

XV. ICHABOD

If we contrast the eyewitness accounts of Macao at the time of the Restoration of the Braganzas with those of a century later, we shall see beyond a peradventure that the glory has departed. This comparison, however odious, is the easier to make, since the fullest accounts of the social and economic life of the colony under the old regime belong precisely to those two periods. Peter Mundy's inimitable account of Macao in its heyday, may be contrasted with the cynical disillusionment and Cassandra-like forebodings of the Franciscan friar José de Jesus Maria, who wrote his *Azia Sinica e Japonica* during his four year sojourn in the colony in 1742-5.

This worthy friar ascribed the decadence of the city mainly to the improvident character of the Macaonese, who had no thought of saving for a rainy day, but spent their scanty earnings within twenty-four hours of receiving them. Since the place entirely depended on maritime trade, its inhabitants were largely at the mercy of the wind and weather which ruled their shipping. In the decade of 1735-45, they were particularly unfortunate in this respect, losing no fewer than eleven ships by storm, shipwreck, and fire, — three of them complete with crews and cargo. These misfortunes were aggravated by the obstinate refusal of the Macaonese, like their Portuguese progenitors, to learn any handicraft or manual vocation whereby they could maintain themselves in time of unemployment. This aversion to manual work applied to both sexes, who would rather beg their bread in the streets than do a hand's turn in what they regarded as menial and degrading labour. The consequence was that the population became little else than a seething mass of pauperised women.

If Gamelli Carreri and Alexander Hamilton had already

commented adversely on the excess of females fifty years earlier, Friar José was even more emphatic. He tells us that from a computation of the parish registers in 1745, he had ascertained that there were than 5,212 Christian souls in the City, of whom 3,301 were women and girls. The 1,911 men and boys included resident foreign employees of the English, Dutch and French East-India Companies, as well as converted Asiatic slaves other than Chinese. European Portuguese numbered only ninety. The Chinese population in the same year totalled about eight thousand, of whom only forty were Christian, or so Friar Joseph was reliably informed. This total population of 13,000 may be contrasted with the 44,000 souls living in the city exactly a century earlier. If we are to believe the scandalised Franciscan friar, economic decadence had been accompanied by a corresponding moral laxity, for he solemnly assures us that the town in his day was a hotbed of "lechery, robbery, treachery, gambling, drunkenness, brawling, wrangling, cheating, killing and other similar vices".

The whole of the local retail trade was in the hands of the Chinese, on whom the European and Eurasian citizens depended for the necessities and the luxuries of life. Friar Joseph would have us believe that they took a natural but unfair advantage of the constitutional laziness of their Iberianized fellow-townsmen, by defrauding them in every possible way when occasion offered. He instances their selling with short weight; adulterating rice with sand, and salt with earth; moistening firewood in water to increase its weight, and adulterating fruit and vegetables in the same way. Worse still, he complains that when he remonstrated with some of his compatriots for their behaviour, they replied that it was impossible to live in Macao without indulging in dishonesty and deceit. Part of the blame he lays on the sailors and merchants who acquired bad habits in the heretic ports of Batavia and Madras, whence they returned as past masters in various nefarious practices. He makes a revealing admission when he states that the ecclesiastical corporations, such as the dean and chapter of the cathedral, or the local monastic orders which had formerly been very wealthy, had latterly been reduced to dire straits owing to

the repeated embezzlement of their funds lent out to traders on *respondencia*. He neglects to point out, however, that in some instances the clergy had only themselves to blame, as in the case of the cathedral chapter whose funds were embezzled by the dean Casal, nephew of the cantankerous old Bishop of that name. The practice of ecclesiastical trading extended even to the Poor Clares of the Franciscan Convent of Santa Rosa, if a Senatorial complaint of December 1746 may be credited. The Senators alleged that although the nuns complained of poverty, they were simultaneously advancing considerable sums on *respondencia* to French, Armenian and Spanish merchants. They also resuscitated earlier complaints that the convent was absorbing all the wealthy girls of the city. One heiress brought with her the sum of 15,000 cruzados, although under the terms of the original charter the foundation was only supposed to receive dowerless maidens. These allegations are confirmed by the account of a contemporary Dutch resident, who further observed that the import duty of 1% *ad valorem* levied as contribution for the upkeep of the Convent, brought in an average annual income of 3,000 taels. The Senate suggested that no further novices should be admitted, and deplored the effect of their entry on the colony's population and morals.

