

CHARLESTON DURING THE CIVIL WAR

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BY

THEODORE C. JERVEY

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WASHINGTON
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Upon the request to prepare a paper for that session of the American Historical Association which was to treat of military history I deemed it important to obtain from the chairman some suggestions of the scope of such, and was informed—

that, on the whole, what we do want most knowledge about are the details of composition and organization of the southern armies. Who, for instance, were the men who officered the South Carolina regiments when the war broke out? How far did the militia organization serve? . . . We have the whole subject of Charleston during the war, and that in every aspect. . . . Blockade running and its practical results. . . . All such topics are perfectly relevant. And the mere fact that information is difficult to get shows how much we need to look into these subordinate matters. For a title: "Charleston during the Civil War," or "Charleston's place (or rôle) in the Confederacy." Length, 25 to 30 minutes.

With these kind hints as a guide, within the limits, I shall attempt to discuss "Charleston during the Civil War"; because it is a far less comprehensive title than the other and one permitting "side lights" to be flashed upon subordinate details, which might be accidentally in the reach of some of us who might well hesitate to reply to wider historical inquiries.

As to the composition and organization of the southern armies, who officered the South Carolina regiments when the war broke out, and how far the militia organization served, particularly as pertaining to Charleston and its environments, the "Memoirs of the War of Secession," by Johnson Hagood, brigadier general, Confederate States Army; "The Defense of Charleston Harbor," by John Johnson, major, Confederate engineers; and "The Military Operations of General Beauregard," by Alfred Roman, A. D. C. and inspector general on the staff of Gen. Beauregard, all furnish quite an amount of valuable information, to which the preparation of the Confederate rolls at Columbia, S. C., will add even more; and a reference to these by me would be more appropriate than any attempt to summarize.

It may be pointed out, however, as a fact of interest, that the lines by which Charleston was successfully defended during the four years of the war were constructed under the supervision, not only of that Confederate general whose attack on Sumter in 1861 opened the war,

but also of that great soldier whose surrender at Appomattox in 1865 ended the struggle. But there are some other facts connected with the construction of these lines, which, if far less important, are not without their local significance. In the graduating class of West Point for the year 1838 the five stars were: First, William H. Wright, of North Carolina, assistant professor of mathematics; second, P. G. T. Beauregard, of Louisiana, assistant teacher of French; third, James H. Trapier, of South Carolina, assistant teacher of French; fourth, Stephen H. Campbell, of Vermont, adjutant; fifth, Jeremiah M. Scarritt, of Illinois, captain.¹ Of these five honor men, two, Beauregard and Trapier, were of French extraction, the one of a Catholic, the other of a Huguenot strain; but this does not seem to have affected in the slightest their intimacy, as subsequent events indicated. One of the first works in which Lieut. Trapier was engaged upon graduation was the construction of Fort Sumter,² which Beauregard, some 23 years later, called upon to surrender. Trapier had resigned from the service in 1848, and was engaged in planting near Georgetown, S. C., at the outbreak of hostilities, when he immediately volunteered his services to his State, and later, as a major of engineers, was responsible for some of the work on the lines about the city. Indeed, Gen. Hagood, to whose valuable book attention has heretofore been called, does not hesitate to criticize adversely the work of Maj. Trapier with regard to the fortification of Coles Island, while excusing his superior, Gen. Beauregard,³ under whose general orders the work was done. The point raised is an interesting one in military engineering, on which I think there may be a difference of opinion. With a distinct admiration for the sterling ability of Gen. Hagood, I am not satisfied that this criticism will stand as put, for if criticism is to be directed to the work it is apt to be found more applicable to the selection of Coles Island by Gen. Beauregard as a point of defense than to the fortifications there erected. Certain it is that to Beauregard the work of his old classmate must have been acceptable, for later, in 1863, when Maj. Trapier, raised to the rank of brigadier general, was in command of the fourth military district of South Carolina, with headquarters at Georgetown, as soon as it appeared that Charleston, not Georgetown, was the objective of the Federal fleet, he was withdrawn from Georgetown and assigned to the command of the second subdivision of the first military district at Sullivan's Island, where he gave the command for the first shot fired at the approaching ironclads.⁴

¹ "Official Register Officers and Cadets," U. S. Military Academy, West Point, N. Y., June, 1838.

