



GEORGE CANNING

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GEOURGE CANNING, British statesman, orator, and man of letters, was born of Irish parents at London, April 11, 1770, and died at Chiswick (seat of the Duke of Devonshire), Aug. 8, 1827. He was educated at Eton and at Oxford by his uncle, Stratford Canning, where he was soon known for his ability and wit, which was afterward abundantly manifested in his writings, as well as in his showy though brilliant eloquence in Parliament, and in his power as a burlesquer and lampoonist. In 1794, he entered Parliament under the auspices of Pitt, who two years later appointed him under-secretary of State. At this time he took a rather reactionary course in politics, opposing Parliamentary reform and peace with France, though aiding Wilberforce in his efforts to abolish the Slave trade. Later in his career he evinced, if not his liberalism, his progressive spirit and thorough goodness of heart by aiding Grattan in the latter's efforts on behalf of Catholic emancipation and in furthering the union with Ireland. From 1804 to 1806 he was treasurer of the navy, from 1807 to 1809 minister for foreign affairs, and from 1814 to 1816 served as ambassador at Lisbon. In 1822, on the suicide of Lord Castlereagh, he succeeded him in the secretaryship of foreign affairs, and in 1827 reached the premiership as successor to Lord Liverpool, but died while forming his cabinet. His talents were great as a speaker, the effect of his speeches being heightened by piquancy and a notable mother wit. The latter he especially showed in his amusing parodies in the "Anti-Jacobin," and in the familiar "Needy Knife-Grinder." For his gift as a speaker and orator, see his collected speeches, by R. Therry; also his "Life" by Bell, and "Canning and His Times," by Stapleton.

ON AFFORDING AID TO PORTUGAL

[England had been for nearly two centuries the ally and protector of Portugal and was bound to defend her when attacked.]

In 1826, a body of absolutists, headed by the Queen Dowager and the Marquess of Chaves, attempted to destroy the existing Portuguese government, which had been founded on the basis of constitutional liberty. This government had been acknowledged by England, France, Austria, and Russia. It was, however, obnoxious to Ferdinand, king of Spain; and Portugal was invaded from the Spanish territory by large bodies of Portuguese absolutists, who had been there organized with the connivance, if not the direct aid, of the Spanish government.

The Portuguese government now demanded the assistance of England. Five thousand troops were therefore instantly ordered to Lisbon, and Mr. Canning came forward in this speech to explain the reasons of his prompt intervention. The speech, delivered in the House of Commons, Dec. 12, 1826, is considered the masterpiece of his eloquence.]

MR. SPEAKER,— In proposing to the House of Commons to acknowledge, by an humble and dutiful address, his Majesty's most gracious message, and to reply to it in terms which will be, in effect, an echo of the sentiments and a fulfillment of the anticipations of that message, I feel that, however confident I may be in the justice, and however clear as to the policy, of the measures therein announced, it becomes me, as a British minister recommending to Parliament any step which may approximate this country even to the hazard of a war, while I explain the grounds of that proposal, to accompany my explanation with expressions of regret.

I can assure the House that there is not within its walls any set of men more deeply convinced than his Majesty's ministers—nor any individual more intimately persuaded than he who has now the honor of addressing you—of the vital importance of the continuance of peace to this country and to the world.

So strongly am I impressed with this opinion—and for reasons of which I will put the House more fully in possession before I sit down—that I declare there is no question of doubtful or controverted policy—no opportunity of present national advantage—no precaution against remote difficulty—which I would not gladly compromise, pass over, or adjourn, rather than call on Parliament to sanction, at this moment, any measure which had a tendency to involve the country in war.

But at the same time, sir, I feel that which has been felt, in the best times of English history, by the best statesmen of this country, and by the Parliaments by whom those statesmen were supported—I feel that there are two causes, and but two causes, which cannot be either compromised, passed over,

or adjourned. These causes are, adherence to the national faith and regard for the national honor.