The morals of the colony were not improved by the expulsion of the Jesuits and the confiscation of all their property on the orders of Pombal. The suppression of the Society in Macao was effected at 3 a.m. on the 5th July 1762, when the Jesuits were rounded up and confined in the Dominican convent, pending transportation to Goa and Europe. Numbers of them died in confinement or succumbed to the rigours of the homeward voyage, since for the most part they were kept in chains in the hold and given insufficient food and drink. Local tradition relates that the authorities expected to surprise them with Pombal's decree of expulsion, but found them, when called upon to leave the colony, mustered in a file, and ready to leave with nothing but their breviaries under their arms. It was believed that being forewarned of what was toward, they had previously disposed of their valuables to trustworthy citizens. There

seems no more reason to credit this allegation than the popular belief that they had concealed priceless treasures in the secret subterranean passages of Saint Paul's. The expulsion of the Jesuits also dealt a severe blow to the economic condition of the colony. Foreign observers were unanimous in their opinion that the commercial decline of the city was greatly accelerated by the loss of its most energetic and competent administrators. One of their most important properties was the Ilha Verde or Green Island in the inner harbour. This place was used as a starting-point by missionaries who were smuggled into the interior during times of persecution; apropos of which the Swedish historian Ljungstedt comments acidly, "Might they not have done more good by remaining where they were born?" The island subsequently became the property of the Vicente Rosa family, in liquidation of a debt which the extinct Society owed them.

Green Island was now about the only place left for the Macaonese to disport themselves *extra muros*. The Jesuit property at Oitem on Lapa island, directly fronting the inner harbour, which had been granted to the Order by the last Ming Emperor as a burial ground of Padre Sambiasi, was reclaimed by the Chinese about this time. The Augustinians who at one time also had property on Lapa, had abandoned their holdings some years earlier. Chinese encroachments had likewise resulted in the loss of landed estates in this area which had belonged to prominent citizens like Antonio de Mesquita Pimentel (Governor of Macao 1685-88) during the last quarter of the 17th century. The boating picnics on neighbouring islands which Peter Mundy mentions as being so numerous in his time, seem to have fallen into disuse, possibly owing to an increase in piracy. A letter of 1764 states that "the gardens and country houses, which the inhabitants formerly owned on the other side of the channel, had in consequence of misfortune and the ruin of the occupants been abandoned and entirely left in the hands of the Chinese". The general decadence is reflected in contemporary travellers' accounts of Macao, when compared with those of the previous century. A typically unflattering description occurs in the inimitable *Memoirs of William Hickey*.

Although one may agree with Rose Macaulay's observation concerning Mr. William Hickey, that wherever chance placed him he managed to put in a wonderful time, his brief visit to Macao was decidedly not a success. The jaundiced eye with which he regarded the colony one August morning in the year 1769, may have been due to the after-effects of a severe typhoon which had buffeted his ship off the Ladrões on the previous day. Readers of the *Memoirs* will however probably be more inclined to attribute it to a hangover, resulting from dining well rather than wisely aboard the East-Indiaman *Plassey*, in which he had taken passage from Madras to Canton. Whatever the cause, the Portuguese settlement found no favour in his eyes. The 'genial tripper' whom Miss Macaulay so charmingly commends for his unaffected enjoyment of Lisbon with its sights, sounds and smells in 1782, had nothing good to say of the 'gem of the Orient Earth'.