² "Confederate Mil. Hist.," V, 421.

³ Hagood, "Memoirs of the War of Secession," 57-59.

⁴ Johnson, "Defense of Charleston Harbor," 48; "Military Operations of Gen. Beauregard," 47, 73.

Had military advancement in the armies of the Confederacy been entirely unaffected by family influence it would have indicated a dislocation of ideas which even war is not always able to break; and the fact that the ancestor of Maj. Trapier had, at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, commanded a company of artillery at Georgetown,¹ S. C., no doubt helped to inspire confidence in the name. Advancement in the British Army had been for years before and continued for years after profoundly affected by family influence, which indeed has had not a few stout defenders, not the least among whom was that cultivated Charleston gentleman, Gabriel Manigault, whose ante bellum novel, "The Actress in High Life," affords a view of its workings during Wellington's peninsular campaigns. As an illustration of the psychological environment of the author in the fifties, this book is not without its interest to the historian, for it reveals to some degree the social atmosphere in which it was produced, English to the core. Not only Charleston, but that great suburb which stretched from above Georgetown to the Savannah River along the rice plantations of the coast, a hundred miles and more, was English in sentiment, pronunciation, and prejudice. For three decades prior to the war the crowning aspiration of the region had been for direct trade with Europe. It was of the languishing commerce of Charleston that Hayne spoke with the greatest earnestness in the debate with Clay on the tariff of 1832,² which ushered in nullification. It was to secure this direct trade that he spent his last days at Asheville, N. C., in 1839, in the effort to push through the railroad from Charleston to Cincinnati. And it was for direct trade with Europe that southern convention after convention, from this date to 1860, vainly resolved. When direct trade did come, in all its fullness, in 1861, it came through the blockade runners; and it is therefore of "blockade running and its practical results" that this paper will treat.

At first the blockade of the southern ports was far from effective, and in the earlier years of the war, at Charleston, the blockade runners, according to northern correspondents with the blockading fleet, came and went almost at will.³ It was claimed in November, 1862, that the firm of John Frasier & Co., of Charleston, had, up to that time, shipped seven-eighths of the cotton that had gone from the ports of the Confederacy for some time prior thereto.⁴

Against objections to the trade it was affirmed by the Charleston Mercury that in making up the return freight of the blockade runners each steamer was first loaded with as much heavy freight for the

¹ McCrady, "South Carolina in the Revolution," 127.

² Jonathan Elliott, "Speech of Robert Y. Hayne, 1832."

³ Scharf, "The Confederate Navy," 441.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

government (Confederate) as she could with safety carry, and that the invoices of John Frasier & Co. were handed to the agents of the government and they were allowed to take whatever the government desired and fix the price themselves. As a concrete example, this paper declared that "the *Minho* had brought in 7,340 rifles, 2,100 swords, 87 cases of ammunition, and 80 cases of caps."¹ From other sources it was gathered that by that year the house of John Frasier & Co. had made as much as \$20,000,000, of which \$6,000,000 was invested in Confederate bonds.² Nassau, in the Bahama Islands, and St. Georges, Bermuda, were the ports to and from which the Charleston blockade runners sailed, and from July, 1862, to June, 1863, it was declared that 57 steamers and 91 sailing vessels left Nassau for Confederate ports, of which 51 of the former and 55 of the latter landed their cargoes; and 44 steamers and 45 sailing vessels reached Nassau from the Confederacy during the same period. From Nassau, by the port of Charleston, it was said that the supplies of arms of the Confederacy had been drawn,³ and from March 16 to April 10, 1862, there were noted at that port 14 arrivals and 6 clearances, among which appears the name of one of the most successful of all the runners, the *Ella and Annie*, consigned with some 10 or 11 others to Henry Adderley & Co.³ In addition to accommodation for passengers, this steamer was capable of carrying 1,300 bales of cotton⁴ and other freight. The government purchasing agent, Maj. E. Willis, quartermaster on the staff of Gen. Beauregard, is cited as the authority for the statement by the Detroit Free Press that for one purchase alone, from goods imported by blockade runners, the government paid \$7,500,000, and that purchases from \$3,000,000 to \$5,000,000 were not infrequent.