Sir, if I did not consider both these causes as involved in the proposition which I have this day to make to you, I should not address the House, as I now do, in the full and entire confidence that the gracious communication of his Majesty will be met by the House with the concurrence of which his Majesty has declared his expectation.

In order to bring the matter which I have to submit to you under the cognizance of the House in the shortest and clearest manner, I beg leave to state it, in the first instance, divested of any collateral considerations. It is a case of law and of fact: of national law on the one hand, and of notorious fact on the other; such as it must be, in my opinion, as impossible for Parliament as it was for the government to regard in any but one light, or to come to any but one conclusion upon it.

Among the alliances by which, at different periods of our history, this country has been connected with the other nations of Europe, none is so ancient in origin and so precise in obligation—none has continued so long and been observed so faithfully—of none is the memory so intimately interwoven with the most brilliant records of our triumphs, as that by which Great Britain is connected with Portugal.

It dates back to distant centuries; it has survived an endless variety of fortunes. Anterior in existence to the accession of the house of Braganza to the throne of Portugal, it derived, however, fresh vigor from that event; and never, from that epoch to the present hour, has the independent monarchy of Portugal ceased to be nurtured by the friendship of Great Britain.

This alliance has never been seriously interrupted; but it

has been renewed by repeated sanctions. It has been maintained under difficulties by which the fidelity of other alliances were shaken, and has been vindicated in fields of blood and of glory.

That the alliance with Portugal has been always unqualifiedly advantageous to this country—that it has not been sometimes inconvenient and sometimes burdensome—I am not bound or prepared to maintain. But no British statesman, so far as I know, has ever suggested the expediency of shaking it off; and it is assuredly not at a moment of need that honor and what I may be allowed to call national sympathy would permit us to weigh with an over-scrupulous exactness the amount of difficulties and dangers attendant upon its faithful and steadfast observance. What feelings of national honor would forbid is forbidden alike by the plain dictates of national faith.

It is not at distant periods of history and in bygone ages only that the traces of the union between Great Britain and Portugal are to be found. In the last compact of modern Europe, the compact which forms the basis of its present international law—I mean the treaty of Vienna of 1815—this country, with its eyes open to the possible inconveniences of the connection, but with a memory awake to its past benefits, solemnly renewed the previously existing obligations of alliance and amity with Portugal. I will take leave to read to the House the third article of the treaty concluded at Vienna, in 1815, between Great Britain on the one hand, and Portugal on the other. It is couched in the following terms:

“The treaty of alliance, concluded at Rio de Janeiro, on the 19th of February, 1810, being founded on circumstances of a temporary nature which have happily ceased to exist, the said treaty is hereby declared to be void in all its parts, and of

no effect; without prejudice, however, to the ancient treaties of alliance, friendship, and guarantee, which have so long and so happily subsisted between the two Crowns, and which are hereby renewed by the high contracting parties and acknowledged to be of full force and effect.”

In order to appreciate the force of this stipulation—recent in point of time, recent, also, in the sanction of Parliament—the House will perhaps allow me to explain shortly the circumstances in reference to which it was contracted.

In the year 1807, when, upon the declaration of Bonaparte that the house Braganza had ceased to reign, the King of Portugal, by the advice of Great Britain, was induced to set sail for the Brazils; almost at the very moment of his most faithful Majesty's embarkation, a secret convention was signed between his Majesty and the King of Portugal, stipulating that, in the event of his most faithful Majesty's establishing the seat of his government in Brazil, Great Britain would never acknowledge any other dynasty than that of the house of Braganza on the throne of Portugal.