"Our sea-pilot having taken the ship into Macao roads, we there anchored to wait the arrival of a river pilot, and were told we had no chance of one until the following day. I therefore after dinner went on shore to this miserable place, where there is a wretched ill-constructed fort belonging to the Portuguese in which I saw a few sallow-faced half-naked, and apparently half starved creatures in old tattered coats that once had been blue, carrying muskets upon their shoulders, which, like the other accoutrements, were of a piece with their dress. These wretches were honoured with the title of 'soldiers'. Not only the men, but everything around bespoke the acme of poverty and misery. Satisfied with what I had seen, and nothing tempted by a printed board indicating the house upon which it was fixed to be 'The British Hotel' where was to be found 'elegant entertainment and comfortable lodging', I did not even take a look within, but walked as fast as my legs could carry me to the seaside, where McClintock, as disgusted as myself with Macao, had procured a boat, in which we returned to our own really comfortable apartment on board the *Plassey*'.

That the sour note sounded by William Hickey was not entirely due to his own intemperance or that of the weather, may be gathered from the complaints of Bishop Alexander

Guimarães a few years later. In seeking to justify his exclusion of non-Portuguese missionaries from Macao, this prelate alleged that the local authorities could not afford to flout the Chinese demands in this respect. The population of Macao included 22,000 Chinese, whereas the Christians of both sexes and all ages did not amount to 6,000 persons of very poor physique. If necessary, the Emperor could at a moment's notice fill Macao with so many Chinese that "if each one of them threw a slipper into the river, the bar would be silted up". The Bishop also found much to criticise in the behaviour of Macaonese women, who, in his opinion, were too fond of imbibing spirituous liquors, "which give rise to carnal desires". Other things which offended his puritanical zeal included tea-drinking and the chewing and spitting of betel in church. More serious perhaps was the practice of women crowding around a penitent during confession, so that they could hear what she was saying, and gossip about it afterwards. This last practice he checkmated by ordering a chalk circle to be drawn at a distance around the confessional box, only one woman at a time being allowed within the circle.

He also threatened to deport any woman under fifty years of age who should be found soliciting alms (or something else) without an episcopal and municipal licence. Such licences, he explained, would only be granted to those who were blind, crippled, or elderly. He further visited his strictures on the lax way in which the religious processions were organised on the high days and holidays. These were evidently liable to degenerate into a free-for-all, owing to the negro slaves getting out of hand and making unedifying scenes outside the Church doors. Nor did the manners and modes of the local clergy escape his censures. They were admonished *inter alia*, to shave their beards and cut their hair, to refrain from attending secular banquets, gambling parties and theatres. They were likewise enjoined to go to bed early, not to carry weapons in the streets, to bury the poor free of charge, and to pay more attention to the duties of their sacred calling in general. All in all, the episcopal pastorals give us no very high opinion of contemporary Macaonese morality; but such as it was, the Bishop evidently

considered it capable of still further deterioration. It was on this pretext that he deprecated a projected transfer of the English factory at Canton to Macao, since the heretics would corrupt local society, raise the cost of living and introduce luxurious standards of food and clothing. The Bishop never met William Hickey, but he would have been confirmed in his opinion had he done so. It was the practice of the budding Bengal attorney to take his breakfast at Canton with his young friend Bob Pott. This latter scapegrace was accustomed to overturn the table with all the chinaware on it, if anybody stayed too long over the meal for his taste. When Hickey once (and once only) remonstrated with him for this wanton waste, Bob Pott replied airily "Why, zounds! you surely forget where you are. I never suffer the servants to have the trouble of removing a tea equipage, always throwing the whole apparatus out of the window or down stairs. They easily procure another batch from the stewards' warehouse". Whatever criticisms may be levelled at the social shortcomings of the eighteenth-century Macaonese, their table manners were undoubtedly superior to those of these boorish representatives of Hogarth's London.