The claim, however, that the capitalists of the trade were Englishmen⁵ is not apparently borne out by original papers of one company in my possession, in which, at the final accounting in 1876, it would seem as if the bulk of the stockholders were Charlestonians, although shares were held in Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and New York. The assertion also of Mr. William Watson that, "while during the earlier years it [the trade] was chiefly carried on by swift steamers, running into Charleston and other ports of the Atlantic States, during the latter part of the war the traffic was confined exclusively to the Gulf of Mexico and the States bordering on its shores,"⁶ is incorrect, for, up to the very last of the war, the business was conducted on a considerable scale at Charleston by the "Import-

¹ Scharf, "The Confederate Navy," 468.

² *Ibid.*, 470.

³ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁴ Letter of F. N. Bonneau, Dec. 15, 1864.

⁵ Scharf, "The Confederate Navy," 474.

⁶ Watson, "Adventures of a Blockade Runner," preface.

ing & Exporting Co. of South Carolina," operating some 23 vessels, with a balance sheet running up into the millions, among the items of which appears a charge for "Government freight."¹ From the imperfect lists of vessels which have been tabulated previously, it would seem as if, for the four years, the number of vessels sailing from Charleston and Wilmington was about twice as great as the number noted from Galveston and four times as great as those from either Savannah or Mobile. How far the writer, M. Quad, may be depended on is problematical, but he is authority for the assertion that Charleston was the point where the purchasing agent of the Confederacy was stationed, and that 10 vessels ran in and out of Charleston to 1 leaving any other port.² But leaving these estimates and getting down to actual figures of original entry on the balance sheets of the Importing & Exporting Co. of South Carolina for February, March, and April, 1865, we find the capital account of the company put at \$1,000,000. To Nassau agents due \$38,578.32; to Charleston agents, \$110,352.16; to interest account, \$12,799.10; dividend No. 3, \$408,444.16; exchange account, \$17,691,230.94.

On the other side of the sheet are items indicating obligations of the Confederate government totaling \$759,111.16; the house of John Frasier & Co., \$100,000; the cost of two steamers, the *Alice* and the *Fannie*, \$244,103.69 and \$245,471.85, respectively; sundry steamers, evidently chartered, \$256,548.27; disbursements of one steamer, the *Ella*, \$2,211,440.58; cotton account, \$1,355,940.98; cash account, \$1,826,011.64; profit and loss account, \$6,439,693.45, the totals varying from \$19,798,516.49, in February, to \$19,728,215, in April.³

By just what standards these figures must be measured to get at actual values is a matter of doubt. At first it would seem reasonable that the Confederate currency tables, carefully made out and preserved with the papers, and exhibiting the rate at which Confederate notes and Confederate money were exchangeable for gold from May, 1861, to April, 1865, as adopted by Virginia or ruling at Augusta, Ga., might be taken with some confidence; but, as will later appear, they can not be entirely depended upon, as, whatever the values of the items in these accounts, they must all have been measured by the same standard, and from other papers I am enabled to arrive pretty closely at the values of some items noted in British pounds sterling. Apparently in February, 1864, the credit of the Confederate government was twice as good at Augusta, Ga., as in Virginia, Confederate notes being exchangeable in Virginia at that

¹ Duplicate I. & E. Co. in acct. current with Jas. M. Calder.

² M. Quad, "Field, Fort, and Fleet," 266.

