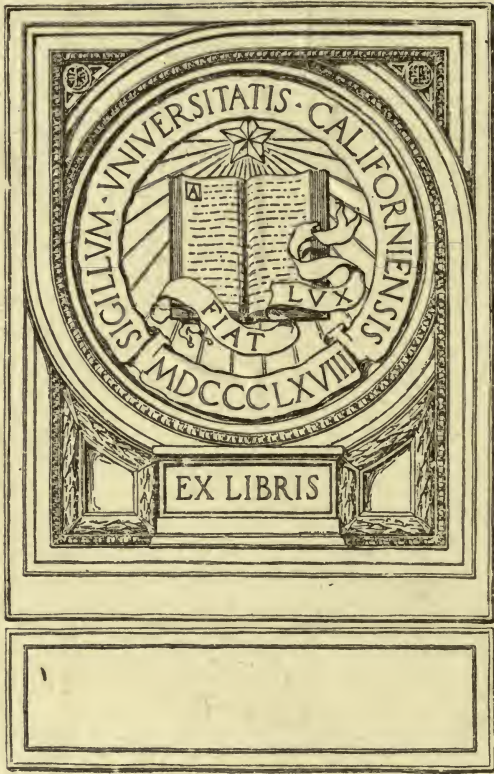


MERCHANT  
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*of Old Salem*

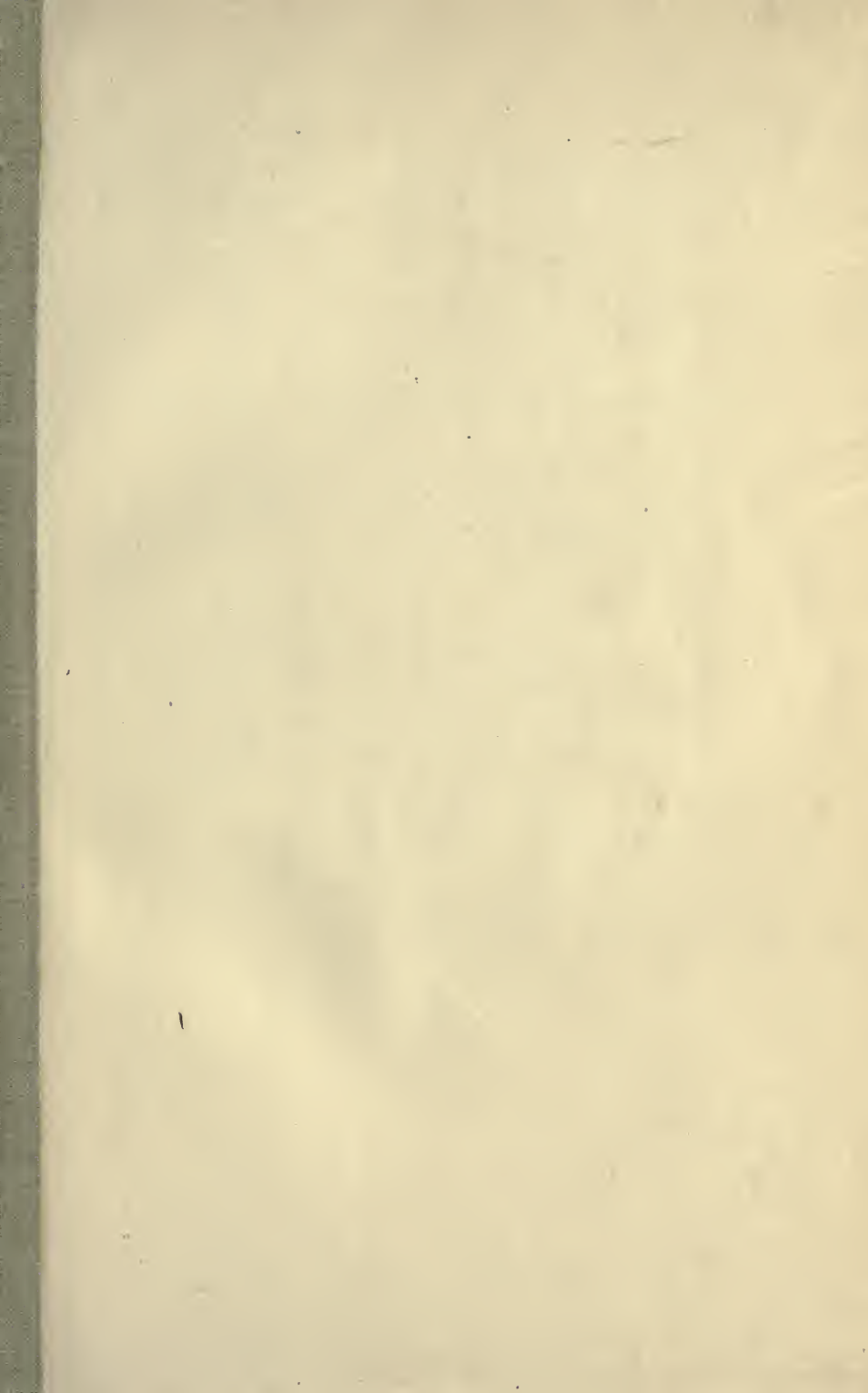


*By*

Robert E. Peabody



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MERCHANT VENTURERS OF OLD SALEM





TO THE  
AMERICAN



SHIP MOUNT VERNON ENGAGING A FRENCH PRIVATEER OFF GIBRALTAR

From the painting by Corné in the Peabody Museum, Salem

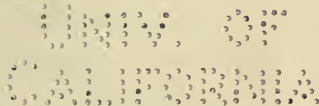
# MERCHANT VENTURERS OF OLD SALEM

*A History of  
The Commercial Voyages of a New  
England Family to the Indies and  
Elsewhere in the XVIII Century*

BY

ROBERT E. PEABODY

WITH PORTRAITS AND  
OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
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## PREFACE

*This book describes how commerce was carried on by American merchants in the early years of our history and illustrates how contemporary political events in America and Europe affected American trade. By tracing the career of a typical family of New England merchants a picture is obtained of that romantic period when diminutive ships, manned often by mere boys and laden with homely cargoes of rum, fish, cheese, or lumber, sailed away for the distant markets of the East, to return years later, their holds filled with teas, spices, or rich silks.*

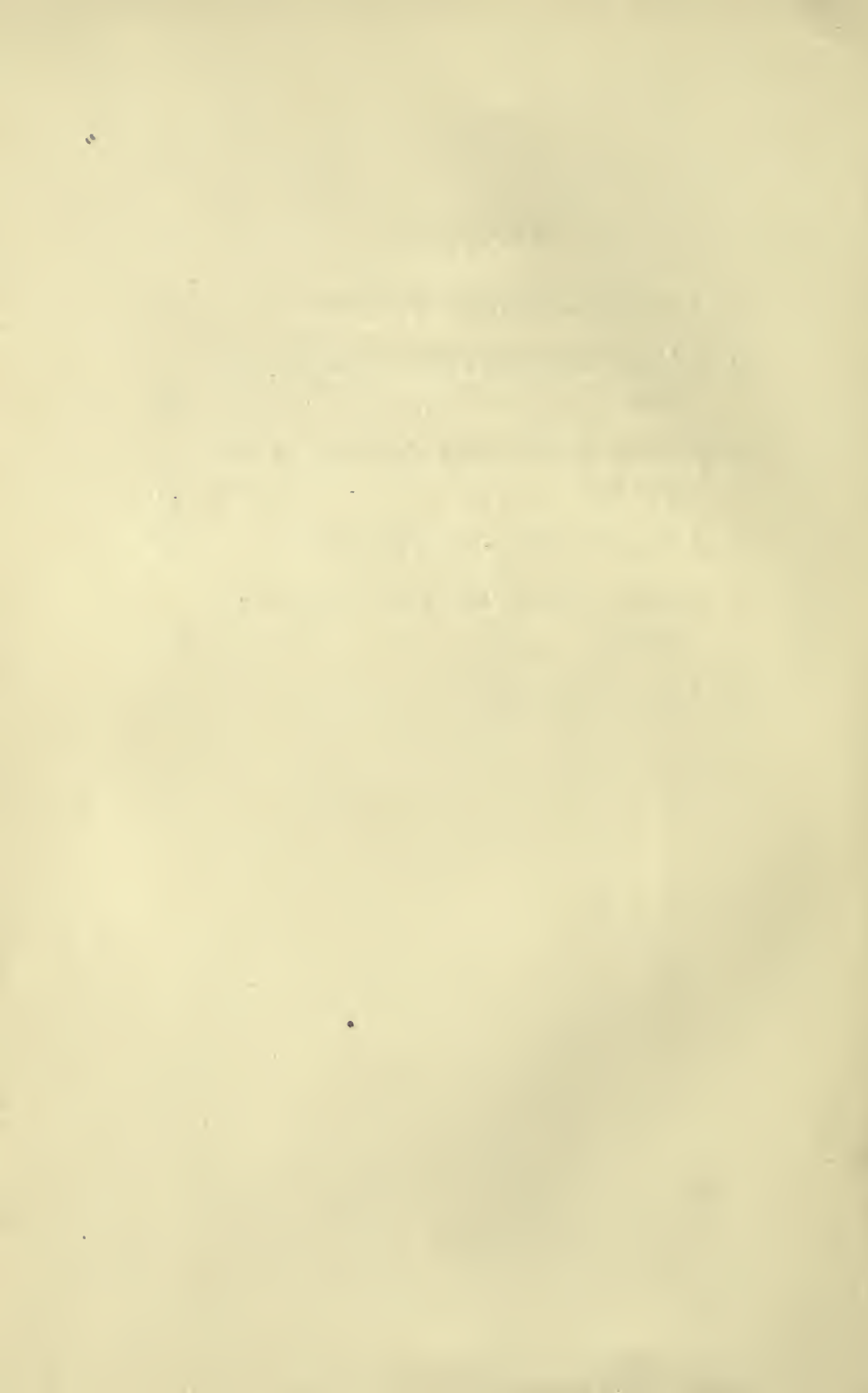
*Many thanks are due to Prof. Edward Channing, of Harvard University, for his assistance in obtaining much of the information in these pages, and also to Dr. Richard Derby and Mr. Roger Derby, of New York, Hon. George P. Wetmore, of Newport, Rhode Island, and Mr. George F. Dow, of the Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts, for the use of manuscripts and records in their possession. The blocks of all the illustrations have been kindly loaned by the Essex Institute.*

MARBLEHEAD, MASS.,  
September, 1912.



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# MERCHANT VENTURERS OF OLD SALEM

## CHAPTER I

### A CHAPTER OF COLONIAL COMMERCE

IN these days when the modern steamship and the cable bind the whole world closely together, it is hard for us to realize the dangers and difficulties that beset commerce two hundred years ago. The ships of that time were mostly small and unseaworthy, charts were few and imperfect, and the science of navigation little known. Those craft which survived the perils of the deep still ran the added risk of capture, for not only did the seas swarm with pirates, but the constant wars of that period made the ships of almost any nation the rightful prey of an enemy's men-of-war. Moreover, the entire system of commerce was so bound round by Navigation Acts and other restrictive legislation that it was practically impossible for a vessel to make a foreign voyage without breaking the laws of some country. It was during these troubled times, however, that the foundations of American commerce were laid.

From earliest colonial days our people were deeply concerned in shipowning, shipbuilding, and other marine pursuits. The only communication of the first settlers with the rest of the civilized world was by sea, and for many years, on account of lack of roads, almost all traffic between the colonies was by water. Thus we became at an early date a seafaring people. This was especially the case in New England, where the shores abounded with fish, and where the forests which grew down to the water's edge formed a boundary to inland progress and at the same time offered material for building ships. Many a sturdy little craft, fashioned from the convenient timber and manned by a few hardy and energetic colonists, sailed for Europe or the West Indies freighted with fish or lumber. From Europe such vessels brought home the many necessities of life, and from the West Indies great quantities of sugar and molasses, which were quickly converted into that eighteenth century staple of commerce, New England rum.

