

Report of an interview by Bishop HARTZELL
with Dr. Affonso Costa, Minister of Justice
and Ecclesiastical Affairs; and Captain
Azevedo Gomes, Minister of Colonies and
Marine,

Lisbon, January 25, 1911.

Dr. Affonso Costa is regarded by many as one of the ablest men in the Cabinet. During the interview I was greatly impressed with his personality. He is of medium height, heavy set, well dressed, and is an earnest, positive character with clear ideas on all questions relating to the affairs of the Republic. Time will differentiate a good many points as he comes to study them more closely and attempts to put into practice many of his legal plans. He is one of the leading lawyers of Portugal, and on several occasions has defended Protestants in important cases involving their civil and religious rights. He received me cordially, Mr. Lorillard, Chargé d'Affaires American Legation presenting me, and I presented Mr. Moreton, of the British and Foreign Bible Society, who acted as interpreter.

I congratulated the Minister, as a Protestant Bishop and citizen of the United States, on the foundation of the Republic, the prospective separation of church and state, the proclamation of religious liberty to all, and the determination of the Government to establish a national system of public schools, entirely free from ministerial and church direction. The Minister was very pleasant in his recognition of these congratulations, and was especially pleased to read--which he did carefully and aloud--the letters of introduction and commendation, regarding me personally and my work in Africa, from President Taft and Ex-President Roosevelt. He was very cordial in his expressions of appreciation that my relations should be so close to the Presidents of so great a nation.

The first matters discussed were questions in relation to Protestantism in the Republic: whether it was welcome or not; whether it could organize its associations and own property, and support its work without any assistance from the Government; whether schools, conducted by different branches of Protestantism, would be permitted, giving as an illustration that of the Wesleyan Methodist school at Oporto, which is under the direction of the Rev. R. H. Moreton, as general superintendent, and the Rev. Alfredo da Silva, as principal of the school. The Minister is well acquainted with Mr. Moreton and Mr. Silva, and the latter has lately been appointed Professor of English in the Government Institute at Oporto.

On these various points the substance of his remarks was as follows:

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He said that he wanted it understood that the republican Government was not anti-religious, but it was anti-Jesuit and anti-reactionary. I asked him if I might repeat that to the American people through the Press and in a letter to the President of the United States. "Certainly," he said, and repeated again, "Not anti-religious, but anti-Jesuit and anti-reactionary"

He said he knew that Protestantism stands for intelligence and for education and liberty among the people, and for the uplift of public morals; and that what the Government is especially anxious for, is to have as much help as possible on these lines, in their efforts to overcome the results of Jesuitical, reactionary influences. They propose to give perfect liberty to all, including Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and those of no faith, and realize that the methods of Protestants can be of help in the establishment of that perfect liberty. When the legislative assembly meets, there will be a law providing for this liberty to all religious organisations, based on the general respect for individual liberty. These organizations will be expected to furnish the Government with their rules and regulations, methods of work, and information as to how funds will be raised, but they will not be allowed to levy taxes on the people; funds raised ought to be strictly voluntary.

When asked especially about the matter of holding property, he said that each association would be permitted to build its own buildings and own its own property, and carry on its worship, receiving voluntary contributions, from the members without aid from the Government. He said that, as in France, there would be two forms of associations, one with full civil rights and the other with what might be called half-personal rights. As far as I could understand he means that, in the case of religious organizations, they are expected to report methods of raising money so as to protect the people against impositions and coercion in raising funds which have been a burden heretofore in the name of the Church.

The whole question of separation of church and state is being carefully considered, and decrees covering that and including laws for religious bodies have not been issued, the Minister stated, because it requires time to prepare the public mind for this great reform. If the separation had come in the first months of the Republic it might have appeared a reform against religion and the religious spirit; coming now, or within a few weeks, separation cannot but be the dispassionate consequence of the principles of liberty in religious matters. It will be carried through before the legislative assembly meets, as there are undeniable proofs that the nation wishes this liberty.

In reference to public education, that is, schools established and maintained by the Government, does not wish to impose religious belief upon anyone, this being a matter of conscience. Morality and patriotism will be taught by precept and example through the teachers and other ways of instruction.

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As to church schools, of which the Wesleyan Methodist school in Oporto is an illustration, he said that they could continue, the Government requiring them, at the beginning of each year to report the school regulations, giving exact plans for work, what time would be set apart for religious instruction, and it must, also, be shown that the children are not forced to enter these schools, but do so at the desire of their parents--the Government desiring perfect freedom in the education of the children.

I suggested to the Minister that a system of government inspection as to the organization and work of such schools would be wise. His reply was that, in order to avoid abuse, there will be inspection for all private schools, and especially for those founded by religious organizations.