³ Extracts from balance sheets, February, 1865, Importing & Exporting Co. of South Carolina.

time at \$45.65 to \$1 in gold; at Augusta, \$22.50 to \$25 to \$1 in gold.¹ On an accounting with the South Carolina Railroad upon the sale of the vessels above named, in which the railroad apparently had a tenth interest, the realization seems to have been at about 60 per cent of cost on the books. This again is in excess of the price as per contract in British pounds sterling. But some facts we can get at beyond dispute, viz, the price of the vessels as per contract between Capt. James Carlin, agent of the company, and William Denny & Bros., shipbuilders at Dumbarton, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, February 1, 1864, and the net proceeds of some of the cotton they subsequently carried across. For 1,473 bales, sacks, etc., shipped to Liverpool between June 30 and November 19, 1864, the company was credited with £67,174-2-4.² What it paid for the vessels built in Great Britain at the close of the war, the following contract indicates:

DUMBARTON, 1st February 1864

Captain JAMES CARLIN :

DEAR SIR: We offer to build you 2 Paddle Steamers 225 x 28 x 13, 54 oscillating Engines, Large Boilers having 40lbs pressure. These Steamers to be adapted in every way for Blockade running. We also offer to build you one Paddle Steamer 255 x 34 x 16 (Ladd?) 65 oscillating Engines Large Boiler having 40 lbs pressure. This Steamer also to be adapted in every way for Blockade running and to have passenger accommodations similar to the smaller ones in proportion to size. Hull, i. e. Model and Scantling and Outfit under your supervision and advice. Machinery and Boiler to Mr Slye. Prices each, small ones £22,000., the larger one £35,000., say twenty two thousand Pounds each for small ones, thirty five thousand five hundred Pounds for large one. Delivery of first small one in five and a half months and second in seven months. Large one in nine months from this date. Penalty for non delivery fifteen pounds per day and a premium of fifteen for each day within time. Instalments in 3 payments, one fifth in signing hereof, 2/5 on each ship, as she is plated, remainder, each ship when furnished and approved of. No extras.

We are dear Sir
Yours truly

WILLIAM DENNY AND BROTHERS.³

Accepted

JAMES CARLIN

From Port Muck, Island Magee, Ireland, under date February 10, 1864, is a letter from Capt. Carlin to the president of the Importing & Exporting Co. of South Carolina, in which the above contract was inclosed and where appear in detail his investigations of the various shipyards of the United Kingdom, visited by him in behalf of the company: Stockton on Tees, Middlesboro, Hartlepool, Liverpool (where he mentions being on the trial trip of Frasier's new steel ship under command of Capt. Hammer), Glasgow, Newcastle on Tyne, and finally Dumbarton, where the order was given. The builders of many of the most noted blockade runners of the earlier period are all mentioned as having been interviewed, and from this

¹ Confederacy currency tables.

² Synopsis of account of Importing & Exporting Co. of South Carolina, with James Calder.

³ Original contract.

letter it appears that the Confederate government or the State of South Carolina was connected with the business; for, to the president of the company, who contemplated resigning and later did resign, he writes: "You must not think of deserting us in our infancy and with the State as a partner." He also, in this letter, indicates the disadvantages attending any purchases of existing types of vessels, of these "the Dover boats being the nearest to what would suit our business. They would cost a great deal and need various alterations for the trade that would be expensive and take a great deal of time." He adds, "I should not like to buy unless there were a near approach to perfection. The ship built for Frasier at Liverpool is a failure in speed and draft, and instead of drawing 8 feet will draw 10; otherwise she is a fine ship, very far from perfection, however."¹

Capt. Carlin's visit to Great Britain was probably due not only to a considerable widening of the activities of the company through the participation therein of southern railroads, as well as the Confederate government, but, in addition to the capture just prior thereto of the most successful of the company's fleet, operating between Charleston, Wilmington, Nassau, and Bermuda, on an attempt, about the last of October or the first of November, 1863, to enter Wilmington. On her last outward trip from Charleston to Bermuda the value of her cargo is put by her master at \$143,000; passenger fares, \$3,000.² But if her capacity for cotton was fully utilized, as he also claims, the value of that alone, by account sales subsequently rendered, must have been \$296,400. The "partnership" of the Confederate government was evidently one of those euphemistic terms by which governments at a pinch help themselves. The Boers coined an excellent word for it, "commandeer." With regard to the blockade runners from Charleston, it was, in the last 18 months of the war, a claim for half of the profits, and I think quite properly so.

