Fanny Hill in Bombay

Gladfelder, Hal

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Cleland’s Mémoire to King João V of Portugal
(1742)

The author of this memorandum, having resided for the span of many years in the East Indies, has long been in a position to learn a great deal about the situation and interests of the Portuguese nation in India, from the many dealings and conversations he has had on this matter with the most respectable persons of that nation, both ecclesiastic and lay, as well as by his endeavors to acquire all the knowledge necessary to maintain trade in the Orient, whether between India and Europe or within the Indies. And the knowledge he has acquired provides the basis on which he states that it would be at least as practicable as it is desirable, for the benefit of the Portuguese nation, to set its colonial settlements—which it has long allowed to run at a loss—on a profitable basis, so long as His Majesty is willing to lend the weight of His authority to encourage the enterprise and support its realization, by means of which, beyond the general good that would result to the State, He would restore the fortunes of a number of families whom the war with the Marathas has reduced to the most painful extremities. [This is] a war one might henceforth describe as advantageous and useful to the entire Portuguese nation if it has provided solid proof of the value and even necessity of restoring its Indian trading colonies and drawing from them all the profit and benefit which the cultivation of commerce cannot fail to produce. And to achieve this, there is no question here of a vaguely defined project but rather of a simple system which can easily be put into effect, His Majesty’s favor permitting, since even after the loss of many previously conquered properties and territories, there remain enough favorably situated settlements and valuable resources to form a plan of trade in the Orient which once begun, supported, and perfected to the degree of which it is capable, will more than make up for past losses. Beyond the situation of the Kingdom of Portugal—its colonial settlements well positioned along the East Indian trading routes—the Portuguese language, diffused throughout the East, and many other evident advantages seem to invite this Nation to regard this trade as a matter of highest priority for the state, and so to dedicate to it all its genius and power.

Translated from the original French, as enclosed in a letter from Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo to Cardinal da Mota, 19 February 1742 (in Carvalho e Melo, Escritos Económicos, 158–161).
The author of this memorandum does not presume to impose any scheme for the establishment of a Portuguese Company or for the regulation and supervision of trade under His Majesty’s auspices within the Kingdom itself; he is not competent to decide such questions. He leaves it to the wisdom of His Majesty and his Council to establish this Company or Service and to determine under what conditions, modifications, or limits and by what means they will establish and regulate this trade, whose object is to increase His Majesty’s revenue, to strengthen His Kingdom’s Navy, to cause His colonies in the East Indies (and indirectly and as a result those of Brazil) to flourish, and to obtain for His Majesty’s subjects the benefits of their location in the East, on the example of other nations which have well known how to profit from this, and whose systems of administration can be instructive as examples to adopt what is useful and reject everything that on examination appears defective, improper, or incompatible with the good of the State and the constitution of the Kingdom.

The aim of this memorandum’s author is simply to offer to contribute his knowledge, his information, and all the service in his power toward the formation and establishment, in the Indies themselves, of that system of trade which will prove most practicable and most suited to the aims and the good of the interested parties, as it is undeniable that a commerce established under a new system or conducted on other premises and principles than in the past undoubtedly requires the advice of some person or persons of sufficient experience, particularly in Indian affairs and the practice of trade there, in order to guide and steady its first steps, which otherwise could not help but be wavering and uncertain. He offers in particular to provide, to those persons His Majesty chooses to nominate for this purpose, the most accurate information on all the procedures used for the ordering and regulation of trade which many years’ experience have demonstrated to be worthy of imitation, especially in the following areas:

- The responsibilities and powers of a Council of Trade in the Indies themselves, answerable and subject to such authority as it pleases the King to determine, according to the particular form of the administration and regulations established for the general conduct of trade in the Indies.
- The allocation of officers and secretarial, revenue, and accounting offices.
- The sale of consignments, the provision of goods in return, the acquisition of bulk fabrics and chintzes from Surat and the purchase of pepper, coffee, and other goods for import.
- The establishment of a commercial center and of a method for subordinating all the other forts, stations, trading posts, or settlements in that degree of dependency that will be found most effective for maintaining and improving trade in general.
- The surest and most suitable means for drawing merchants under the protection of His Majesty in the Indies and for increasing the number of useful subjects.
The author therefore willingly offers to travel to Portugal in order to communicate, in person and in detail, all the necessary records, written instructions, and other information, in whatever manner or form required, without setting any conditions in advance and seeking no reward other than as it pleases His Majesty and in proportion to the actual, useful service he finds himself in a position to provide.