That convention, I say, was contemporaneous with the migration to the Brazils; a step of great importance at the time, as removing from the grasp of Bonaparte the sovereign family of Braganza. Afterward, in the year 1810, when the seat of the King of Portugal's government was established at Rio de Janeiro, and when it seemed probable, in the then apparently hopeless condition of the affairs of Europe, that it was likely long to continue there, the secret convention of 1807, of which the main object was accomplished by the fact of the emigration to Brazil, was abrogated, and a new and public treaty was concluded, into which was transferred the stipulation of 1807, binding Great Britain, so long as his faithful Majesty should be compelled to reside in Brazil, not

to acknowledge any other sovereign of Portugal than a member of the house of Braganza. That stipulation, which had hitherto been secret, thus became patent, and part of the known law of nations.

In the year 1814, in consequence of the happy conclusion of the war, the option was afforded to the King of Portugal of returning to his European dominions. It was then felt that, as the necessity of his most faithful Majesty's absence from Portugal had ceased, the ground for the obligation originally contracted in the secret convention of 1807, and afterward transferred to the patent treaty of 1810, was removed. The treaty of 1810 was therefore annulled at the Congress of Vienna, and, in lieu of the stipulation not to acknowledge any other sovereign of Portugal than a member of the house of Braganza, was substituted that which I have just read to the House.

Annulling the treaty of 1810, the treaty of Vienna renews and confirms (as the House will have seen) all former treaties between Great Britain and Portugal, describing them as "ancient treaties of alliance, friendship, and guarantee;" as having "long and happily subsisted between the two Crowns;" and as being allowed, by the two high contracting parties, to remain "in full force and effect."

What, then, is the force—what is the effect of those ancient treaties? I am prepared to show to the House what it is. But before I do so I must say that if all the treaties to which this article of the treaty of Vienna refers had perished by some convulsion of nature, or had by some extraordinary accident been consigned to total oblivion, still it would be impossible not to admit, as an incontestable inference from this article of the treaty of Vienna alone, that in a moral point of view there is incumbent on Great Britain

a decided obligation to act as the effectual defender of Portugal.

If I could not show the letter of a single antecedent stipulation I should still contend that a solemn admission, only ten years old, of the existence at that time of "treaties of alliance, friendship, and guarantee," held Great Britain to the discharge of the obligations which that very description implies. But fortunately there is no such difficulty in specifying the nature of those obligations. All of the preceding treaties exist; all of them are of easy reference, all of them are known to this country, to Spain, to every nation of the civilized world. They are so numerous, and their general result is so uniform, that it may be sufficient to select only two of them to show the nature of all.

The first to which I shall advert is the treaty of 1661, which was concluded at the time of the marriage of Charles the Second with the Infanta of Portugal. After reciting the marriage, and making over to Great Britain, in consequence of that marriage, first, a considerable sum of money, and, secondly, several important places, some of which, as Tangier, we no longer possess; but others of which, as Bombay, still belong to this country, the treaty runs thus:

"In consideration of all which grants, so much to the benefit of the King of Great Britain and his subjects in general, and of the delivery of those important places to his said Majesty and his heirs forever, etc., the King of Great Britain does profess and declare, with the consent and advice of his council, that he will take the interests of Portugal and all its dominions to heart, defending the same with his utmost power by sea and land, even as England itself."

It then proceeds to specify the succors to be sent, and the manner of sending them.

I come next to the treaty of 1703, a treaty of alliance con-

temporaneous with the Methuen treaty, which has regulated, for upward of a century, the commercial relations of the two countries. The treaty of 1703 was a tripartite engagement between the States-General of Holland, England, and Portugal. The second article of that treaty sets forth that—

“If ever it shall happen that the Kings of Spain and France, either the present or the future, that both of them together, or either of them separately, shall make war, or give occasion to suspect that they intend to make war upon the kingdom of Portugal, either on the continent of Europe or on its dominions beyond the seas; her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, and the lords the States-General, shall use their friendly offices with the said Kings, or either of them, in order to persuade them to observe the terms of peace toward Portugal, and not to make war upon it.”