Master's pay seems to have been as follows: From August, 1863, bringing steamer from Nassau to Charleston, \$8,000, Confederate currency (about \$600 in gold); taking steamer out to Nassau, \$2,000, payable at Nassau; from Nassau to Wilmington, N. C., \$10,000; Wilmington to Bermuda, \$2,500.³

The first of the steamers contracted for with William Denny & Bros. is announced as sailing July 30, 1864, drawing 8 feet, with 550 tons dead weight on board, which Capt. Carlin writes he regards as remarkable and only fears that her return cargo of cotton may not sink her deep enough, as she should draw at least 6 feet, and better still, 7 feet 2 inches on an even keel.⁴ From the same letter

¹ Letter of Capt. James Carlin to William C. Bee, Feb. 10, 1864.

² Letter of F. N. Bonneau, Dec. 10, 1864.

³ Statement of Capt. Carlin, Aug. 25, 1863.

⁴ Letter of Capt. Carlin, July 30, 1864.

it appears that as the vessels were completed they were fitted out, manned, and officered by Capt. Carlin, who kept a full complement on shore pay to meet all requirements; and by the disbursement sheets of the agent at Nassau, May, 1865, there were then operating from that port the *Alice*, the *Caroline*, the *Emily*, and the *Fannie*.¹ The *Ella* does not appear on this, and in December, 1864, Capt. Bonneau alludes to his regret at hearing of her loss; but as, in another letter, he states that the loss of the *Ella and Annie* was the only loss suffered by the company he may have been mistaken. The five vessels above named, however, did not represent all that the company was operating; for in the final accounting of the Liverpool agent in December, 1865, appear charges referring to the *Flying Scud*, the *Wild Pigeon*, the *Monmouth*, the *B. De Wolf*, the *Fearless*, the *Frygia*, the *Pleiades*, the *Troya*, the *Pembroke*, the *Crocodile*, the *Storm King*, the *Enterprise*, the *Orizava*, the *Pink*, the *Electra*, the *Maria*, the *Orion*, the *Mary Garland*, the *Urania*, the *Star of the East*, the *Ariosto*, and the *Harriet*.² But around none centers that personal interest which attaches to the *Ella and Annie*, a fairly accurate representation of which has been preserved in a faded water-color sketch made just prior to her capture. She was, as appears, painted a cream white, an absolutely new departure from accustomed ideas up to her appearance, the prevailing color until then, as I have been informed, having been black, and the experiment of her coat being due to the advice of Capt. Carlin, who insisted that cream white was the most invisible of shades. In the letter of the retiring president of the company I note an allusion to the courage displayed by her captain on the night of her capture, and, whether somewhat apocryphal in its details or not, I shall venture the short account told me by the last president of the company, as an illustration of how gallantly and chivalrously war may be waged by fearless combatants.