As early as 1660 England's Navigation Acts restricted to English and colonial vessels the trade between the colonies as well as the trade to the mother country, and this exclusion of foreign vessels was a great boon to colonial shipping. So

industriously did the American merchants extend their trade and so rapidly did their ships increase in number, that in 1775 Burke declared, "The commerce of your colonies is out of all proportion beyond the numbers of the people." Of the fisheries he added, "Neither the perseverance of Holland nor the activity of France nor the dexterous and firm sagacity of English enterprise ever carried this most perilous mode of hardy industry to the extent to which it has been pushed by this recent people, — a people who are still, as it were, but in the gristle, and not yet hardened into the bone of manhood." Although the middle colonies were actively engaged in shipping, it was in New England that the largest number of the colonial ships were owned. In fact, so absolutely did New England depend upon her commerce that when in 1764-68 the duties and regulations of the Grenville and Townsend Acts imposed heavy burdens upon her hitherto practically untaxed trade, her merchants were among the very first to rise up against the policy of the British Government, making New England the scene of the first struggles of the war for independence. The Revolution, however, hindered but slightly the rapid growth of American commerce, for within ten years after



#### 4 *Merchant Venturers of Old Salem*

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the war American merchants were sending their vessels to India, China, Africa, Russia, — in fact to every part of the known world, — and were reaping handsome profits from this lucrative trade.

In no American port was this commercial enterprise developed to a greater extent than in Salem, Massachusetts. Although to-day not a single ocean-going vessel hails from this place, between one hundred and one hundred and fifty years ago it was one of the leading American ports, and between the Revolution and the War of 1812, the period of its greatest prosperity, Salem was well known in many parts of the East Indies and the South Seas where no one had ever heard of New York or Boston.

Of all the Salem merchants who helped give their town this early commercial supremacy none were more active than those of the Derby family. Roger Derby, the founder of the family in America, came to this country in 1671, and settled at Salem, where he engaged in maritime trade. This occupation was continued by his descendants until the early part of the nineteenth century. Richard Derby, the grandson of Roger, was an example of the many New England merchants of the colonial period. By tracing his career one obtains an inter-

esting view of the manner in which these early merchants carried on their business, and of the effect on American commerce caused by the English Acts of Trade and Navigation and by the Revolution. Moreover, Elias Hasket Derby, the son of Richard, was one of the pioneer American merchants in the trade to the Far East, and a study of his life and operations shows us how American commerce was extended to the distant markets of the Orient during the early years of our national history.

Richard Derby was born in Salem in 1712. His father had been a sea captain and merchant, but died while Richard was an infant, and the boy was reared by an energetic mother. Practically nothing is known of his childhood, but early in 1736, at the age of twenty-four, he appears as master of the "sloop Ranger on a voige to Cadiz," Malaga, etc., taking a cargo composed principally of fish. With a mate and a crew of four men, young Derby made a successful voyage, and having exchanged his fish for oil, fruit, and handkerchiefs, returned to Salem in the latter part of May. In September he sailed again to Spain in the Ranger on a similar trip, and in the winter of 1739 he went as master of the "skoner Ranger" to the island of St. Martins

## 6 *Merchant Venturers of Old Salem*

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in the French West Indies, where in April he sold his cargo for £2178. 4. 0.

This voyage of the *Ranger* to a French West India island was contrary to the laws of France, for the governments of Spain, Holland, Denmark, and France prohibited foreign vessels from trading with their colonies. Nevertheless, the laws of these countries were easily evaded. Customs officials were readily induced to sell registries that would make a New England vessel French, Spanish, Dutch, or Danish to suit the case, and by means of "a little greasing" of the proper authorities at these islands a colonial captain could obtain a right to trade wherever he wished. A duty of four and one half per cent was levied on all goods exported from the English islands, while the export duty from the French islands was but one per cent. This alone was reason enough for the extensive trade to the French West Indies.

On December 6, 1741, Captain Richard Derby sailed for St. Martins as master and part owner of the schooner *Volant*, and the following extract from his sailing orders shows how the New England merchants evaded the regulations of foreign countries:—

"If you should go among the French Endeavour



to gett Sale at St. Martins but if you should fall so low as Statia; & any Frenchman Shou'd make you a good Offer with good Security, or by making your Vessel a Dutch Bottom or any other means practicable in order to your getting among ye French embrace it among whom if you Should ever Arrive be sure to give strict orders amongst your men not to sell the least Trifle unto them on any Terms least they shou'd make your vessel liable to a Seizure, — also Secure a permit so as for you to Trade there the next Voyage w<sup>ch</sup> you may Undoubtedly do by your Factor & a little greasing some others; — also make a proper Protest at any Port you Stop at.”

Written on the margin of the sailing orders is the following note: —

“Capt Derby if you Trade at Barbadoes buy me a Negroe boy about Siventeen years old which if you do advise Mr. Clarke of y<sup>t</sup> he may not send one also —

“BENJ. GERRISH JR.”

Captain Derby must have made a successful trip, for on July 5 following he sailed again in the *Volant*, “for Barbadoes and elsewhere.” The manifest of the *Volant*'s outward cargo on this

development of trade  
voyage is still preserved, and may be taken as a typical cargo for the West Indies, except that cod, mackerel, and other fish are usually more in evidence. Its main items were 54,000 feet of boards, 34,500 shingles, 3500 staves, 10 barrels of shad, 16 horses, 78 bags of corn and 20 of rye, and 32 empty hogsheads for water.

It is needless to follow each and every voyage of Captain Derby, and it is sufficient to say that he continued in the capacity of master till 1757, when, having laid up a comfortable fortune and become owner or part owner of a number of vessels, he gave up a sea life and established himself as a merchant in Salem. In 1755 he had been granted the upland, beach, and flats at Ober's or Palmer's Head on Winter Island in Salem Harbor, for a wharf and warehouse for one thousand years at one shilling per year. But he does not appear to have used this site, for soon after he began the construction of the present Derby Wharf, whence he and his descendants during the next fifty years sent vessels to all parts of the world.

Mr. Derby now began to build up a thriving trade with the Spanish Peninsula, especially with Bilboa on the Bay of Biscay, and was constantly sending his smaller vessels on trading voyages

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RICHARD DERBY

1712-1783

From a copy by Weir, after the portrait by Col. Henry Sargent



through the West Indies, as well as on occasional trips to Virginia and the Carolinas. Between 1757 and 1764 he had the brig Neptune, the ship Antelope, and brig Ranger trading regularly to Spain and the Madeiras, and a number of his smaller vessels made occasional voyages to the Peninsula. His Bilboa agents, or "factors," as they were called, were Gardoqui & Company. On the arrival of one of his ships they would see to the disposal of the cargo to the best advantage and arrange with the merchants in the interior of Spain for whatever commodities the captain wished to purchase for the return cargo. Often the captain would take bills of exchange on London in return for part of the outward cargo, as these bills sold at a premium in America and helped to pay for importations from England to the colonies. Gardoqui & Company always kept an account with Mr. Derby, so if ever one of the Derby captains wished any cash, this house would supply him and draw against the account for the amount.

Although Mr. Derby appears to have had no trade with England, he very early established an account with Messrs. Lane & Fraser, of London, always leaving with them a considerable balance which his captains, wherever they might be, could



draw upon by means of letters of credit. Thus, when the outward cargo of the ship *Antelope* did not realize a sufficient amount for the captain to procure a full return cargo, R. Anderson & Company at Gibraltar wrote to Salem: "We shall supply him with whatever sum he may be deficient, against his Bills on London where he tells us he has a Credit lodged for that Purpose."

In the trade to the West Indies Mr. Derby constantly had a number of small vessels employed. This fleet included the schooners *Pembroke*, *Three Brothers*, *Three Sisters*, *Mary*, and *Charming Kate*, and the sloops *Betsy* and *Sally*. These little craft would load with fish, lumber, or grain, and take besides a few horses, cows, or sheep, and then sail down through the West Indies, disposing of their cargoes little by little wherever they found a market. In the same way they would pick up a return cargo wherever they could with advantage, generally bringing back sugar, molasses, cotton, indigo, or fruits. Sometimes Mr. Derby would send a vessel on a triangular voyage, of which we have an example in the case of the ship *Antelope*. She took a cargo of fish, lumber, and rum from Salem to Cadiz, disposed of it there, crossed to Tangier and loaded a cargo of mules, carried them



to the West Indies, and thence returned to Salem with sugar and molasses.

The management of all these voyages was left largely in the captain's hands. Mr. Derby always gave his captains, when they sailed, directions how to dispose of the cargo and in what commodities to invest the proceeds for the return voyage, but they were allowed to use their judgment in changing their orders to benefit the voyage. In order to ensure the hearty interest of his captains, Mr. Derby usually employed them "on primage," that is, he gave them a certain percentage of the profits of the voyage over and above their monthly wage. Among the Derby papers there have been preserved a great many wages accounts, or port-ledge bills, and from these we can observe the rate of pay of officers and seamen in those days. From 1760 to 1783 masters received monthly wages varying from £2.8.0 to £3.7.0; mates, from £2.5.0 to £3.0.0; able seamen, £2.8.0 to £2.14.0; and common seamen, £1.17.0 to £2.8.0. Cooks received from £1.7.0 to £2.6.0, and cabin-boys were usually paid £1.4.0. Both officers and crew were shipped for the round voyage and received one month's wages before sailing and the balance on their return home.

In 1756 the Seven Years' War broke out, and thus, with France the enemy of England, it became unlawful for the American colonists, as subjects of the English Crown, to trade with the French West Indies. The profits of this trade, however, were very great at that time, because the French islands were so absolutely dependent on the products of the American colonies that had this source of supply been cut off, they would hardly have been able to subsist. Quite regardless, therefore, of the rules of war, all the colonial merchants continued to carry on an active commerce with these islands. At first thought, it seems strange that the leading merchants and most respected men in the community should have been actively engaged in feeding and supporting the enemy's colonies. Mr. Derby was an honored member of the Massachusetts Council, and yet the largest part of his business during the wars was with the French West Indies. Apparently this trade with the enemy was not looked upon as treason by the American colonists, but the merchants who engaged in it seem to have been regarded simply as daring business men who ran great risks in hope of large profits. The seas swarmed with English privateers, mostly owned in the Brit-

ish West Indies, which, if they could find colonial vessels evading the rules of war by trading with the French, looked on them as legitimate plunder. French men-of-war at the same time lay in wait to capture American vessels as natural enemies. The merchant who evaded these varied perils was merely successful in a hazardous game.

The dangers were too great for Mr. Derby to continue this lucrative commerce long without a loss. In July, 1759, his schooner *Three Brothers*, fifty-six tons, Captain Michael Driver, sailed from Salem for the French West India island of St. Martins, with a cargo of fish, wine, oil, raisins, and lumber. When but one day out of Salem she was chased by a British privateer. Captain Driver hoisted his English colors, but the privateer nevertheless fired nine shots at him, made him heave to, and her captain ordered Driver to come aboard with two of his crew. In the mean time the Englishman sent his lieutenant with several men on board the *Three Brothers*, and they took away "a quantity of fish and 797 pieces of eight" out of Driver's chest. Captain Driver was then returned to his vessel, a prize crew was put on board, and

the course was laid for Spanishtown.<sup>1</sup> Here the privateersmen discharged and sold as much of the cargo as they pleased, and then the lieutenant of the privateer took the schooner to Antigua, which was his home port. For three days Driver was confined on board his vessel. When he finally was allowed to land he was soon convinced that he could obtain no redress from the owners of the privateer. He accordingly left the schooner and what remained of her cargo at Antigua and took the first vessel for Salem. Mr. Derby then registered a protest and claim for £1334.13.4 for ship and cargo. But as the Three Brothers had been bound on a voyage to a French colony for the purpose of trading with the enemy, it is extremely doubtful whether his claim was allowed by the admiralty courts. No record remains to show that he ever received any compensation, and unless the vessel was insured, the whole must have been lost.

