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UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede autori Sotto attacco

Sebastiao Jose de Carvalho e Melo, Marques de Pombal

The son of a country gentleman of modest means, b. in Lisbon, 13 May, 1699; d. 8 August, 1782. He was said to have been educated at the University of Coimbra and served for a time in the army. After a turbulent life in the capital, he carried off and married the niece of the Conde dos Arcos, and his aversion for the nobility originated perhaps with the opposition offered by her family to what they deemed a



mésalliance. Pombal then retired to a country estate near Soure, and in his thirty-ninth year received his first public appointment, being sent as minister to London in 1738. In 1745 he was transferred to Vienna, where his work was to effect a reconciliation between the pope and the empress; there in the same year he married as his second wife the daughter of Field Marshal Daun, a union brought about by the influence of John V's Austrian wife, who befriended him more than once, though the king disliked him and recalled him in 1749. John died 31 July, 1750, and on 3 August, 1750, the new monarch, Joseph, named Pombal Minister of Foreign Affairs. The distinguished diplomat, D. Luiz da Cunha, had recommended Pombal to Joseph when the latter was only prince, but it was the faovur of the queen-mother and perhaps also of a Jesuit, Father Moreira, that secured him the coveted post. His superior intelligence and masterful will enabled him in a short time to dominate his colleagues, who were dismissed or made insignificant, and with the acquiescence of his royal master he became the first power in the State. Some years later the English ambassador said of him, "with all his faults, he is the sole man in this kingdom capable of being at the head of affairs". His energy after the earthquake, 1 Nov., 1755, confirmed his ascendancy over the king, and he became successively first Minister, Count of Oceras in 1759, and Marquis of Pombal in 1770. The mysterious attempt, 3 Sept., 1758, on the king's life gave him a pretext to crush the independence of the nobility. He magnified an act of private vengeance on the part of the Duke of Aveiro into a widespread conspiracy, and after a trial which was a mockery, the duke, members of the Tavora family and their servants were publicly put to death with horrible cruelties at Belem, 13 Jan., 1759.



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No penalty was considered too severe for *lèse majesté* and there is some evidence that Joseph himself ordered the prosecution, indicated the Tavoras for punishment, and charged Pombal to show no mercy. If true, this explains in part the leniency shown him after his fall by Joseph's daughter and successor, Queen Maria. The so-called Pombaline terror dates from these executions. The people were effectively cowed when they saw that perpetual imprisonment, exile, and death rewarded the enemies or even the critics of the dictator.

He was bound to come into conflict with the Jesuits, who exercised no small influence at Court and in the country. They appear to have blocked his projects to marry the heiress presumptive to the Protestant Duke of Cumberland and to grant privileges to the Jews in return for aid in rebuilding Lisbon, but the first open dispute arose over the execution of the Treaty of Limits (13 Jan., 1750), regulating Spanish and Portuguese jurisdiction in the River Plate. When the Indians declined to leave their houses in compliance with its provisions and had to be coerced, Pombal attributed their refusal to Jesuit machinations. Various other difficulties of the Government were laid to their charge and by the cumulative effect of these accusations, the minister prepared king and public for a campaign against the Society in which he was inspired by the **Jansenist** and Regalist ideas then current in Europe. He had begun his open attack by having the Jesuit confessors dismissed from Court, 20 Sept., 1757, but it was the Tavora plot in which he implicated the Jesuits on the ground of their friendship with some of the supposed conspirators that enabled him to take decisive action. On 19 Jan., 1759, he issued a decree sequestering the property of the Society in the Portuguese dominions and the following September deported the Portuguese fathers, about one thousand in number, to the Pontifical States, keeping the foreigners in prison. The previous year he had obtained from Benedict XIV the appointment of a creature of his, Cardinal Saldanha, as visitor, with power to reform the Society, but events proved that his real intention was to end it. Still not content with his victory, he determined to humiliate it in the person of a conspicuous member, and himself denounced Father Gabriel Malagrida to the Inquisition for crimes against the Faith. He caused the old missionary, who had lost his wits through suffering, to be strangled and then burnt. He entered into negotiations with the Courts of Spain, France, and Naples to win from the pope by joint action the suppression of the Society, and having no success with Clement XIII, he expelled the Nuncio 17 June, 1760, and broke off relations with Rome. The bishops were compelled to exercise functions reserved to the Holy See and the Portuguese Church came to have Pombal as its effective head. The religious autonomy of the nation being thus complete, he sought to justify his action by issuing the "Dedução Chronologica", in which the Jesuits were made responsible for all the calamities of Portugal. In 1773 Clement XIV, to prevent a schism, yielded to the pressure brought to bear on him and suppressed the Society. As soon as he was sure of success, Pombal made peace with Rome and in June, 1770, admitted a nuncio, but the ecclesiastical system of Portugal remained henceforth a sort of disguised Anglicanism, and many of the evils from which the Church now suffers are a legacy from him.

In the political sphere Pombal's administration was marked by boldness of conception and tenacity of purpose. It differed from the preceding in these particulars: (1) he levelled all classes before the royal authority; (2) he imposed absolute obedience to the law, which was largely decided by himself, because the Cortes had long ceased to meet; (3) he transformed the Inquisition into a mere department of the State. In the economic sphere, impressed by British commercial supremacy, he sought and with success to improve the material condition of Portugal. Nearly all the privileged companies and monopolies he founded ended in financial failure and helped the few rather than the many, yet when the populace of Operto rose in protest against the Alto Douro Wine Company, they



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were punished with ruthless severity, as was the fishing village of Trafaria, which was burnt by the minister's orders when it sheltered some unwilling recruits. His methods were the same with all classes. Justice went by the board in face of the reason of state; nevertheless he corrected many abuses in the administration. His activity penetrated every department. His most notable legislative work included the abolition of Indian slavery and of the odious distinction between old and new Christians, a radical reorganization of the finances, the reform of the University of Coimbra, the army and navy, and the foundation of the College of Nobles, the School of Commerce, and the Royal Press. He started various manufactures to render Portugal less dependent on Great Britain and his Chartered Companies had the same object, but he maintained the old political alliance between the two nations, though he took a bolder attitude than previous ministers had dared to do, both as regards England and other countries, and left a full treasury when the death of King Joseph, on 24 Feb., 1777, caused his downfall. He died in retirement, having for years suffered from leprosy and the fear of the punishment he had meted out to others. The bishop of Coimbra presided at his funeral, while a well-known Benedictine delivered the panegyric. Even to the end Pombal had many admirers among the clergy, and he is regarded by the Portuguese as one of their greatest statesmen and called the great Marquis.

Sources

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