The third article declares—

“That in the event of these good offices not proving successful, but altogether ineffectual, so that war should be made by the aforesaid Kings, or by either of them, upon Portugal, the above-mentioned powers of Great Britain and Holland shall make war with all their force upon the aforesaid Kings or King who shall carry hostile arms into Portugal; and toward that war which shall be carried on in Europe they shall supply twelve thousand men, whom they shall arm and pay, as well when in quarters as in action; and the said high allies shall be obliged to keep that number of men complete, by recruiting it from time to time at their own expense.”

I am aware, indeed, that with respect to either of the treaties which I have quoted it is possible to raise a question—whether variation of circumstances or change of times may not have somewhat relaxed its obligations. The treaty of 1661, it might be said, was so loose and prodigal in the wording, it is so unreasonable, so wholly out of nature, that any one country should be expected to defend another, “even as itself;” such stipulations are of so exaggerated a character

as to resemble effusions of feeling rather than enunciations of deliberate compact.

Again, with respect to the treaty of 1703, if the case rested on that treaty alone, a question might be raised whether or not, when one of the contracting parties—Holland—had since so changed her relations with Portugal as to consider her obligations under the treaty of 1703 as obsolete—whether, or not, I say, under such circumstances, the obligation on the remaining party be not likewise void. I should not hesitate to answer both these objections in the negative.

But without entering into such a controversy it is sufficient for me to say that the time and place for taking such objections was at the Congress at Vienna. Then and there it was that if you, indeed, considered these treaties as obsolete, you ought frankly and fearlessly to have declared them to be so. But then and there, with your eyes open, and in the face of all modern Europe, you proclaimed anew the ancient treaties of alliance, friendship, and guarantee, “so long subsisting between the Crowns of Great Britain and Portugal,” as still “acknowledged by Great Britain” and still “of full force and effect.” It is not, however, on specific articles alone; it is not so much, perhaps, on either of these ancient treaties, taken separately, as it is on the spirit and understanding of the whole body of treaties, of which the essence is concentrated and preserved in the treaty of Vienna, that we acknowledge in Portugal a right to look to Great Britain as her ally and defender.

This, sir, being the state, morally and politically, of our obligations toward Portugal, it is obvious that when Portugal, in apprehension of the coming storm, called on Great Britain for assistance, the only hesitation on our part could be—not whether that assistance was due, supposing the occasion

for demanding it to arise, but simply whether that occasion, in other words, whether *casus fœderis* had arisen.

I understand, indeed, that in some quarters it has been imputed to his Majesty's ministers that an extraordinary delay intervened between the taking of the determination to give assistance to Portugal and the carrying of that determination into effect. But how stands the fact? On Sunday, the third of this month, we received from the Portuguese ambassador a direct and formal demand of assistance against a hostile aggression from Spain. Our answer was, that although rumors had reached us through France his Majesty's government had not that accurate information—that official and precise intelligence of facts—on which they could properly found an application to Parliament. It was only on last Friday night that this precise information arrived. On Saturday his Majesty's confidential servants came to a decision. On Sunday that decision received the sanction of his Majesty. On Monday it was communicated to both Houses of Parliament; and this day, sir, at the hour in which I have the honor of addressing you, the troops are on their march for embarkation.

I trust, then, sir, that no unseemly delay is imputable to government. But undoubtedly, on the other hand, when the claim of Portugal for assistance, a claim clear, indeed, in justice, but at the same time fearfully spreading in its possible consequences, came before us, it was the duty of his Majesty's government to do nothing on hearsay. The eventual force of the claim was admitted; but a thorough knowledge of facts was necessary before the compliance with that claim could be granted. The government here labored under some disadvantage. The rumors which reached us through Madrid were obviously distorted, to answer partial political

purposes; and the intelligence through the press of France, though substantially correct, was, in particulars, vague and contradictory. A measure of grave and serious moment could never be founded on such authority; nor could the ministers come down to Parliament until they had a confident assurance that the case which they had to lay before the legislature was true in all its parts.