A few years later, in 1762, Captain Driver was again captured, this time by a Frenchman. Returning home to Salem from the West Indies in the sloop Sally, his vessel was seized by the French

<sup>1</sup> Probably Virgin Gorda, one of the Virgin Islands. Spanishtown, the only settlement on the island, was a favorite rendezvous of the buccaneers.



privateer, *La Tigre*. His captor was lenient, and after taking the first mate as security for the desired amount of ransom, he allowed the *Sally* to proceed to Salem. Mr. Derby thereupon fitted out his schooner *Mary*, as a cartel to sail under a flag of truce to Cape St. François<sup>1</sup> and pay the ransom. He was joined in this venture by Messrs. Furlong and Titcomb, of Newburyport, who also had a man held by the French as hostage for a captured vessel. The *Mary* sailed on June 2, 1762, with Captain Driver in command, and all the necessary specie and papers for the ransom. When passing down by the Bahamas, the *Mary* fell in with the English privateer *Revenge*, which captured her, took all her specie and two of the crew, and sent her into Nassau, on the ground that she was bound to Cape St. François, which was a French colonial port. Captain Driver entered a protest stating that from the nature of the voyage, being bound as a cartel and in ballast, he was not violating the rules of war; and after about two months of delay, on August 12, by an order of the Court of

<sup>1</sup> Cape St. François was the capital of Hayti, the western portion of Hispaniola, and at that time French territory. The city was sacked and destroyed in 1793 during the revolutionary war in Hayti.

Admiralty at Nassau, his rights were recognized and the ship and specie returned to him.<sup>1</sup> Two days later he sailed for Cape St. François, where he arrived on August 27. The ransom was paid, the two hostages taken on board, and Captain Driver started back to Salem. However, his troubles were not yet over. As he was about to leave the harbor, the commanding officer of the port came aboard the *Mary*, took off the unfortunate hostages, and placed them on board of a French frigate just sailing for Santiago de Cuba, and putting a prize crew on the *Mary*, compelled Captain Driver to sail to Santiago with the frigate. Here the *Mary* was detained for over three months, and when on December 3 the hostages were at last set free and the *Mary* was allowed to depart, her provisions were nearly gone. Moreover, during her long stay in port the teredos, or shipworms, had so eaten into her bottom that she was very leaky. Captain Driver accordingly crossed over to Port Royal,

<sup>1</sup> In the mean time Mr. Derby had been active at home in trying to gain the *Mary's* release, and on September 21, 1762, the Massachusetts General Court instructed its "agent to use his Endeavours that said Vessel and the Monies sent in her be restored to the owners, and to take effectual care that all Proceedings of this kind be prevented for the future." But by that time the *Mary* had been set free. — *Mass. Archives*, vol. 66, p. 226.



Jamaica, where he careened his vessel and repaired her bottom, then, having taken on board provisions, he sailed for Salem, where he at last arrived in safety. The losses incurred by Mr. Derby and Messrs. Furlong and Titcomb by this ill-fated voyage amounted to about £300 more than they had sent out as ransom, or £800 between them.

Perhaps the most exasperating seizure that Mr. Derby suffered during the war of 1756-63 was that of his ship *Ranger*. With the proceeds of several successful cargoes to Spain he purchased at Gibraltar a French prize ship of three hundred tons, which had been condemned to be sold by the British Admiralty Court. He gave her the name of *Ranger* and sent Captain George Crowninshield out to take command of her, with instructions to load with wine for the West Indies. Crowninshield fulfilled these orders and on arrival in the West Indies exchanged his wine for sugar and sailed for Leghorn in Italy. But hardly had the *Ranger* cleared the islands when she was captured by four English privateers and carried into Nassau. She was condemned by the Court of Admiralty, in the first place because she had no register, which, having been a foreign prize, she could not obtain

until her arrival in an American port; and secondly, because she was bound from a French island. The capture greatly aroused Mr. Derby, as, had the vessel reached Leghorn, she could have been sold with her cargo for fully \$70,000. On the advice of the leading Massachusetts lawyers, he sent his son John to Nassau, in a small vessel, with specie and a letter of credit, but he found he could do nothing. Mr. Derby accordingly wrote to his counsel in London, to try to obtain redress from the home government. In this letter he stated that in three years fully two hundred colonial vessels had been taken into Nassau, that all had been condemned except those that were able to pay the court more than the captors, and that Admiralty Judge Bradford and Governor Shirley, who had gone to the Bahamas in poverty, left for home with fortunes of £30,000. He added that these captures had "set the country on fire," and would soon be taken up by the Province, and concluded by advising that no pains be spared to reverse the decree of the court. For a number of years Mr. Derby continued his appeal. He sent another vessel to Nassau to serve an inhibition on the courts, but he never got any satisfaction, and it is safe to say that, except for a moderate insurance, this voyage,

which might have doubled his fortune, was a total loss.<sup>1</sup>

These cases clearly show the risks under which the colonial merchants carried on their trade, for Mr. Derby's losses were not exceptional cases and many others suffered far more than he. In fact, during the sixteen months between July 1, 1760, and November 1, 1761, no less than twenty-three Salem vessels trading to the West Indies were captured by the French. But New England vessels ran as much risk of seizure by English ships as by French. Within three years, as has been stated above, fully two hundred colonial vessels had fallen into the hands of English privateers.

In view of all these dangers to American shipping, it is interesting to observe what the rates of marine insurance were in those days. It happens that there have been preserved a few old insurance bills of Mr. Derby's in account with John Higgin-

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to understand why Mr. Derby should have expected to obtain redress in this case. His vessel was clearly guilty of trading with the enemy. She may have had a Dutch or Spanish registry and on this technicality should have been considered a neutral. It is probable, however, that in those days almost any unarmed American vessel sailing through the West Indies, regardless of where she was bound, ran a risk of being captured and carried into Nassau and condemned, unless she could pay the court a satisfactory sum to be released.

son, agent, for the period of the Seven Years' War. Insurance on the ship *Lydia* to Madeira in 1760 was quoted at eleven per cent. The following year, on the same vessel from Salem to Jamaica, it was fourteen per cent, and ten per cent for the return voyage. The higher rate on the Jamaica voyage was probably due to the greater likelihood that the ship might fall in with a French armed vessel while sailing through the West Indies than while on the broad Atlantic. It is noticeable also that the homeward rate from Jamaica was lower than the outward, a condition due probably to the fact that on the return voyage, when once a vessel could get away from the islands unnoticed, she was practically safe, while on the outward voyage as she approached the West Indies there was no telling when she might be captured. The highest rate of insurance recorded during this period was twenty-three per cent on the schooner *Three Sisters*, bound from Salem to Monte Cristo,<sup>1</sup> Santo Do-

<sup>1</sup> Monte Cristo is a small town, with an open roadstead on the north coast of Santo Domingo, and only a few miles from the boundary of Hayti. During the French wars it was illegal for American vessels to trade with the French in Hayti, but the Yankee merchants eluded this by loading and unloading their vessels at Monte Cristo, which was Spanish territory, and carrying the goods across into Hayti in lighters. The place was known as "the Mont," and in 1760 Admiral Holmes re-



mingo, while fifteen per cent is quoted for the return voyage.

With such excessively high rates of insurance, the profits of these voyages must have been proportionally large. But it is difficult to learn how great they were; for though we have plenty of accounts of the sales of cargoes in foreign ports, we have no evidence to tell us how much the goods originally cost. Mr. Derby would buy a certain amount of lumber here and a certain amount of rum there, some horses in one place, grain in another, and fish elsewhere, and then store them on his wharf. When one of his vessels was ready to sail on a voyage he would select from his stock on hand various commodities in such amounts and proportions as he thought might suit the market to which she was bound. Thus, we have no basis on which to form an estimate of the exact profits of any one of his voyages, but we can safely assume that he carried on a very successful business in spite of his numerous losses.

By 1763 Mr. Derby appears to have been recognized as one of the leading citizens of Salem. Not far from his wharf he had built a substantial brick ports seeing ninety-one Yankee vessels lying in the roads at one time.

house surrounded by pleasant gardens, where he lived with his wife and family of three daughters and three sons. His eldest son, Richard, and his youngest, John, in early age had been trained to the sailor's life. At twenty-four, Richard was master of his father's brig Neptune, while John was master of a vessel bound to the West Indies, when only twenty-three.<sup>1</sup> His second son, Elias

<sup>1</sup> Letter from John Derby to his father after starting on his first voyage as master: —

IN SIGHT OF THE ROLSERFER  
28 March — 1763

HOND. SIR. — I am about to wright a Letter that is not agreeable to me. Nither will it be to you I beleave. I met with the misfortune of loosing all my anker on the Banck & was ablidged to put back to Providence to refit & sailed from there 2 days ago & this day met Capt. Boudetch from the Havana who tells me of the bad marckets there is there. & now Sir I am undertaking a thing grait consequence but Sir I hope it will turne out for the best but Sir if it does not I hope it will be overloocket by you. That is I am about to put away for Charlestown in South Carolina. I whould have proseaded as far as Havana as it was but being afraid of lenthening time & of our wines growing bad thought it best to mack the best of our way for Charlestown which is all the marckets we have to trust too now. I shall endever to macking payable on my arivall at Charlestown. If I should think of any whare else that was lickly for a better market I whould prosead let it be whare it whould. Excues haist as night is coming on. Capt. Boudetch can enform you of aney particulars relaiting to my affairs. My duty to you and my mother.

Your dutiful son

JOHN DERBY.



Hasket, however, never went to sea, but when a young man entered his father's counting-room and began to master the ways of his father's business. Mr. Derby not only engaged extensively in foreign trade, but also kept a large wholesale and retail store and did a considerable banking business. In those days banking was a rather crude operation, and in the lack of better facilities was largely carried on by the merchants. Mr. Derby kept accounts with a large number of people in Salem, and if one man owed another a certain sum he would give his creditor a note on Mr. Derby and the creditor could then demand the amount either in cash or dry goods or rum or any article he wished, since Mr. Derby acted as retail merchant as well as banker. Accordingly there may be found among the Derby papers many such notes which served the purpose of modern bank checks and of which the following are some early examples:—

SALEM, February 13. 1760.

“Friend Derby Pleas to let Barer have the sum of six shillings and eight pence in goods and charge the same to account of

“JONATHAN DEANE.”

“SALEM, November 16th 1738.

“Capt darby. Be plesd to let Mr. Robert Smith heve one gallon of Rum and Charge the Same to the account of yours to Sarve

“BENJ JONES.”

