

The President of the Portuguese Republic

Theophilo Braga, Poet, Scholar, Philosopher

[Written for The Independent (New York) by Hayward Keniston, A. M., lately instructor in Romance Languages in Harvard University.]

For the first time in eight centuries of national history, a republican flag floats over Portugal, and the spirit which swept France in the eighteenth century has found another tardy expression in a sister nation of the Latin race. The first evidence of the power of democratic ideas had appeared as long ago as 1820 in the revolt against the British regency, when the discontent culminated in the charter of 1826. By this charter provision was made for a general assembly, consisting of two chambers, the Camara dos Pares and the Camara dos Deputados. Executive power was lodged in the king, but his power of veto was merely suspensive. Under this constitutional monarchy the nineteenth century was a stormy one for Portugal. When rival claimants for the throne ceased to rend her civic welfare, the warring elements of the varied political parties, each seeking its own aggrandizement, defeated the ends of administration and justice. With every position of public service, down to that of the humblest street cleaner, a government appointment, in which the incumbent felt his duty discharged with the collection of his salary, "graft" was rife. A recent writer has remarked: "It is not saying too much to assert that Portugal's present troubles are due to a surfeit of politics rather than to a paucity of actual resources." By the end of the century conditions had become almost desperate; the national debt was heavy; credit impaired abroad and a general decline in industry apparent at home. The administrative dictatorship of Premier Franco, in 1907, made necessary by the obstructive policy of the dissenting parties in refusing to pass the budget, ended in the lamentable assassination of Carlos I. and of the crown prince in February, 1908. Manuel's advisers forced the dismissal of Franco and an election was called. But unrest was still evident, and 1909 saw four successive ministries. Something was wrong somewhere; manifestly the constitution was not providing a satisfactory form of government.

These years of decline in material prosperity had, however, seen a remarkable revival of letters. Two types in particular had been cultivated with unusual success—poetry and history. At Coimbra, the university town, a new school of poets, reacting against the ultra-romanticists, had striven to restore poetry to a rational foundation. There, too, began the investigations of Portuguese history along the scientific and philosophical principles of Vico. But these men were not mere speculators and dreamers. The men of letters and the men of affairs have never represented distinct types in the Iberian peninsula, and the inevitable consequence of their doctrines was an active participation in the affairs of the state. Their acquaintance with the thought of France made them intolerant of institutions in any form. We are not surprised that they allied themselves with the republican element. Among a people as generally illiterate as the Portuguese their mental achievements were held in such esteem that their advancement in politics was assured. Little by little they have attempted to disseminate their philosophical theories of republicanism and of liberty, often misguided in their methods, it is true, but inspired with a high ideal of national unity and of individual freedom. It is fitting that Portugal should have chosen as her pilot across the trying sea of constitutional reform the man who, by his works and by his teaching, has been the most important factor in making possible a peaceful transition from the ancient regime to a new order.

Theophilo Braga is the son of a former artillery officer who, on the termination of the conflict between Dom Miguel and Dom Pedro, in 1834, entered the teaching profession in his native town, Ponta Delgada, on the island of San Miguel, in the Azores. There Theophilo was born on February 24, 1843, the youngest of several children. His mother died when he was three years old and the stepmother who came into his home in the following year filled with bitterness the formative period of his life. His early training at the Lyceu, where his father was professor, was supplemented by his own reading in the printing shop where he worked in spare hours. At the age of sixteen he published a little collection of sentimental verse,

called "Folhas Verdes" ("Green Leaves"). On the point of taking ship for America in the following year to escape his domestic unhappiness, he was persuaded by his father to go to Coimbra to enter the course in law. In April, 1861, he was on his way to the continent—a moody youth with infinite mental curiosity and boundless confidence in himself.

The atmosphere of the university, which he afterwards described as a "lazaretto cloistered from modern ideas," seemed to him then a paradise of freedom, and he plunged into the new world of study with enthusiasm. Although forced to eke out his meager allowance by various activities, such as translating Chateaubrian, he found time even amid his legal studies to continue his poetry, and in 1864 surprised his comrades by the publication of a long epic poem, the "Visao dos Tempos" ("Vision of the Ages"). This poem, manifestly suggested by Hugo's "Legende des Siecles," in its three parts pictures the development of mankind through the cycles of fatality, of struggle and of liberty; its various lyric and narrative episodes form an epic of humanity. Its success was immediate. Young Portugal acclaimed a new high priest in this islander with his far-reaching outlook. But meanwhile the law had not been neglected, and in 1868 he was admitted to the doctorate. For three years he lived an uncertain life, writing verse, publishing his collections of early Portuguese popular song, trying in vain for an appointment at Porto and at Coimbra.

In 1872 he presented himself as a candidate for the chair of modern languages in the Curso Superior de Lettras, in Lisbon, and in public competition defeated Pinheiro Chagas, his chief rival for the appointment. With his activity as a teacher of Portuguese literature begins a vast history of that literature, which in its thirty-two volumes already published leaves hardly a phase of the development of the art of letters untouched. His interest has dwelt chiefly on those works and periods which seemed best to illustrate the unfolding of the national genius; his purpose has been to demonstrate the identity of a Portuguese renaissance.