I then discussed missionary and school questions as related to the colonies with him and Minister Azevedo Gomes, and was assured that the same general line of action would be followed; except, that they are determined, also, in the colonies to crush out the Jesuitical organizations which seek to compel people to accept doctrines they do not believe.

Our work and methods as a church in Portuguese Africa were then considered: In the first place, we teach the Portuguese language; 2nd, we do not mix in politics; 3rd, we teach industries; 4th, we have schools in which to train native men and women to be teachers and leaders among their own people. I, also, said that reports and photographs illustrating the work would be sent. On all these points both the Ministers were greatly interested and pleased.

Reference was made to the fact, on my part, that there are many millions of native Africans under Portuguese flag on the continent of Africa, who as yet have scarcely been touched by Christian influences; that evil forces of civilizations are already multiplying among them; and that they must be reached as quickly as possible with the civilizing influences of morality and proper education; that Portugal cannot do this work alone--she has not the money or the men--and what she needs is the co-operation of missions, Protestant in organization and spirit, that will loyally work with the Government; Both Ministers were very emphatic in approving

Then I suggested that, if the Government would subsidize these schools, having them organized to the satisfaction of both Government and church, the mutual co-operation would be strengthened. I gave an illustration of how this plan would work out in the establishment of larger centers: If the Government would give one or two hundred pounds a year towards the expense of equipment, buildings, etc., the Mission Boards would put in from one to two thousand pounds a year. This would mean a large amount of money brought in every year from without, and several men and women, well educated, consecrated people, as a rule married, giving their lives to this sacred work. This putting of the case seemed to impress both the Ministers, but Dr. Affonso Costa did not take so kindly to the idea of a subsidy, and said he knew what our work is; the Government would give not subsidies, nevertheless would carry out the inspection of all schools.

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Minister Affonso Costa then made some general inquiries as to the organization of American Methodism, and I gave him some points about our General Conference; that we have no pope or arch-bishop; once in four years, there is a world conference which legislates for the church; administration is through annual conferences, most of them in America, but many in foreign lands; Our missionaries do not mix in political affairs. We believe in ministers being married, although it is not an absolute law; the Protestant ideal of a pastor of a church is a consecrated Christian man, with his wife and children about him, his Christian home being a model for his people. He said, "Your Bishops and ministers are married?" I replied that that is so as rule, but there is no law requiring it. Both of the Ministers were greatly impressed with the idea of a Christian pastor's home for every church.

I said to Minister Affonso Costa that I wanted to make one suggestion, which I trusted he would not consider as a discourtesy. He said, "All right, go ahead." The suggestion was that, in carrying forward the general administration of Government, was there not danger in going too rapidly in religious matters; that they might have the appearance of being anti-religious, and in the name of liberty refusing the rights of liberty. For example, it was all right in the National University at Coimbra not to have religious instruction, but I hoped it was not intended, that students going there would be interfered with in following their own personal religious ideas. He said that was not intended, and again repeated, that "The Republican Government is not anti-religious; it is anti-Jesuit and anti-reactionary" I referred not only to the stopping of worship in the chapel at Coimbra, but that the building had been set apart as a museum of art, and that the church equipments were to be piled up and arranged to form the foundation of a museum. I raised the question whether that was not going a good ways in expressing the feeling that faith and religion were things of the past. I further remarked that, whatever differences of opinion there might be in religious questions, or questions of no religion, the great majority of the Portuguese people believe that there is a God, and desire real religious training.

His reply was quite earnest, and he spoke with perfect freedom. He said that personally he was not connected with any religious cult; but that he respected the conscientious convictions of all.

The interview occupied an hour, and was intensely interesting and direct from beginning to end. As we were separating, I told the Ministers that, in the final battle in which Portugal regained its independence from Spain, among the English gentlemen who came and brought their retainers to help Portugal there was one Hartzell, and that account of this is given to Africa; and that, as Portugal has a large section of that Continent under its flag, I belong to some extent to Portugal, and both myself and what I represent are friendly to Portugal and the Republic, ready to do everything possible to aid in the enlightenment and uplift of people.

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I further remarked that, while we might differ in religious matters, there is one God over all, who cares for the affairs of nations and men, and that to Him I would pray for them personally; for the Republic, and for the Portuguese people. Both the Ministers thanked me very cordially.

Dr. Affonso Costa went with us from his private office through the waiting room and across the hall to the staircase and, after shaking hands, bade us a very cordial adieu.

(The above interview was read and approved by Dr. Affonso Costa, Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs.) J.C.H.

Lisbon, Portugal, January 26, 1911.