Up to 1764 Mr. Derby's prosperous commerce seems to have been but slightly affected by the trade regulations enacted in England for the colonies. In 1733, to be sure, Parliament had passed the so-called “Molasses Act,” which placed practically prohibitory duties on all foreign molasses, sugar, and rum imported into the colonies, the object being to check the trade of the colonies with the French West Indies and divert it to the English West India islands. This act, however, had never been enforced with any thoroughness and was easily evaded; for, as a recent writer on this period very truly says, “Smuggling in the eighteenth century was a respectable and profitable occupation.”<sup>1</sup> The customs system of the colonies had from the very beginning been lax and inefficient. The collectors had no power to enforce the payment of duties, and many of the officials were very unscrupulous. Some even held their

<sup>1</sup> Henry Belcher's *First American Civil War*.

offices and drew their pay, although they stayed at home in England. Besides all this, the colonists were not unwilling to evade taxes that they thought unjust. In 1764, however, the first Grenville Act was passed, the purpose of which was to raise a revenue for "defraying the necessary expences of defending, protecting, and securing the British colonies and plantations in America." The act contained many provisions for raising revenue by impost duties, but the taxes which most seriously affected Mr. Derby and other colonial merchants were those on foreign molasses. Under the Act of 1733 the duty on foreign molasses imported into the colonies had been sixpence a gallon, and was so high that, had it been enforced, the trade with the French islands would probably have been discontinued. In order to make the new act create a revenue, this duty was reduced from six to three-pence a gallon and was actually collected, for the most important part of the new policy was the means for its enforcement. The customs system of the colonies was thoroughly reorganized and placed on a stable footing. Capable officers were appointed and given the authority and power to enforce the payment of duties and to bring smugglers to punishment. Mr. Derby gives us an inter-

esting insight into the operation of this legislation on his trade. "The late Act of Parliament," he writes in 1765, "has put it out of the people's power to pay money for the necessaries of life, because the duties, arising by the late act, have almost deprived us of our gold currency already; for all the money that is paid for duties is sent home and will finally put a stop, if not entirely ruin the trade of the country and the people in it."

The Grenville Act also provided for a great increase in the duty upon foreign wine, in order that the colonies might be obliged to obtain their wine in England rather than directly from the Azores or Madeiras. As a result of this legislation, we find Mr. Derby ordering the captain of his schooner *Patty* at Madeira not to load wine for the return voyage but to obtain good bills of exchange on London or Lisbon, and if wine was the only return cargo procurable, to buy it at one fourth less than the previous year or it would not pay the cost of the duties. The Grenville Acts laid many other duties, and in 1767-68 the Townsend Acts further inconvenienced colonial trade by a large number of burdensome customs regulations. The restrictions of this new policy greatly reduced the profits of the colonial merchants, and



the Grenville and Townsend Acts were among the causes for the demand of "No taxation without representation," which helped to bring on the Revolution.

## CHAPTER II

### A SALEM MERCHANT'S PART IN THE REVOLUTION

BY 1774 affairs with the mother country had begun to assume a serious aspect. The attempts to enforce such legislation as the Grenville, Townsend, and Stamp Acts had roused the colonies to the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea-Party, and in 1774 the first Continental Congress had assembled and resolved upon retaliatory measures to meet those of England. On October 20 of that year, the American Association was established, which resolved not to import any goods from Great Britain into the Continental Colonies after December 1. Its rules prohibited the importation from the British West Indies of molasses, syrups, paneles, coffee, pimento, and indigo, and committees were chosen in every county, city, and town to oversee the carrying-out of this policy against England and her West India colonies. The persons most severely affected were of course the merchants, for this was another restriction on their trade in addition to the Grenville and Townsend Acts. As time went on, many of the leading



merchants and wealthy people in the Provinces, especially those who expressed any partiality for the royalist cause, began to find the difficulties of trade in America too great and most of them, preferring to remain loyal to the home government, began to leave for England. At the same time many of the wealthy American merchants were ardent supporters of the Provincial cause, and by lending and giving freely of their resources to the Continental Congress were largely instrumental in bringing about the successful outcome of the Revolution. Of this latter class, none were more prominent than the Derbys, who lent both guns and ships to the Continental Government, fitted out privateers, and in many ways took an active part in the defence of their country. In 1774 and 1775, young Richard was a member of the Provincial Congress, and old Mr. Richard Derby, his father, one of the Massachusetts Council.

It is not unnatural, therefore, to find the Derby name connected with one of the first actions that led to the Revolution. In February, 1775, General Gage sent to Salem a regiment of British soldiers under Colonel Leslie, to capture some cannon. The soldiers were met at the North River Bridge in Salem by a large body of citizens, and tradition

says that when the demand was made to deliver up the cannon, old Mr. Derby came forward and boldly replied, "Find them if you can! Take them if you can! They will never be surrendered!" This answer appeared to voice the attitude of the constantly increasing crowd and the troops prudently withdrew.

Less than two months later the battle of Lexington plunged the Provinces into what Joseph Warren termed "the horrors of a most unnatural war." At the time few people in America had any idea of seceding from England and setting up a new nation, but it was felt that this affair at Lexington was the result of the constant and oppressive measures of the British ministry. The Americans claimed that the engagement had been started by the English, and that, far from being the aggressors, the Provincials simply had defended themselves and their property and were entirely within the law. On April 24, five days after the battle, General Gage had sent his despatches and account of the fight at Lexington and Concord to England by the ship *Sukey*, Captain Brown. The members of the Provincial Congress became aware of this fact, and in order to prevent the *Sukey's* despatches from operating "a publick injury" for

the colonies, and in order to keep the English people from getting only "a fallacious account of the tragedy which they have begun," it was resolved to send a fast vessel to England with the colonial version of the affair. Every colonist who was in the fight was then required to write a personal description of the battle, showing that the English had begun the engagement, and these depositions, together with a public letter to the English people, were all to be sent to Franklin and Lee, the colonial agents in London. They were to spread them broadcast in all the papers and thus bring the English people to sympathize with the colonial cause.

Captain Richard Derby, Jr., who was at that time a member of the Provincial Congress, communicated this plan to his father, and old Mr. Derby immediately offered Congress one of his vessels for this service. Accordingly, on April 26, the Congress ordered that "Ye Hona<sup>bl</sup> Richd Derby, Esq<sup>r</sup> be & he hereby is impowered to fit out his vessel as a packet to Great Britain in ye Service of this Colony & to Charge ye Colony with ye Hire of ye Vessel & all other expenses which he shall be at for port charges Victuelling, necessaries &c."<sup>1</sup>

The vessel selected by Mr. Derby for this voy-

<sup>1</sup> *Massachusetts Archives*, vol. 66, p. 546.

age was the little schooner Quero<sup>1</sup> of sixty-two tons, a fast sailer, and one that could be quickly fitted out without causing any suspicion. For her master he selected his son John. On April 27 Congress gave him his orders as follows:—

“In Committee of Safety, April 27, 1775. Resolved, That Captain Derby be directed, and he hereby is directed, to make for Dublin, or any other good port in Ireland, and from thence cross to Scotland or England, and hasten to London. This direction is given, that so he may escape all cruisers that may be in the chops of the channel, to stop the communication of the provincial intelligence to the agent. He will forthwith deliver his papers to the agent on reaching London.

“J. WARREN, Chairman.

“P.S. You are to keep this order a profound secret from every person on earth.”

The following day Captain John Derby took the depositions and letters, and during the night of the 28th of April he sailed on his voyage, bearing

<sup>1</sup> We do not find the Quero mentioned in any of Mr. Derby's papers except in connection with this voyage. Possibly this was a vessel hired by him, or it may have been one of his many West India traders with her name changed just for this voyage.



news which was destined to throw a country into consternation. The expedition had been organized with the utmost secrecy so that the British cruisers patrolling the coast would not get wind of it, and it is even stated that the crew did not know where they were bound until they were off the Banks of Newfoundland. As the *Quero* carried no cargo and had favorable winds, she arrived off the Isle of Wight after a passage of twenty-nine days. On May 28, Captain Derby appeared in London and deposited his written affidavits<sup>1</sup> of the battle in the hands of the Lord Mayor. General Gage's despatches had not yet arrived, and thus Captain Derby brought to England the first news of the commencement of hostilities. The effect it produced may be best observed by quoting from contemporaries. Ex-Governor Hutchinson of Massachusetts, who was then in London, wrote in his "Diary": "Capn. Darby came to town last evening. He is sent by the Provincial Congress in a vessel in ballast, to publish here their account of an action between the troops and the inhabitants on the 19th of April. A vessel which sailed four days before with dispatches from Gage is not

<sup>1</sup> The originals of these affidavits are now among the Arthur Lee manuscripts in the Harvard Library.

arrived. The opposition here rejoice that the Americans fight, after it had been generally said they would not. I carried the news to Lord Dartmouth,<sup>1</sup> who was much struck with it. The first accounts were very unfavorable, it not being known that they all came from one side. The alarm abated before night, and we wait with a greater degree of calmness for the accounts from the other side.”<sup>2</sup> A private letter from London dated a few days later said, “The intelligence of Captain Darby of the defeat of General Gage’s men under Lord Percy by the Americans on the 19th of April last has given very general pleasure here, as the newspapers will testify. ’T is not with certainty that one can speak of the disposition of people in England with respect to the contest with America, though we are clear that the friends of America increase every day, particularly since the above intelligence. It is believed the ministers have not as yet formed any plan in consequence of the action of April 19. They are in total confusion and consternation and wait for General Gage’s despatches by Captain Brown.”<sup>3</sup>

These two extracts illustrate the excitement

<sup>1</sup> Secretary of State.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson’s *Diary*, p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> Essex Institute *Historical Collections*, vol. 36, p. 10.



into which England had been thrown by Captain Derby's arrival. Stocks fell and general uneasiness prevailed. Many people, however, especially in official circles, were inclined to discredit the report, or at any rate to consider it a gross exaggeration. In order to dispel any doubt on the matter, Arthur Lee, the Massachusetts agent, published a statement in the London papers to the effect that any one calling at the Lord Mayor's could see the affidavits and the copies of the Salem "Gazette" giving an account of the engagement.

Two days later Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State, summoned Derby to come before him and give a verbal account of the affair, for a general desire had been expressed that the bearer of such alarming news should be "taken up and examined." But Captain Derby was nowhere to be found. He had disappeared as suddenly and as quietly as he had come. The interest in his actions is shown by the following extract from Hutchinson's "Diary": "It is said that Darby left his lodgings the first instant and is supposed to have sailed and that he had a letter of credit from Lane on some house in Spain. Mr. Pownall<sup>1</sup> sent to Southampton to inquire, and the collector

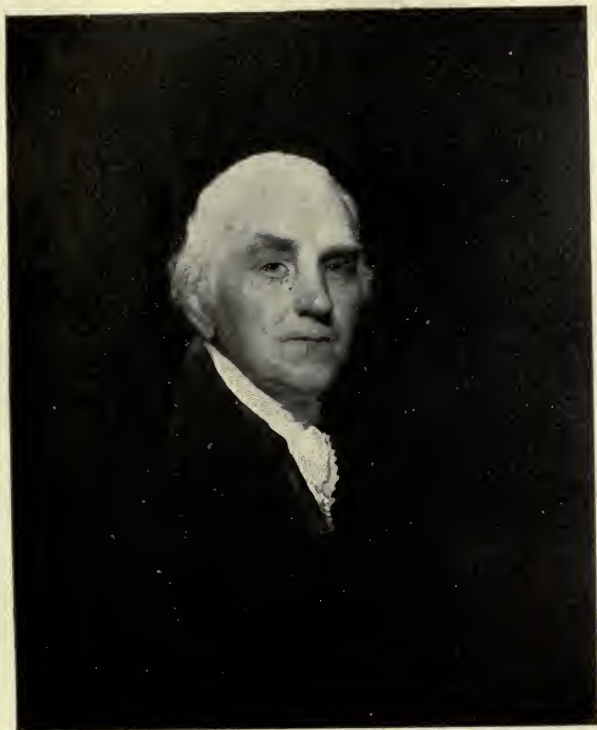
<sup>1</sup> Assistant Secretary of State.

knew of no such vessel there. It is supposed he left her in some small harbor or inlet and came in his boat to Southampton. Pownall was of opinion Darby was gone to Spain to purchase ammunition, arms, &c. Darby has said to some that he had a vessel gone or going to Spain with a cargo of fish: to others that he was going for a load of mules."<sup>1</sup> It was not till June 9, or two weeks after Derby had delivered his news, that the Sukey arrived with General Gage's despatches, which confirmed the previous accounts of the battle. In the meantime, Captain Derby was well on his way home again. Leaving London on June 1, he had gone by post-chaise to Falmouth, where he joined the Quero and set sail before England had got over the first excitement caused by his information. On July 18 he arrived in Salem, and proceeding immediately to Headquarters at Cambridge, gave Washington the first account of the effect produced in London by the news of the battle. Captain Derby's statements of expenditures on this interesting voyage are still preserved in the State House at Boston and include his bill for personal time and service, which he modestly puts down as "o."