One of the questions dealt with by Bishop Guimarães was the ticklish topic of the colony's exact political status. This was never satisfactorily determined prior to Amaral's outright annexation of the place in 1849, and its formal admission by the Chinese Government in the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of 1888. Nor in the nature of things could it have been, for it was neither fish, fowl nor good red herring. Patriotic Portuguese from the time of the Visconde de Santarem (1845) onwards have claimed that the colony was lawfully ceded by the Ming Emperor in 1557, but they have never been able to adduce any contemporary document to prove it; nor do the existing Chinese records imply any such formal alienation of Chinese soil, which is inherently improbable on the face of it. On the other hand, modern Chinese claims that the place was entirely under the jurisdiction of the Kwangtung provincial authorities at all times, are likewise refuted by the known facts. English sneers, dating from the early days of Hongkong, that Macao was "an unrecognised and unpermitted but unchallenged squat-

ting on an undefined portion of Chinese Territory", must also be dismissed as inspired by ignorant malice and commercial jealousy. When it suited their own interests (as in 1803 and 1808) the English took a very different view of Portuguese rights; the following quotation from a little book by one Joseph Thompson, "Late of the East-India House", entitled *Considerations respecting the trade with China* (London, 1835) gives at once a juster and more temperate view, and one which sums up the actual position of Macao from 1557 to 1849, better than any other which I have seen.

"The supracargoes in detailing to the Court of Directors, a few years ago, a difference which had occurred between them and the Portuguese authorities of Macao, observed that the original document, granting Macao to the Portuguese, was supposed to be lost. The supracargoes, however, according to my remembrance of the circumstances, expressed their conviction, that the cession from the Chinese was full and complete. At times, it is said, the Portuguese acted as though they considered themselves possessed of full sovereignty at Macao; and on other occasions, particularly when the English sought permission to trade there, they pretended they held the place so entirely under the Chinese, that they could not grant any such request. But the fact undoubtedly is, that landed and other property at Macao is bought, sold, and possessed, by virtue of, and according to, the laws of Portugal. Civil, ecclesiastical, and criminal proceedings are also carried on according to Portuguese jurisprudence; and a case occurred, only a few years ago, in which a foreigner was tried, condemned, and executed at Macao under the sanction of, and in obedience to, those laws, the Chinese neither complaining nor interfering on the occasion. Hence whatever may be supposed respecting the real terms in which the original grant of Macao was couched, it may be presumed, that as in fact the Portuguese authorities do at the present time exercise many of the prerogatives of sovereignty in that district, it may be safely inferred, that the Portuguese government in Europe may, if they should deem such a measure advisable, transfer Macao to the English, on the same conditions as they appear

to have formerly received it from the Chinese, and thereby give the same authority to the English, to exercise the same prerogatives as the Portuguese now undoubtedly possess and exercise, under the sanction of the Crown of Portugal".

"... Transfer Macao to the English" ... Aye, there's the rub! But whilst that specious proposal largely accounts for this bland piece of special pleading, the facts stated are quite incontrovertible. Other instances could be adduced to show that the Ming and Manchu mandarins regarded Macao as not being entirely a part of the Middle Kingdom, although they would not have agreed that it was completely independent of Chinese suzerainty. Chief amongst these is the fact that at times when the celebration of the Roman Catholic cult was strictly prohibited throughout the Chinese Empire, no effort was ever made to apply this ban to Macao, if we except the half-hearted attempt by the *Sun-to* of the two Kwang in 1749. — and this was soon dropped in face of the resolute stand by Bishop Hilario and the Jesuits. Other striking instances are the rejection by the Senate of the *Sun-to's* proposal to transfer the foreign factories at Canton to Macao in 1718 and 1733. Had the Manchu government regarded Macao as a piece of Chinese soil pure and simple, they would never have consulted the wishes of the colonial authorities, but would have enforced the measure without hesitation. Contrariwise, the Portuguese plea that the colony was on a par with their other Asiatic settlements is likewise contradicted by all the available evidence. Nor did they pretend otherwise before the break-up of China began in the early 19th century.