But there was another reason which induced a necessary caution. In former instances when Portugal applied to this country for assistance the whole power of the state in Portugal was vested in the person of the monarch. The expression of his wish, the manifestation of his desire, the putting forth of his claim, was sufficient ground for immediate and decisive action on the part of Great Britain, supposing the *casus fœderis* to be made out. But, on this occasion, inquiry was in the first place to be made whether, according to the new constitution of Portugal, the call upon Great Britain was made with the consent of all the powers and authorities competent to make it, so as to carry with it an assurance of that reception in Portugal for our army which the army of a friend and ally had a right to expect. Before a British soldier should put his foot on Portuguese ground, nay, before he should leave the shores of England, it was our duty to ascertain that the step taken by the Regency of Portugal was taken with the cordial concurrence of the legislature of that country. It was but this morning that we received intelligence of the proceedings of the Chambers at Lisbon, which establishes the fact of such concurrence. This intelligence is contained in a dispatch from Sir W. A'Court, dated 29th of November, of which I will read an extract to the House:

“The day after the news arrived of the entry of the rebels into Portugal, the ministers demanded from the Chambers

an extension of power for the executive government, and the permission to apply for foreign succors, in virtue of ancient treaties, in the event of their being deemed necessary. The deputies gave the requisite authority by acclamation; and an equally good spirit was manifested by the peers, who granted every power that the ministers could possibly require. They even went further, and, rising in a body from their seats, declared their devotion to their country, and their readiness to give their personal services, if necessary, to repel any hostile invasion. The Duke de Cadaval, president of the Chamber, was the first to make this declaration; and the minister who described this proceeding to me said it was a movement worthy of the good days of Portugal!"

I have thus incidentally disposed of the supposed imputation of delay in complying with the requisition of the Portuguese government. The main question, however, is this: Was it obligatory upon us to comply with that requisition? In other words, had the *casus fœderis* arisen? In our opinion it had. Bands of Portuguese rebels, armed, equipped, and trained in Spain, had crossed the Spanish frontier, carrying terror and devastation into their own country, and proclaiming sometimes the brother of the reigning sovereign of Portugal, sometimes a Spanish princess, and sometimes even Ferdinand of Spain, as the rightful occupant of the Portuguese throne. These rebels crossed the frontier, not at one point only, but at several points; for it is remarkable that the aggression on which the original application to Great Britain for succor was founded is not the aggression with reference to which that application has been complied with.

The attack announced by the French newspapers was on the north of Portugal, in the province of Tras-os-Montes; an official account of which has been received by his Majesty's government only this day. But on Friday an account was received of an invasion in the south of Portugal, and of the

capture of Villa Viciosa, a town lying on the road from the southern frontier to Lisbon. This new fact established even more satisfactorily than a mere confirmation of the attack first complained of would have done, the systematic nature of the aggression of Spain against Portugal. One hostile irruption might have been made by some single corps escaping from their quarters — by some body of stragglers who might have evaded the vigilance of Spanish authorities; and one such accidental and unconnected act of violence might not have been conclusive evidence of cognizance and design on the part of those authorities: but when a series of attacks are made along the whole line of a frontier it is difficult to deny that such multiplied instances of hostility are evidence of concerted aggression.

If a single company of Spanish soldiers had crossed the frontier in hostile array, there could not, it is presumed, be a doubt as to the character of that invasion. Shall bodies of men, armed, clothed, and regimented by Spain, carry fire and sword into the bosom of her unoffending neighbor; and shall it be pretended that no attack, no invasion has taken place, because, forsooth, these outrages are committed against Portugal by men to whom Portugal had given birth and nurture? What petty quibbling would it be to say that an invasion of Portugal from Spain was not a Spanish invasion because Spain did not employ her own troops, but hired mercenaries to effect her purpose? And what difference is it, except as an aggravation, that the mercenaries in this instance were natives of Portugal.

I have already stated, and I now repeat, that it never has been the wish or the pretension of the British government to interfere in the internal concerns of the Portuguese nation. Questions of that kind the Portuguese nation must settle