Though the colonies now found themselves

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson's *Diary*, p. 464.

DAY OF  
CAPTAINS



CAPTAIN JOHN DERBY

1741-1812

Merchant of Salem (From the portrait painted in 1809 by Gilbert Stuart



engaged in a war with the mother country, the conditions of trade were not yet particularly affected. The following letter from Mr. Richard Derby, Senior, to one of his captains in the West Indies gives an interesting idea of affairs at that time:—

SALEM, May ye 9, 1775.

“Capt. Danl. Hathorn of Schooner Patty, West Indies.

“I suppose you will be glad to hear from home, but things are in such a confused state I know not what to write you. Boston is now blocked up by at least 30,000 men. We have had no action since ye 19 of April which was very bloody. They, ye Regulars, came out in ye night, silently up Cambridge river, and got almost to Concord before day, so that ye country had a very short time to get out. Had we had one hour longer not a soul of those bloodthirsty creatures would ever have reached Boston. However, they got a dire drubbing so that they have not played ye Yankee tune since. We have lost a number of brave men but we have killed, taken and rendered justice, I believe, at least 8 to 1, and I believe such a spirit never was, everybody striving to excel. We have no Tories, saving what is now shut up in Boston or gone off.



There hath not been as yet any stopping of ye trade, so I would have you get a load of molasses as good and cheap and as quick as you can and proceed home. If you have not sold and ye markets are bad where you are, you have liberty to proceed any other ways, either to ye Mole, Jamaica, or to make a fresh bottom, or anything else that you may think likely to help ye voyage, but always to keep your money in your own hands."

The Derbys, however, were not destined to continue their prosperous commerce during such turbulent days without interruption, and in the winter of 1775-76 they began to suffer a number of serious losses. The first of these was the capture of their schooner *Jamaica Packet*, Captain Ingersoll. While on a passage to Salem from the north side of Jamaica she was taken by a British cruiser and carried into Boston. Mr. Derby thus describes the affair: "The captain who took him [i. e., Captain Ingersoll] deprived him of all his papers, and kept them until the trial came on, when the bill of stores was missing from the papers. The court condemned one cask of rum and one cask of sugar for want of the bill of stores, but acquitted the vessel and cargo. Captain Ingersoll could not get

leave to sell the cargo. He applied, from time to time, to have the interest delivered, and could not succeed; but after a time, and when the enemy were near leaving Boston, he obtained leave to sell so much of his cargo as would be sufficient to repair his vessel, with a view to leave Boston with the fleet, which he was desirous of doing, hoping thus to save the interest. When the fleet and army were leaving Boston, they came and took most of the rum on board the transports; the soldiers and sailors, and others, came in the time of confusion and cut his sails from the yards, and made them into bags; they cut the hoops from the hogsheads of sugar, and took most of it away. Not being satisfied with that, the day they quitted the town they came and cut the fasts from the wharf, when the schooner drove down river and went ashore on one of the islands, and was there burned by the British, by which I lost better than £3000 sterling."

By this time practically the entire business of the house was managed by Mr. Derby's second son, Elias Hasket, and the old gentleman had largely retired from active affairs. The capture of this vessel made young Mr. Derby very nervous lest he should lose more of his property, for he had

three vessels in the West Indies ready to sail for home. They were at Hispaniola, in charge of Captain Nathaniel Silsbee, one of his most trusted shipmasters. During February, 1776, the Derbys sent Captain Allen Hallet to St. Nicholas Mole, Hayti, in the schooner Nancy, with a credit for £500 to £1000 to be laid out to the best advantage. A long letter was also sent to Captain Silsbee in regard to the management of the vessels in his charge. This letter fortunately has been preserved, and not only shows the anxiety felt by the Derbys for the safety of their property, but gives an insight into the methods of carrying on commerce during the Revolution. Elias Hasket Derby writes:—

“If this letter should meet you at the Mole, you may ship me, by any vessels bound to Cape Ann, Newbury, Ipswich, or near to it, some cotton, cocoa, sugar, molasses, duck, cordage, powder, or any other article you think may answer, as I make no doubt that any goods will make 100 per cent. But do not send any indigo, as that is contrary to the association, but any foreign goods you have a right to bring.

“Worsted stockings & Middleing Linen for shirting is at Present much wanted, as is Pins,

Silk & Cotton Handkfs. & writing Paper, all which articles is worth at least 150 per cent. more than common, and £150 Sterling well layd out in such articles will leave more Proffitt than any Westindia goods, but they must not come (in a vessel) with an English Clearance, & neither must any of them be taken from Jamaica, as it would be in direct Violation of the Association, which I do not mean to break.”<sup>1</sup>

Of Captain Hallet he writes:—

“I shall depend on your advising him in all matters. He has no Clearance & therefore suppose it not safe to go to Jamaica for a Clearance, but you will judge of that. He has two Registers & if you think it safe & Best he may go down to Jamaica as from the Mole in Ballast belonging to Dominica, but I suppose he may be as safe with a Cargo of Molasses, Sugar, Cocoa, & Cotton from the Mole without any Clearance at all, Provided it is consigned to some Merchant in Nova Scotia & the French Clearance to agree with that. The reason of my wanting his Papers so, is I think if he is taken there, he must be safe if he is leased to that government. I have ordered Hallett to throw all the Papers over in case he gets taken, but I do not

<sup>1</sup> The American Association. See page 28.



think of loosing her as the Schooner sails very fast. If not taken & if he meets an Easterly Wind, as it will be the right season of the year for it, he will stand a good chance to get into some of our Harbours on the North Shore, & I am well assured if he does well & has a good Cargo of Goods, he will make not less than 100 per cent after Paying the Insurance and charge which at present is high. I have insured the Schooner out & while she lay at the Mole against all Risques at ten per ct. but if she goes to Jamaica it is to be 5 per ct. more, so that the Insurance down will be not less than 100 Dollars. At present I have not made Insurance home as suppose I cannot at this time get it done under 25 per ct. & shall not make any at present for by the last acct. from England it seems they are tired of this unnatural War, but of that you can form a much better judgement than we can here, as it is seldom we have accounts that are to be depended on.

“There are many difficulties in carrying on business at this time, and I should be sorry to hear of your going to Halifax, or of doing anything, however small, contrary to the Association of the Continent; and you may depend upon it, that if the present dispute should continue the next summer,



that there will be no less than 100 sail of privateers out from the continent, and I suppose the interest of mine, as Jamaica or Halifax property, must share the fate of other things, if taken. But may the Almighty Disposer of all things order the councils of the wicked administration to come to naught."

Mr. Derby concludes by saying:—

"The times at present are such I cannot determine what will be for the best, and must therefore leave it wholly to you, not doubting the business will be conducted with care. Should so large a fleet come on this coast in the spring as is talked of, I should think it not best to ship so much to the Northward or otherwise: but it is now said that commissioners are appointed to come over to accommodate affairs, but I doubt it. I commit you to the Almighty's protection, not doubting that we shall once more carry on business at Salem in peace and safety.

"From your friend

"ELIAS HASKET DERBY."

Captain Silsbee disposed of Captain Hallet's cargo, quickly procured a return one for him, and

about March 20, the Nancy started for home. In the latter part of April she arrived safely at Falmouth (now Portland), Maine, where the cargo was sold to great advantage. Captain Silsbee sent word to Mr. Derby by Captain Hallet that he would "visit Jamaica to learn the latest news," and govern himself accordingly, and that he would not ship the principal part of the property until he could do so with safety. But it was impossible to carry on commerce at that time in safety, and though Silsbee used his best judgment, the vigilance of the British cruisers was too great. During the spring, when he sent the three Derby vessels North, two of them fell into the hands of the enemy. This disaster brought Elias Hasket Derby to a decision. Up to that time he had indulged in peaceful commerce alone; henceforth, if he wished to retain his position on the seas, he must meet the enemy with force.

In June, 1776, he fitted out his schooner *Sturdy Beggar*, of ninety tons, as an armed vessel, with six carriage guns and a crew of twenty-five men. On June 13, the Massachusetts Council gave Peter Lander his commission to command the vessel and "to make Reprisals on the Enemys of the united Colonys of North America agreeable to the Laws

and Regulations of this Country.”<sup>1</sup> A few days later the *Sturdy Beggar* sailed from Salem, being one of the first privateers commissioned in Massachusetts during the Revolution. Of this voyage no record now remains, but in September Mr. Derby fitted out, in company with Miles Greenwood, of Salem, his West India trader *Revenge*, armed with twelve guns, which made a very successful cruise, taking “four Jamaicamen, laden with 733 hogsheads of sugar, besides other cargo.”

One might suppose that this success would have encouraged Mr. Derby to engage more extensively in privateering, but he does not appear to have sent out another armed vessel till the following year. By the autumn of 1777 all hopes of a peaceful settlement between England and the Provinces had disappeared, and Mr. Derby became one of the most active men in New England in fitting out privateers. Of the one hundred and fifty-eight armed vessels equipped at the port of Salem during the Revolution, he appears as owner or part owner of twenty-five, and without doubt he had shares in twice as many more.<sup>2</sup> At the same time

<sup>1</sup> *Massachusetts Archives*, vol. 164, p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> Armed vessels fitted out by Elias Hasket Derby during the

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he continued to send some of his vessels on trading voyages, for every sort of commodity was in great demand and high prices awaited the merchant who was courageous enough to engage in foreign commerce. These vessels were always well armed and equipped with a "letter of marque" which allowed them to capture any of the enemy's ves-

Revolution, with dates when commissioned (*Massachusetts Archives*):—

|      |          |                        |                  |            |
|------|----------|------------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1776 | June 13  | Sch. Sturdy Beggar,*   | privateer,       | owner      |
| 1776 | Sept. 4  | Sloop Revenge,         | "                | part owner |
| 1777 | Oct. 8   | Sloop Rover,           | "                | "          |
| 1777 | Dec. 19  | Schooner Congress,     | letter of marque | "          |
| 1777 | Dec. 22  | Sch. Centipede,        | privateer        | "          |
| 1778 | Jan. 21  | Sloop Patty,           | "                | "          |
| 1778 | Feb. 25  | Sch. Scorpion,         | "                | owner      |
| 1778 | Apr. 10  | Sch. Lexington,        | "                | part owner |
| 1778 | Apr. 18  | Brigt. Franklin,       | "                | "          |
| 1778 | May 22   | Sch. Centipede,        | "                | "          |
| 1778 | July 20  | Sch. Congress,         | "                | "          |
| 1778 | July 23  | Sch. Scorpion,         | "                | "          |
| 1778 | Oct. 16  | Brigt. Franklin        | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Mar. 29  | Ship Oliver Cromwell,* | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Mar. 30  | Brigt. Franklin,       | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Apr. 15  | Ship Hunter,           | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Apr. 15  | Brigt. Fame,           | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Aug. 3   | Brigt. Roebuck,        | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Aug. 3   | Sch. Centipede,        | "                | "          |
| 1779 | Oct. 28  | Ship Three Sisters,    | letter of marque | "          |
| 1779 | Nov. 25  | Ship Salem Packet,     | "                | owner      |
| 1779 | Nov. 25  | Sloop Nancy,           | "                | "          |
| 1780 | Mar. 22  | Brigt. Hasket & John,  | "                | "          |
| 1780 | Apr. 18  | Brigt. Lexington,      | "                | "          |
| 1780 | Apr. 18  | Brigt. Fame,           | "                | "          |
| 1780 | Aug. 5   | Brigt. Hasket & John,* | "                | "          |
| 1780 | Sept. 25 | Sloop Morning Star,    | privateer        | part owner |
| 1781 | June 13  | Ship Grand Turk,       | "                | "          |
| 1781 | Sept. 4  | Brigt. Young Richard,  | letter of marque | "          |
| 1781 | Sept. 29 | Ship Grand Turk,       | privateer        | "          |
| 1781 | Sept. 29 | Ship Patty,            | letter of marque | "          |
| 1781 | Nov. 29  | Ship Salem Packet,     | "                | "          |
| 1781 | Nov. 29  | Brigt. Lexington,      | "                | "          |
| 1782 | Feb. 12  | Ship Exchange,*        | "                | "          |
| 1782 | Feb. 2   | Sch. Fly,              | privateer        | "          |
| 1782 | May 9    | Brigt. Lexington,      | "                | "          |
| 1782 | June 29  | Ship Patty,            | letter of marque | "          |
| 1782 | June 29  | Ship Salem Packet,*    | "                | "          |
| 1782 | Dec. 16  | Ship Astrea,           | "                | owner      |

