes eminently respectable. Britain was being allowed by its Labour government to sink into the same client status as it had for so long imposed on Portugal; and Toryism, still entrenched in the Foreign Office and the other seats of power, was allowed to throw its mantle over the erring dictators. They were granted plenary absolution for all their war-time sins. Anglo-Portuguese "friendship" has never been more woefully misused.

In 1956 Portugal was admitted to the UNO, and like all member-States was called upon to declare what colonial possessions it held. Its government unblushingly asserted that it had none, since homeland and overseas territories were legally on the same footing. This absurd evasion immediately came under fire. England is not known to have

tried to induce Lisbon to abandon it; and when a Portuguese foreign minister's defence of it was circulated for propaganda purposes in an English edition, Lord Chandos supplied a foreword urging that after six hundred years of "treaty relations" with this country "Portugal is entitled to a fair hearing". Nogueira, the author, depicts the UNO as a Holy Alliance interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign States; his country, he pleads ingenuously, refuses to recognize peoples as African, Asian, or anything but human beings.⁶⁰ "A group or society which has only one race, one culture, one language, one religion, may seem to be fairly happy but it is certainly stagnant and does not contribute anything to mankind."⁶¹ This might serve for an excellent summing up of Portugal's stagnation, reduced to a single religion and culture by the Inquisition and its modern heirs like Salazar; a mixture of genes, which the country has never lacked, can be no cure for a wrong social and political structure.

Today Salazar's successor Caetano, like many other heads of disreputable régimes, is anxious to get certificates of good conduct from "respectable" ones like the British, as a means of impressing his own subjects and depriving them of any hope of foreign sympathy. In this country he benefits from the propaganda that has always been kept up by Catholicism of the old unregenerate sort; and now as always there are financial interests with a stake in Portugal and its colonies, eager to promote "friendship" and able to pull the necessary strings. "China lobbies" or their equivalent are not confined to Washington. There is nothing new in this; two centuries ago the Portuguese government knew how to utilize backstairs contacts with the House of Lords in order to put pressure on ministers.⁶² Lower down in the scale there are the droves of unthinking British tourists, ready to disport themselves on any beaches where wages are kept down for their benefit by police truncheons. Tourism has become in fact one of the major modern forms of exploitation of poor countries by rich, a neo-colonialism for the common man. Since the war-strained Portuguese economy is kept going by proceeds of tourism, along with remittances from the host of Portuguese working in France or Germany because there are no jobs for them at home, and by supplies of arms from NATO, this indifference of the British tourist to anything but cheap food and sunshine has an ugly practical importance.

This year's Anglo-Portuguese junketings in honour of the treaty of 1373 furnish a good example of the make-believe that obsolete ruling cliques like Caetano's or parties like Mr. Heath's are liable to indulge in. The spectacle of Order in Portugal, with the police firmly in command, gives a vicarious satisfaction to British conservatives who privately pine for the same happy dispensation. Their foreign secretary, Sir A. Douglas-Home, has a natural relish for anything so antiquarian,

so cobweb-covered, as a 14th-century treaty, and has thrown himself into the revels as he might into a mock-tournament with suits of armour brought out of the museum. As a local magistrate he was described by the press, at the time when he became briefly prime minister, as "hard on poachers", and he may be supposed to look on Border poachers and African rebels as birds of the same feather. Both as scion of medieval feudalists and as straggler from Munich, he has passed his long life hating socialism in any shape. The Hitler and Mussolini he and his leader Chamberlain were so anxious to conciliate are gone, but there are still some of their understudies to be befriended.

Progressive Portuguese must have been more disappointed than surprised at the Pope visiting their country and saying nothing about either repression there or the brutal colonial wars. They can scarcely have expected anything better from Sir A. Douglas-Home. There is an old Portuguese saying about things got up merely to impress the English—*para o inglês ver*; only the thinnest varnish has been required to satisfy British officialdom of this Portuguese régime being civilized enough for an exchange of State visits. On May 5, while a number of writers were under prosecution for breaches of the censorship, the Guardian reported "a new wave of repression of cultural activities", following police firing on Lisbon students who were objecting to the presence of plain-clothes policemen in their classrooms. On the same 5th of May Sir A. Douglas-Home was addressing assembled Europe at Helsinki, and began with a ringing declaration: "The time for words is finished. Now is the time for action." A stranger might have supposed that he was at last about to insist on Caetano and his crew mending their ways; anyone familiar with his record could easily guess that he was only going to lecture the Russians about the importance of a free flow of ideas across their frontiers.

Portugal had an empire before it arrived at modern nationhood. Since Homer's Greeks and Virgil's Romans no other people has cherished a grand national poem like The *Lusiads*, with exploration and conquest for theme. Ironically Camoens died on the eve of his country's loss of independence in 1580, brought on by the catastrophe in north Africa: by the time his next centenary comes round in 1980 it may well have suffered new disasters in southern Africa. Portugal and Spain are the classic demonstrations that a colonial empire is no passport to prosperity, except for privileged individuals or groups; still less an assurance of constitutional progress. How the silent majority of Portuguese feels is another matter,⁴³ but the vocal minority has always been reluctant to face this fact, if only because after possessing colonies for five centuries it has come to think of the national existence as bound up with them. Some of the exploits celebrated long ago by Camoens were indeed heroic, and such as a nation ought not to forget;

but no nation can live for ever on heroic memories and foreign guns. Obsession with the past has hindered this one from finding other and better ways by which a small nation can, like Norway for instance, achieve self-respect and the respect of others. Germany by contrast only had colonies for a single generation, and has now, we may hope, forgotten them.

Colonialism has bounded Portugal's horizon, and this has retarded it in every way. Even when trying to move forward the country has kept its head twisted round to the back, in contemplation of a "glorious" past, much as Muslims in Pakistan and India are failing to make progress because they cannot throw off nostalgia for "their" lost dominion. In recent times the willingness of too many Portuguese to support their rulers over Africa, if over nothing else, has had something like the paralysing effect that Ireland had a century ago on Liberal and working-class politics in Britain. The connection with Britain, the great gatherer of colonies, must always have helped to foment Portugal's colonial obsessions; and even today, after abandoning its own empire, this country continues to aid and abet them. To no two countries could we better apply Dr. Johnson's dictum about individuals, that "Most friendships are either partnerships in folly, or confederacies in vice". They may be both.

The relationship will enter a fresh phase when an unreformed Portugal and Spain are incorporated, as is too likely to happen before long, in a Europe already under the shadow of giant monopolies and anti-democratic forces of many kinds. It was a far-sighted American who warned Britain and France in 1849 that they ought to be fostering progress in the Peninsula, instead of thinking in narrow terms of self-interest. "The time may come . . . when rational progress and liberal institutions may have need of allies in the west of Europe."⁶⁴ Such a time came during the second World War. It may come again.

NOTES

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(This article is an enlargement of a discussion paper written for the conference held at Manchester in June 1973 by the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea.)