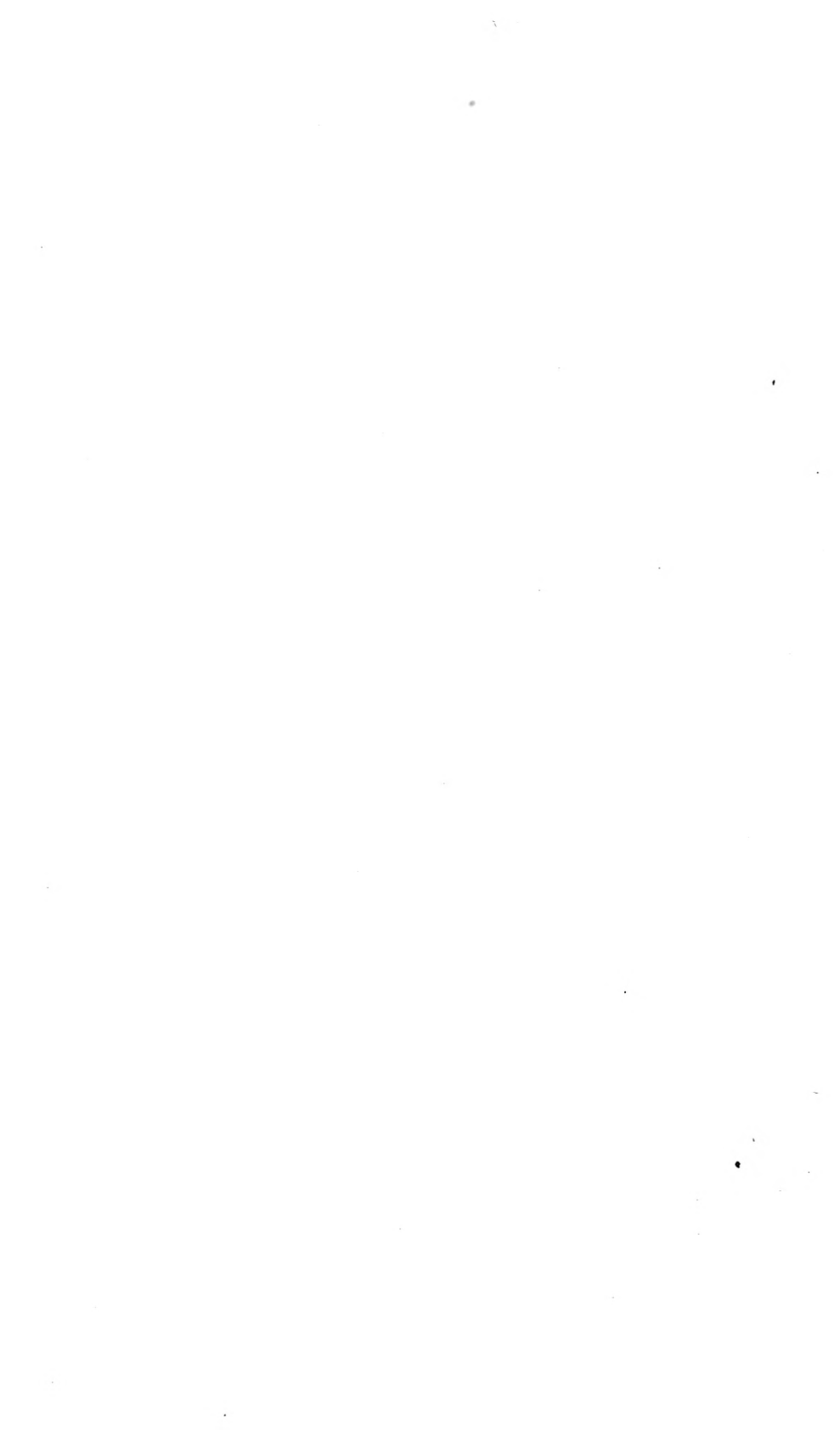
On the night that his vessel was overhauled, seeing that his capture was otherwise inevitable, Capt. Bonneau put on all steam and steered for the nearest of the captors in the desperate hope of escaping over her rammed and sinking hulk, for which acknowledged design he was, on trial by court-martial, condemned to death, which sentence was blandly set aside by the United States admiral presiding, with the calm declaration that in Bonneau's place he would have done the same thing himself.

Fifty years have passed since those stirring times, and in all probability many of the captors with their gallant old chief have long since gone to "the reconciling grave that swallows up distinctions that first made us foes," but the captured captain still lives, an illustration of the chances of war.

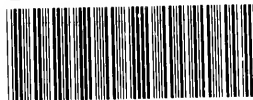
¹ Statement of disbursements of Henry Adderley & Co., May, 1865.

² Duplicate Importing & Exporting Co. in account with James Calder.





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