\* Captured by the enemy.



sels they might fall in with while on the voyage. As a result of these many ventures, Mr. Derby found the Revolution a period of great profit. To be sure, five of his vessels were captured, but his privateers took many valuable prizes and his trading vessels, sailing as "letters of marque," made a number of profitable voyages. Samuel Curwen wrote of Salem in 1780: "Those who five years ago were the meaner people, are now, by a strange revolution become almost the only men of power, riches, and influence. The Cabots of Beverly, who, you know, had but five years ago a very moderate share of property, are now said to be by far the most wealthy in New England; Hasket Derby claims the second place in the list." He adds, "E. H. Derby's province tax is £11,000, and his neighbors complain he is not half taxed."<sup>1</sup>

As the war progressed, however, Mr. Derby began to engage less in privateering, and, converting most of his ships into "letters of marque," he sent them trading with fully as much chance of material profit as though he had continued in privateering. A glance at the prices of standard commodities during the war shows how much was to be gained by a successful commercial voyage.

<sup>1</sup> S. Curwen's *Journal and Letters*, p. 234.



In 1780 Curwen wrote: "In New England a dollar bill is worthy only 2 2-3 of an English half penny. Pins at 1s. apiece, needles at 2s., beef 2s. 6d., veal 2s., mutton and lamb, 1s. 6d., butter 6s. per lb., rum eight dollars per gallon, molasses two dollars, brown sugar 10s. per lb., loaf sugar 15s., Bohea tea seven dollars per lb., coffee five dollars, Irish pork sixty dollars per barrel, lemons 3s. apiece, wood twenty dollars a cord, ordinary French cloth twenty-two dollars a yard, hose nine dollars a pair. A suit of clothes which cost five guineas here (England), would cost five hundred dollars in Boston."

Although, as the war went on, Mr. Derby gradually withdrew his vessels from privateering, in 1781 he had a large ship of three hundred tons built at Salem expressly for a privateer. This vessel was the *Grand Turk* and was destined to be one of the most famous ships ever owned in Salem. She was designed for speed and yet had good carrying capacity, and her armament of twenty-four guns made her a regular man-of-war. On June 13, 1781, Thomas Simmons received his commission to command her, and such was the general desire to be a member of her crew that, within three days after the notices were posted, more than one hundred of the one hundred and twenty men required

had signed the articles. No record has been preserved of her first cruise, but in September she sailed again under the command of Captain Joseph Pratt, and making her way towards the English Channel, she fell in with the sugar-laden ship *Mary*, off the Irish coast. The vessel was homeward bound from Jamaica and was an easy prey for the *Grand Turk*. A prize crew was placed on board, and the two vessels started for Bilboa, but before they reached that port they fell in with the brig *John Grace*, which the *Grand Turk* captured. On arrival at Bilboa the two prizes were sold and netted \$65,802. On her return to Salem, the *Grand Turk* refitted and sailed on another cruise under Captain Pratt, this time to the West Indies. Again she captured several prizes, one being the twenty-gun ship *Pompey*, from London. These vessels were all carried into the French West India islands and sold, and the proceeds were remitted to Salem.

In the mean time Mr. Derby had another ship constructed which was even larger than the *Grand Turk*. He named her the *Astrea* and fitted her out as a "letter of marque" under the command of his brother, John Derby. During the latter part of December, 1782, she sailed for France, and made

the passage across the Atlantic in the fast time of eighteen days, although she stopped to capture an English brigantine on the way. Shortly after her arrival at Nantes, the preliminaries of peace between England and the United States were signed at Paris. Captain Derby, therefore, made all haste to discharge and reload. On March 12, after some delays, the *Astrea* finally got to sea, and twenty-two days later arrived in Salem. Until then no knowledge of the peace had reached the United States, and thus Captain John Derby, who had the distinction of being the first to carry the news of the outbreak of hostilities to England, was also the first to bring to America the news of the declaration of peace. A fortnight after Captain Derby's arrival, hostilities ceased and the war came to a close.

## CHAPTER III

### PIONEERS OF AMERICAN COMMERCE IN THE FAR EAST

THE successful voyages of the Derby vessels, cruising as privateers or trading as "letters-of-marque" during the Revolution, had materially increased the wealth and importance of the house and placed it in a position to carry on a far more extensive commerce than in colonial days. At the close of the war the Derby fleet consisted of the ships Grand Turk and Astrea, and the brigs Henry, Three Sisters, and Cato, in place of the seven small sloops and schooners of which it consisted in 1775. Previous to the Revolution the principal part of the Derby trade had been to the West Indies, the Spanish Peninsula, and the Western Islands, and with his little sloops and schooners Mr. Richard Derby, Senior, had built up a comfortable fortune in commerce to those places. A few months after the end of the war the old merchant died, honored by his townspeople and all who knew him. It was fortunate that he lived to witness the independence of his country, for he was always a sound Whig

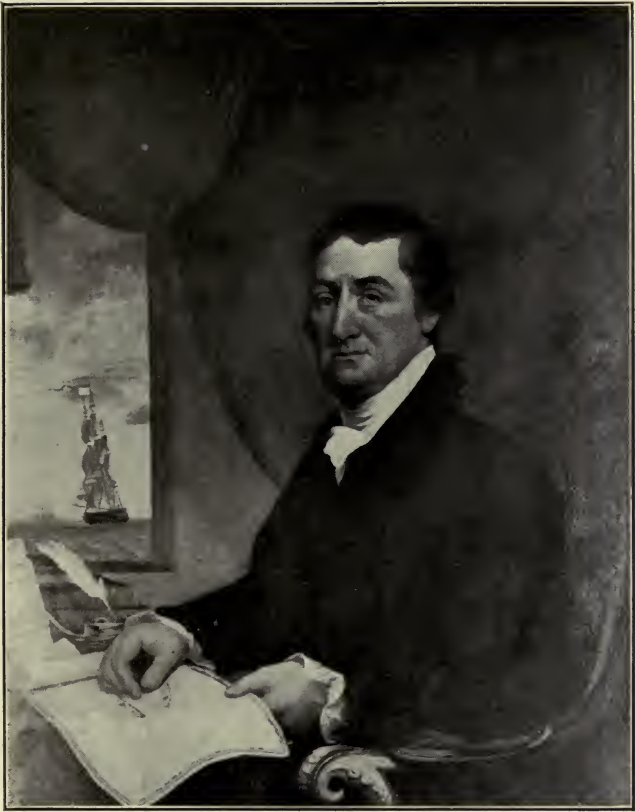


and an ardent patriot, and during the Revolution both lent and gave freely his vessels, guns, money, and other property to the Continental Government. At his death, his son, Elias Hasket Derby, who since 1772 had largely managed the affairs of the house, took entire charge of the business. Hostilities had ended, and that short period of peace which lasted in western Europe from 1783 to 1793 was beginning. With a fleet of five staunch ships Elias Hasket embarked at once upon new and broader fields of commerce, and under his skilful and energetic management, his vessels within a few years were carrying the Derby flag to the distant markets of the Far East, and the Derby house had become one of the leading mercantile establishments of America.

Elias Hasket took charge of the business of the house in the summer of 1783, and one of his first ventures was to send the *Astrea* to London. She was the first Derby vessel to go to England on a commercial voyage. The ship left Salem in August, 1783, first proceeding to Alexandria, Virginia, where she loaded with tobacco. Mr. Derby consigned the cargo to Messrs. Lane & Fraser, of London, with whom his father in colonial days always had lodged funds which could be drawn



LIBRARY OF THE  
PEABODY MUSEUM  
SALEM, MASS.



ELIAS HASKET DERBY  
1739-1799

Merchant of Salem. From the portrait by James Frothingham in the Peabody Museum, Salem



upon by his captains wherever they might be. On arrival in London the tobacco was sold at a good profit. A return cargo of English goods was then shipped, and the vessel returned to Salem.

Encouraged by the success of the *Astrea's* voyage, Mr. Derby now decided to enter more extensively upon the trade to Europe. The following season he seems to have sent two of his brigs to England with tobacco. At the same time he decided on a voyage to a part of the world hitherto unvisited by a vessel bearing the American flag. In the spring of 1784 he bought a fine English-built ship of two hundred and sixty-six tons named the *Light Horse*, which had been captured during the war. Having loaded her, he despatched her from Salem on June 15, for St. Petersburg, Russia. "This vessel and her cargo of sugars," wrote Mr. Derby to Lane & Fraser, "cost me £8000 sterling, and as the voyage is new to us in this quarter of the world, I wish you to make me £3000 sterling insurance." In August the *Light Horse* reached Cronstadt, the port of St. Petersburg, and was the first ship to display the Stars and Stripes in the Baltic Sea. Unfortunately, however, her sugar did not meet with a ready sale, and had to be disposed of at a loss. The funds received were laid out in a

return cargo of canvas, duck, hemp, and iron. Towards the end of September the Light Horse sailed for Salem, where she arrived November 28, 1784. Although this pioneer voyage had not been a success financially, it was certainly valuable as a means of teaching Mr. Derby the character of the Baltic market. Messrs. Gale, Hill & Carzalet, of St. Petersburg, who managed the business of the Light Horse while at Cronstadt, wrote to Mr. Derby a letter of advice for his guidance if he should send another vessel to those parts. They told him that it was better to have letters of credit on London than to bring goods with which to buy a cargo, for practically the only saleable articles at St. Petersburg were coffee, sugar, and rice, and even for these commodities only a very limited market was offered. The principal goods for export were hemp, sailcloth, duck, cordage, and iron.

There are several reasons to account for this sudden expansion of Mr. Derby's trade. One cause was that the declaration of peace made it possible to carry on commerce with England and North Europe without much fear of capture. Before the Revolution the trade between the colonies and England was to a considerable extent carried on in English bottoms, whereas in the decade after the



Revolution, at Salem at least, practically no English vessels arrived or cleared. This was probably due to the fact that the American merchants preferred to use their own vessels and did their best to exclude English ships from American trade. This feeling towards England expressed itself in Massachusetts in an act of June 23, 1785, which prohibited the exportation of any goods from that state in British vessels. Furthermore a duty of seven shillings a ton in addition to the regular tariff was levied on all goods which were imported into Massachusetts in a foreign vessel. Although this act was repealed a year later, being "rendered inefficacious for want of coöperation of our Sister States," it shows the attitude of the people of Massachusetts at that time. Another reason why Mr. Derby had extended his business to new fields was the exclusion of American vessels from trade to the British West Indies. Under the English Navigation Acts, the colonial ships had shared with English vessels a monopoly of the commerce to those islands. But when the United States achieved her independence, her ships, like those of any other foreign nation, were not permitted to trade with these British colonies. Thus a valuable market for American commerce was lost, and a

new field for the employment of vessels hitherto in that trade had to be sought.