A final quotation from Bishop Guimaraes limns the situation with sufficient accuracy, — "On this spot of China the great power of His Most Faithful Majesty is only absolute, *in solidum*, free and despotic in so far as regards his own vassals, who are likewise subject to the decisions of the Emperor. And as the allegiance is therefore a mixed one, dependent on both Our Lord the King and on the Emperor of China, I do not know how anything can be carried out by force against the orders of the lord of the soil. The Emperor has all the strength and we have none. He is the direct lord of Macao which pays him an annual

quitrent, whereas we only enjoy the practical ownership. The place was not obtained by conquest, and thus our residence is not firmly established". These arguments were advanced as reasons for opposing a line of action ordered by the home government with which the Bishop did not agree, and may be taken *cum grano salis*. But when all has been said *pro* and *con*, the fact remains that from 1557 to 1849, Macao, for all practical purposes, was under a mixed regime administered by the Portuguese but strongly influenced by the Chinese.

Although the genial English toper and the puritanical Portuguese Bishop make it quite clear that the glory had departed from Macao in their time, there was still a sunset glow of attraction about the place which exerted its fascination on other and more discerning spirits. Such a one was William Hunter, who wrote of Macao as he first saw it in the days of the painter Chinnery during the early nineteenth century. He commends its delightful climate, completely within the sea breezes, and its beautiful situation, comparing the Bay of Macao with that of Naples. At that time, and for another half-century it offered a perhaps unique specimen of Western colonies in the Eastern world as they existed three centuries ago, — in its forts, churches, and walls, its convents, senate house, and the extensive solidly-built private residences.

The scenic beauties of the place made a similar impression on an earlier visitor and contemporary of William Hickey, the Hollander A.E. van Braam Houckgeest, who spent long years as chief of the Dutch East-India Company's factory at Canton and knew the Portuguese colony well. He devotes a hundred pages to a description of it in the second volume of his *Voyage de l'Ambassade de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales Hollandaises vers l'Empereur de la Chine dans les années 1794 et 1795*, printed at Philadelphia of all places in 1798. This is the fullest account of Macao which appeared in print before the present century, but it has been ignored or neglected by modern historians. Although full of admiration for Macao's natural beauty and potential economic advantages, he partakes of William Hickey's scorn for its inhabitants; albeit in his case with more reason,

since his knowledge of the place was not limited to a quick trip ashore from a hospitable East-Indiaman.

Van Braam's impression of the domestic interior of a wealthy Macaonese hearth and home in 1770, is a sorry contrast to the colourful glimpse of family life afforded Peter Mundy in 1637. The Dutchman admits that the houses were large and spacious, but alleges they were badly designed and clumsily built, — "more like labyrinths than dwelling-places inside". Rooms communicated directly with each other, and were furnished more in the Chinese than in the European taste. The family lived on the first floor, the ground floor being usually used as a warehouse, or for storing surplus furniture. Houses were strongly built, the walls being usually three or four feet thick.

In strong contrast to the golden days of the seventeenth century, even the wealthy Senators kept a very poor table, "the richest Portuguese often contenting themselves with a little salted fish and rice". This spartan fare was indeed a surprise to anybody who, like Van Braam, was accustomed to the profuse hospitality, not to say downright gluttony, which characterised the lucullan boards of the wealthy Factors at Batavia, Calcutta and Madras. Latin abstemiousness in wine was also another source of never ending wonder to the jolly toppers of John Company, who noted with pained surprise that the Portuguese "never proffer a man drink unless he ask for it". Van Braam considered the social manners of the Macaonese on a par with their taste in household furniture, which he described as *nil*. He noted that the women usually had no chairs in their apartments, but sat about on a low dais or on mats. He had no reason to be surprised at this, since his own country-women at Batavia had an even more Asiatic standard of living, as may be seen from the accounts of contemporary travellers like Stavorinus. His acidulous criticisms of Macaonese society were equally applicable to the tedious social gatherings in the Dutch East-India Company's establishments.