The necessity of filling a temporary vacancy in the chair of universal history at the Curso a few years later led Senhor Braga to a new field of investigation, the results of which are embodied in his "Historia Universal." Even more important for his mental development was his study of philosophy, also begun in connection with a course in the Curso. In Auguste Comte he found an interpretation of the universe and of man well suited to his temperament and he soon became the leading representative of positivism in Portugal, expounding his ideas in the "General Outlines of Positivistic Philosophy" and in a "System of Sociology." Incident to his wider grasp of human problems came a series of investigations in Portuguese ethnology and folk-lore. Braga now set before himself the task of realizing the threefold activity of the human spirit—the poetic, the scientific, the philosophic. Surveying his work as a whole, he proceeded to balance its various parts. To his "Vision of the Ages" he added another volume; the mental activity of Portugal was treated in a "History of the University of Coimbra;" philosophy in its relation to politics was the theme of his "Positivistic Solutions of Portuguese Politics."

Not the least of the tenets of his religion is the need of action and he entered zealously into public life. As editor of O Positivismo, as republican deputy and leader in the Cortes, as moving spirit of the tercentenary of Camoens, he was tireless in his efforts to spread his teachings, not merely as abstract doctrines—and here he differs from the rationalistic philosophers of the eighteenth century in France—but as a practical solution of the problems which confront his people.

Senhor Braga's activity has been incredible. In the forty years during which he has taught in Lisbon, he has written more than a hundred books, covering almost every phase of Portuguese life and thought; he has maintained relations with the principal thinkers of Europe; he has been a leading spirit of the republican movement of Portugal. In such a crowded career, it is not to be wondered that his productions are not impeccable; the casual reader finds them full of inaccuracies, of inconsistencies, of hasty generalizations from insufficient data. But

he has performed a service which cannot be over-estimated. To him must be assigned the chief credit for awakening Portugal to a consciousness of her national entity in history and in art, and for pointing out her intimate relations with France and the other countries of Europe. He has come to stand for the best that there is in the Portuguese genius.

Such is the man who has been named as the head of the provisional government. And his associates are men cast in the same mold. Affonso da Costa, minister of justice, long a professor of law in the university, a lawyer of wide reputation, is regarded as one of the ablest speakers and keenest thinkers in his profession. Bernardino Machado and Antonio d'Almeida are literary men who have cast in their lot with the progressive movement of constitutional reform. These men are neither agitators nor demagogues, but intelligent thinkers, men who are convinced that the existing conditions under the monarchy were impossible. Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the philosophic nature of the revolution. Not the king, nor the dynasty is the object of their attack, but an outworn principle of hereditary right to govern, of the existence of a class of privilege. The movement which they head is not the protest of a downtrodden layer of society, demanding economic and industrial relief, but the inevitable progress of the individual toward social equality with his fellows.

The task which lies before these leaders is not an easy one. Whether their theoretical plans will prove adapted to the peculiar needs of their position is a question. The possibilities of the Portuguese race are greater than ever; in Brazil and in Africa are wide opportunities for industrial development and for trade; at home are prospects of increased activity in mining and in manufactures. There is little doubt that the possibility of a Pan-Iberian alliance is remote. Theophilo Braga is a federalist, but he is a Portuguese federalist and he has spent the greater part of his life in indicating how the Portuguese nation has grown up in her conditions and in her own characteristic expression. We may believe that he will seek now a way whereby she may work out her own salvation. That scenes of violence will attend the establishment of the new government may be expected; six men were killed and more than fifty wounded in the riots at the last general election in Lisbon. The spirit of mob rule will appear in any time of disturbance even in the most cool-headed countries. But that any measures of lawlessness or violation of personal rights or property will be tolerated or connived at by the authorities is out of the question. Theophilo Braga and his associates are men to appreciate the seriousness and responsibility of their high calling; we may look to them to restore to their fatherland the prestige she once enjoyed when Portuguese ships were pioneers on every sea.

A WISE DECISION

President Mellen of the Boston and Maine railroad, says in a recent speech: "We shall not interfere with the election of members of the legislature or other public officers. We shall do away with the lobby, in the sense in which that term is commonly used. We must, however, employ the ablest talent we can secure to present to the legislature our views upon pending legislation affecting our company."

Good! Let the roads recognize the right of the people to rule. Let them present their side openly and honestly and then trust the people to do them justice.

"T'WAS EVER THUS"

On the 8th of October, 1776, John Adams wrote to his wife from Philadelphia: "The spirit of venality you mention is the most dreadful and alarming enemy America has to oppose. It is as rapacious and insatiable as the grave. This predominant avarice will ruin America, if she is ever ruined. If God Almighty does not interfere by His grace to control this universal idolatry to the mammon of unrighteousness, we shall be given up to the chastisement of His judgment. I am ashamed of the age I live in."

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