Taking these facts into account, it is not surprising to find that in November, 1784, five months after the Light Horse had sailed for the Baltic, Mr. Derby cleared his ship *Grand Turk* for the Cape of Good Hope, under the command of Captain Jonathan Ingersoll. This was the first voyage from Salem to that part of the world, although not the first from the United States. In the latter part of the seventeenth and the early years of the eighteenth century, a number of New York merchants carried on a fairly extensive trade with the pirates who infested the seas about Madagascar. American products were taken out in New York vessels and exchanged for Eastern goods which the pirates had captured from vessels in the Indian seas.<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia also seems to have had some trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope before the Revolution. In 1783 the ship *Empress of China* had sailed from New York for Canton, being the first American vessel to go to China. When, in March, 1785, she stopped at the Cape of Good Hope on her way home, she found the *Grand Turk* lying there. Major Samuel Shaw, the pioneer

<sup>1</sup> Channing's *History of the United States*, vol. II, pp. 263-71.

American merchant in the China trade and afterwards United States Consul to China, was supercargo of the *Empress of China*, and in his journal tells of the *Derby* ship. "Captain Ingersoll's object," writes Major Shaw, "was to sell rum, cheese, salt provisions, chocolate, loaf sugar, butter, &c., the proceeds of which, in money, with a quantity of ginseng, and some cash brought with him, he intended to invest in Bohea tea; but as the ships bound to Europe are not allowed to break bulk on the way, he was disappointed in his expectations of procuring that article, and sold his ginseng for two thirds of a Spanish dollar a pound, which is twenty per cent better than the silver money of the Cape. He intended remaining a short time to purchase fine teas in the private trade, allowed the officers on board India ships, and then to sail to the coast of Guinea, to dispose of his rum, &c., for ivory and gold-dust, thence, without taking a single slave, to proceed to the West Indies, and purchase sugar and cotton, with which he would return to Salem. Notwithstanding the disappointment in the principal object of the voyage and the consequent determination to go to the coast of Guinea, his resolution not to endeavor to retrieve it by purchasing slaves did



the captain great honor, and reflected equal credit upon his owner, who, he assured me, would rather sink the whole capital employed than directly or indirectly be concerned in so infamous a trade.”<sup>1</sup>

Captain Ingersoll, having disposed of all his cargo except his rum, was about to sail for the Guinea Coast when the British East Indiaman Calcutta came into port. Her captain had on board two hundred chests of Hyson tea on his own account, which Captain Ingersoll persuaded him to exchange for the Grand Turk's New England rum and a small amount of specie. Ingersoll on his part agreed to deliver the rum for the Englishman at St. Helena. Accordingly as soon as he had loaded the tea, Ingersoll set sail and on May 4 arrived at the island of St. Helena where he landed the rum. From there the Grand Turk proceeded to the West Indies to complete her cargo by loading sugar, and on July 26 she arrived at Salem.

Although, like the voyage of the Light Horse to the Baltic, this first venture of Mr. Derby's to the southern hemisphere did not result in great profits, it gave him an idea of the state of the markets in distant parts of the world. While at the

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw* (edited by Josiah Quincy), p. 208.



Cape, Captain Ingersoll had learned of the possibilities of trade at the Isle of France, or Mauritius.

This small island and its neighbor, the Isle of Bourbon, lie in the Indian Ocean about five hundred miles east of Madagascar, directly in the sailing route around the Cape of Good Hope to the East Indies. In 1661, at the advice of Colbert at the French Court, France took possession of the islands, and a settlement was made first on the Isle of Bourbon. In 1722 Port Louis, on the Isle of France, was founded, which soon became important as a way station for ships of the French East India Company bound from France to the French possessions in India. The culture of sugar, coffee, and other products was established; and before long considerable trade grew up. The French Company, however, held a monopoly of the trade of all the French possessions in the East Indies, so that theirs were practically the only commercial vessels that ever called at the islands. However, in 1783 France had extended to American vessels the privilege of touching at the Isle of France for provisions, and in a decree of November 30, 1784, this privilege was further extended by permitting American vessels to land American produce at the Isles of France and Bourbon and to load the pro-

duce of those islands or the East Indies in return.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Derby was not slow to appreciate the advantages of this decree and the possibility of a lucrative trade. Accordingly, soon after the return of the Grand Turk from the Cape of Good Hope in July, he decided to despatch her in the fall to the Isle of France. In the mean time he began gathering together a miscellaneous cargo of brandy, rum, butter, cheese, flour, beef, pork, candles, and various groceries. During the summer he wrote to Messrs. Lane & Fraser in London asking them to insure the vessel, and their reply of May 4, 1786, shows how such a voyage was regarded by the underwriters:—

“We could not effect the Insurance you ordered on the Ship Grand Turk & Cargo, Eben<sup>r</sup> West Master, from Salem to the Isle of France & back; our Underwriters are not fond of the risque, it being a new trade to the Americans most of the Ships in this kind of business are very particularly describ’d, & the Masters & Seamen well acquainted with Navigation, besides there was another material objection which was the uncertainty how long Capt. West was likely to be out as it might not be in his power to procure a loading at the Isle of

<sup>1</sup> Auber's *Constitution of the East India Company*, p. 11.

France; in short we do not think that under the most favourable circumstance of Ship & Crew we should have been able to have cover'd your property under 10 gs. per ct. we give you the earliest notice of this that you may get part of your property insured at Boston or Salem."

The command of the vessel was given to Captain Ebenezer West, and Mr. William Vans was appointed supercargo. On December 3, 1785, the Grand Turk sailed, being, so far as any records show, the first vessel to clear from Salem for ports beyond the Cape of Good Hope. The following is the manifest of her cargo:—

INVOICE OF MERCHANDISE SHIPT ON BOARD  
THE GRAND TURK, EBEN<sup>a</sup> WEST MASTER  
BOUND FOR THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE &c.  
CONSIGNED TO WILLIAM VANS & EBEN-  
EZER WEST FOR SALES & RETURNS ON MY  
ACCOUNT.

|                            | £.  | s. | d. |
|----------------------------|-----|----|----|
| 10 Bbls. of Pitch          | 12  | 0  | 0  |
| 10 " Tar                   | 8   | 10 | 0  |
| 75 " Superfine Flour       | 180 | 0  | 0  |
| 6 Tierces of Rice          | 38  | 1  | 4  |
| 35 Hogsheads Tobacco       | 686 | 10 | 9  |
| 49 Furkins New York Butter | 140 | 4  | 2  |
| 20 Casks Claret Wine       | 90  | 0  | 0  |
| 483 Bars Iron              | 300 | 0  | 0  |

62 *Merchant Venturers of Old Salem*

|                                    | £.    | s. | d. |
|------------------------------------|-------|----|----|
| 12 Hogsheads Loaf Sugar            | 88    | 17 | 3  |
| 50 Cases of Oil                    | 90    | 0  | 0  |
| 20 Boxes Chocolate                 | 30    | 0  | 0  |
| 22 " Prunes                        | 9     | 8  | 6  |
| 20 Crates Earthenware              | 166   | 2  | 0  |
| 26 Casks Brandy                    | 206   | 14 | 0  |
| 163 1-2 bbls. of Beef              | 293   | 8  | 0  |
| 9 Casks Ginsang                    | 194   | 2  | 0  |
| 30 Puncheons Granada Rum           | 464   | 2  | 0  |
| 42 Casks Coniac Brandy             | 823   | 10 | 0  |
| 7 " Bacon & Hams                   | 93    | 5  | 0  |
| 7 Boxes English Mold Candles       | 25    | 6  | 10 |
| 50 " Spermacety Candles            | 199   | 7  | 9  |
| 100 " Mould Candles                | 233   | 6  | 3  |
| 27 " Tallow Candles                | 53    | 1  | 3  |
| 32 " Soap                          | 93    | 15 | 9  |
| 478 Furkins Butter                 | 1157  | 4  | 9  |
| 579 Boxes Cheese                   | 514   | 11 | 2  |
| 123 1-2 Bbls. Pork                 | 252   | 3  | 0  |
| 38 Kegs of Beef                    | 36    | 2  | 0  |
| 25 Baskets Aniseed                 | 15    | 0  | 0  |
| 14 Hogshds New Eng. Rum high proof | 152   | 3  | 8  |
| 20 1-2 " " " " " " " "             | 132   | 2  | 1  |
| 6 Casks Cheese                     | 37    | 17 | 1  |
| 20 Hogshds Fish                    | 184   | 15 | 0  |
| 42 Bbls. of Beer                   | 126   | 0  | 0  |
| 4 Tierces of Bottled Beer          | 22    | 10 | 0  |
| 4 " " Porter                       | 23    | 15 | 0  |
| 9 Kegs of Pork                     | 9     | 9  | 0  |
| Amount of Cargo                    | £7183 | 5  | 7  |



|   | £.    | s. | d. |
|---|-------|----|----|
| Ship Turk with Stores Wages &<br>outfits for Voyage | 2000  | 0  | 0  |
| Light Cash  | 16    | 14 | 5  |
|   | <hr/> |    |    |
|   | £9200 | 0  | 0  |

After a rather stormy passage, the Grand Turk arrived at the Cape of Good Hope on February 23. Here a small part of the cargo was sold and a consignment of hides taken in exchange, to be called for on the return voyage. On March 17 she continued on her way, and about a month later arrived at the Isle of France. Unfortunately the demand for the cargo was not so great as Captain West and Mr. Vans had anticipated, so they decided to wait for better prospects. They wrote Mr. Derby that if the market continued bad they might go on to Batavia, in the Dutch East Indies. The cargo, however, was gradually disposed of at the Isle of France, but the price of coffee and sugar, which were the two important exports of the island, remaining high, Mr. Vans was at a loss to obtain a return cargo. While thus situated, he was approached by a French merchant of the island, Sebier de la Chataignerais by name, who offered to charter two thirds space in the Grand Turk to carry freight from the Isle of

France to Canton, and thence back to Boston, and agreed to pay all the port charges in China. Mr. Vans, seeing in this a chance to make a profitable voyage out of a poor one, accepted the merchant's offer, and having taken on board the freight, the Grand Turk sailed in July for China, with the French merchant as passenger. Early in September the ship arrived at Whampoa, the port of Canton, where she was the second vessel to display the American flag.

In order to understand the dealings of the Grand Turk at Canton one must know the peculiar methods of carrying on foreign trade with China in those days. Until 1842, Canton was the only port in China where foreigners were permitted to trade, and the whole system of complicated customs and duties, with the observance of endless formalities from the moment a foreign vessel arrived until she left, would have been enough to discourage all foreign commerce but for the great profits of the China trade. On the arrival of a foreign ship at Whampoa, a Chinese security merchant had to be engaged before any cargo could be unloaded or the least business transacted. Practically the entire business of the ship was carried on through him. He received her cargo into his

warehouse on the Canton river front, sold it for the ship's account, and then furnished the outward freight. He paid the import and export duties on the goods himself; for in all buying and selling with foreigners the Chinese merchants made their prices with that understanding. In 1786 there were about twelve of these merchants in Canton. They were called "Hong," and were known collectively as the "Co-Hong." In return for the annual payment of a large sum to the Government, they were given the exclusive privilege of trade with foreigners, but at the same time were responsible for the good conduct of the foreigners with whom they transacted business and for the full payment of all duties and taxes in connection with the foreign trade. The "Hong" had large establishments, including docks and warehouses on the river front at Canton, and were men of great wealth and influence. In their business dealings they seem to have maintained a very honest and respectable character.