Van Braam dismisses the Macaonese as a "bastardised and degenerate race", and he thought that nowhere else in the world would it be possible to find such a mixture of races and colours, from all shades of black through every

variety of yellow and brown to white. He seems to have forgotten the mixture of Hollander-Hottentot-Bantu-Chinaman-Malay at the Cape of Good Hope. As for the women who formed two-thirds of the population, "beauties amongst them were as common as white feathered crows." This criticism anticipated similarly unflattering accounts of his Eurasian countrywomen at Batavia by the English army of occupation in 1811-16. He was on safer ground in ascribing the prevalence of prostitution amongst Macaonese women to their grinding poverty, and the common Iberian belief that it was less shameful to beg than to work, for the Bishop and Friar José de Jesus Maria were of the same opinion. The benevolent activities of the local *Misericordia* on behalf of the widows and orphans formed a pleasing exception to the general degeneration and squalor, as Van Braam notes.

The general run of the friars and parish clergy, on the other hand, incur his severest censures, the truth of which is to some extent attested by the Episcopal Pastorals already referred to. As an instance of the low state of their intelligence and morality, he adduces their belief that all Jews were born with tails, in punishment for their part in the crucifixion of Our Lord. This ridiculous allegation was not confined to the clergy of Macao, for it was widely current in Portugal where the crackpot Sebastianists and crazy friars also propagated the belief that male Jews and "New Christians" menstruated like women.

Van Braam gives us some interesting details on the commerce of Macao, which are corroborated by Friar José de Jesus Maria and others. There were only a dozen Macao-owned ships most of them of comparatively small burthen. Normally, two were employed on the Bengal (Calcutta) run, one to Goa, one to Timor, sometimes one to Batavia, and the remainder to Indo-China. The duties levied on sandalwood from Timor had at one time paid for the upkeep of the place, but Indian opium was the most profitable import in Van Braam's day, and for nearly half a century afterwards. Macao has incurred a great deal of unmerited odium in connection with this traffic. Unprejudiced observers must perforce agree with William Hunter, who after forty years residence at Canton, Macao, and Hongkong wrote, — "As

compared with the use of spirituous liquors in the United States and in England, and the evil consequences of it, that of opium was infinitesimal". A chest of opium bought at Calcutta for 4-700 rupees might fetch between 5-8,000 *livres* at Macao, in the palmy days of the trade. Customs dues at Macao were less onerous than at Canton or Whampoa. Import duties were limited to six percent, of which 5% was for the Municipality and 1% for the Convent of the Poor Clares. There were no export duties.

Van Braam considered that a far more profitable source of income for the colony was derived from the factors of the English and Dutch East India Companies, who resided at Macao annually during the dead season for business at Canton. According to him, not only did many Macaonese householders make a living by acting as compradores and agents for the foreign factors, but also as pimps for the supply of concubines from among the women of their own families. Our oft quoted Friar Joseph informs us that in good times the municipality's income from the 5% import duties amounted to between 15 and 18,000 taels, which sufficed to pay the salaries of the Governor, garrison and officials, as also the upkeep of the ecclesiastical establishments. The cash as well as the glory had departed by 1770 however, and only the ever-increasing importance of the opium trade saved Macao from commercial extinction.

When Friar José de Jesus Maria shook the dust of Macao off his feet somewhat self-righteously in 1745, he did not, he tells us, expect the colony to survive for more than a brief space. Van Braam expressed the same viewpoint twenty-five years later, whilst William Hickey, had he stopped to give the 'miserable place' a second thought, would doubtless have said Amen. But although conditions time and again threatened to end in a catastrophe, some peculiar core of toughness for which none of the carping critics made allowance, enabled the despised Macaonese to surmount the apparently insuperable difficulties which confronted them. In our own time Macao has proved a hospitable haven of refuge to those in need, as she did to the missionaries in days of yore. None should begrudge her any Indian Summer of prosperity which may yet come her way.

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