Having engaged a "Hong" merchant to act as security or fiador for the ship and to manage her affairs, the next thing for the ship's supercargo to do was to engage a "linguist." This individual was not necessarily, as his name might imply, a

master of languages. His duties were to report on all goods loaded or unloaded from the ship, to provide the "sampan" in which the cargo was carried to the "Hong's" wharf in Canton, and to act as a sort of messenger in transacting the ship's business with the custom-house or the "Hong" merchant. In this last capacity he was indispensable, as no foreigners were admitted to any part of the city of Canton, except to a very small section on the river front, where the foreign merchants were allowed to live while their vessels were lying at Whampoa.

Soon after arriving, every foreign ship had to be measured by the "Hoppon," or collector of customs. This official was commissioned by the Emperor to act as the Government's superintendent of foreign trade. He received a nominal salary, but made his fortune by exactions and fees. To quote from the journal of Major Samuel Shaw: "When the Hoppon goes to measure the shipping he is attended by the Co-Hong. On these occasions the captains produce their clock work and other curiosities, of which the Hoppon lays by such as he likes, and the fiador (Hong security merchant) of the ship is obliged to send them to him. Sometime after, the Hoppon demands the price, for he will



not receive them as a present. The merchant, who understands the matter perfectly, tells him about one twentieth part, or less, of their value, and takes the money. As soon as the ship is measured, the fiador takes out a permit for unloading, and the linguist provides two sampans to receive the goods, which are hoisted out of the ships in presence of two mandarins, who live in their sampan alongside. When the goods arrive at Canton, one of the principal mandarins, with his assistants, attends to weigh, measure, and take account of everything, after which liberty is granted to sell. Such articles as the fiador or the Co-Hong do not want may be disposed of to any other person, from whom the linguist receives the duty, and settles with the fiador. When the return cargo is to be sent on board, the mandarins attend, as before, and each package must have the seller's 'chop' (mark) upon it, in order that the linguist may know where to apply for the duty; otherwise, the purchaser is himself obliged to pay it. The expense of unloading is paid by the Europeans, and the Chinese deliver the return cargo alongside the ship free of all duties and charges whatever. All merchandise must be unloaded and loaded by Chinese sampans."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shaw's *Journals*, p. 176.

The principal article of export from Canton in those days was tea. The teas for the foreign market were purchased by agents of the "Hong" merchants from the growers in the Bohea or Sunglo regions, about three hundred and fifty miles north of Canton. The first consignments arrived in Canton in July and the last in November, after a long and costly trip of about eight hundred miles across hills on porters' backs and down rivers on rafts. On arrival in Canton the teas were re-sorted and re-packed in decorated chests marked with "chops" indicating the place of growth and the seller's name. These chests were then sold to foreigners by the "Hong" in lots of one hundred to one thousand.

1786  
After this general description of the methods of carrying on trade in Canton it will be easier to understand the operations of the Grand Turk while there. The Derby ship arrived at Whampoa early in September and found that the ship Empress of China of New York had just arrived on her second voyage to Canton. Soon the two American vessels were joined by three more: the ship Canton from Philadelphia, and the ship Hope and the sloop Experiment from New York. When it is realized that only one American vessel had ever been seen

84- in China before this season, it is interesting to note five American vessels thus gathered at this new market for American commerce. All except the Grand Turk had come as a result of the enthusiastic reports brought by the Empress of China on her return from the first voyage to China two years before. Soon after their arrival at Whampoa, Captain West, Mr. Vans, and M. Sebier, the merchant from the Isle of France, proceeded up to Canton, where with the captains and supercargoes of the other American ships they rented a "factory" or place of business for the season. Thus for the first time there was an American "factory" on the Canton river front, in company with the establishments of the English, Dutch, French, Danish, and other nations.

One of the first things done by Mr. Vans and Captain West was to engage a "Hong" merchant to act as fiador and security for the Grand Turk, and to manage her affairs while in China. An arrangement was made accordingly with the "Hong" merchant Pinqua for this purpose. Soon after arriving in China, M. Sebier, for some reason, appears to have given up his charter of the Grand Turk from Canton to Boston and to have settled his affairs with Mr. Vans by giving the latter



an order for \$10,039, but he, nevertheless, held himself to his original contract to pay all the Grand Turk's port charges at Canton. As these amounted to nearly \$10,000, it was certainly a great saving. As soon as the Frenchman had paid the \$10,039, Mr. Vans made a contract with Pinqua to lay out this sum in Bohea tea "at the price paid by the Danish and Dutch companies this season," to be delivered free of duties on board the Grand Turk within sixty days. This contract was made on September 26. On November 28, one of the American vessels being about to sail for home, Captain West and Mr. Vans wrote to Mr. Derby as follows:—

"In our last Letter from the Island of France we acquainted you that we had taken a freight for China & that the Cargo was answerable for that Freight. Since when we have the pleasure to Inform you of our arrival at Canton. Although the Cargo was made over to us for the freight the situation of the Gentleman & Customs of Canton obliged us to give up the Cargo and take 3800 dollars in full for the Contact & freight from Island of France to this place he paying all charges except Manning, Victualing, & Rigging the Ship. The particulars of this affair will be too long for a letter we shall



therefore wait our arrival in America. We are now taking a Cargo for America on your Account Consisting of the following Articles. China Ware — Table sets Tea & Coffee ditto & Cups & Saucers the whole amounting to about 2000 dollars (sufficient to floor the ship) 30 or 40 pukle of Cassia Cinnamon at 24 dollars per pukle — 300 large chests Bohea Tea amt<sup>ing</sup> to ab<sup>t</sup> 15000 dollars — Hyson Singlo & Congo Teas to Compleat the Cargo the whole of which will amount to abt 21000 dollars at Canton which place we hope to leave by 20th December. We shall stop at the Cape G. Hope & take as many Hides as will fill the ship & compleat our Cargo & from there make our best way home. The Duties Charges & Presents which every Ship has to pay make it very expensive being here a Vessel of 30 tons pays the same as a ship of 1000 tons. — The person who freighted the ship Turk will pay near 10,000 dollars for charges duties & presents to hoppo. We hope to be in America in all May & conclude with wishing ourselves a safe arrival & good Reception.

“Yr. very humble servants

“WM. VAN’S &

“E. WEST.

“per Sloop Enterprise Capt. Dean.”

*Experiment?*

In the mean time, while the Grand Turk was sailing the distant seas and visiting the new markets of the East, what had Mr. Derby been doing at home? The Grand Turk had left Salem in December, 1785, her destination being the Isle of France. In July he heard that she had arrived at the Isle of France in April, and therefore as the autumn advanced he began to expect her back. He appears to have heard nothing more of the ship till February, 1787, when he received a letter from Captain West, dated at the Isle of France in the previous June, which told of the Grand Turk's charter to M. Sebier for a voyage to Canton and thence back to Boston. Mr. Derby immediately communicated with his insurance agents and had the ship's policy changed so as to cover this extension of the voyage, but it is apparent that he had much difficulty in getting underwriters to take the risk even at so high a rate as nine per cent.

Early in May the sloop Experiment arrived at New York from Canton, bringing the letter from Captain West and Mr. Vans which stated that the Grand Turk was about to sail for home with a full cargo of teas and Chinese goods. What must have been Mr. Derby's feelings on the



**SHIP GRAND TURK**

From a painting by Robert S. Peabody, after the design in the punch bowl made at Canton, China, in 1786, and now in the Peabody Museum, Salem





morning of May 22, 1787, when on looking from the window of his counting-house he beheld the Grand Turk under a full press of canvas standing into Salem Bay and up the Beverly shore? As the ship came to off Naugus Head and dropped anchor a salute was fired, and before the smoke had cleared away it is safe to say that half the population of Salem, including friends, relatives, and those actuated simply by curiosity, had put off to the ship in every available row-boat or skiff. The Grand Turk was the first Salem vessel to arrive from ports beyond the Cape of Good Hope and one of the first American vessels to come back from China. Crowds of people thronged her decks listening to the crew's accounts of the strange Chinese manners and customs or examining the curios brought from the distant and almost mythical East by these eighteenth-century Marco Polos.

Although the curios and stories probably entertained Mr. Derby, it was the cargo tightly stowed beneath the hatches that most seriously demanded his attention. The ship could not have been at anchor long before he had retired to the cabin with Captain West and Mr. Vans, and over a good bottle of Madeira looked through the ship's

manifest. This document has fortunately been preserved and is given below:—

MANIFEST OF THE CARGO ON BOARD SHIP GRAND  
TURK EBEN WEST MASTER FROM CANTON  
22ND MAY, 1787

(Showing costs at Canton)

|     |                          |   |                |
|-----|--------------------------|---|----------------|
| 240 | Chest Bohea Tea          | } | \$17510        |
| 175 | $\frac{1}{2}$ Chests “ “ |   |                |
| 2   | Chests Hyson “           |   | 95             |
| 52  | “ Souchong               |   | 521            |
| 32  | “ Bohea Congo            |   | 459            |
| 130 | “ Cassia                 |   | 779            |
| 10  | “ Cassia Bud             |   | 85             |
| 75  | Boxes China              |   | 1923           |
| 945 | Ox Hides                 |   | 1050           |
| 100 | Shammy Skins             | } | 184            |
| 50  | Buck Skins               |   |                |
| 130 | Ordinary Hides           |   |                |
| 10  | Casks Wine               |   | 568            |
| 1   | Box paper                |   | 44             |
|     |                          |   | <u>\$23218</u> |

Adventures:—

|    |                       |       |
|----|-----------------------|-------|
| 13 | Chests Bohea tea      | \$650 |
| 6  | “ Canzo               | 300   |
| 6  | Boxes China           | 135   |
| 24 | pkgs. Bandanna Hdkfs. | 72    |
| 24 | Chests of muslins     |       |

It would be interesting for us to know how great were Mr. Derby's profits on the Grand Turk's trip. Felt, in his "Annals" of Salem, says, "Her voyage was very profitable, yielding twice more capital than she carried out."<sup>1</sup> However true this may be, it is certain that the voyage was a very successful one, but it is practically impossible to estimate the profits with any exactness. At that time foreign exchange was an extremely variable figure, both on account of the unstable condition of American currency and of the constant depreciation of the Spanish dollar, which was then the one great worldwide medium of exchange. The cargo of the Grand Turk had been purchased at Canton with Spanish dollars, and was sold to people in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, in each of which states the currency was in pounds, shillings, and pence of a different value. A rough estimate of the value of the New York pound and the Spanish dollar of the time would place the rate of exchange at about £1 = \$2.60. Applying this to the cost of the Bohea tea, which was bought at Canton at about \$53.40 per chest and sold in New York for about £48 per chest, we see that the gross profit per chest was about \$70, or nearly fifty per cent.

<sup>1</sup> Felt's *Annals*, vol. II, p. 292.

Of course, all the expenses of manning, victualling, and maintaining the ship during the voyage, and the insurance, would have to be deducted from this gross profit, but, even allowing for these expenses, the return must have been considerable.

The arrival of the Grand Turk in May, 1787, found Mr. Derby already well started in the trade to the Cape of Good Hope and beyond. In August, 1786, he had despatched the brig *Three Sisters* to the Cape of Good Hope and the Isle of France with a cargo of miscellaneous provisions, and in January, 1787, he had sent the *Light Horse* on the same voyage with a similar cargo. The opening of the trade to the Isle of France to American vessels in 1784 has already been mentioned, but it has been seen that the Grand Turk did not find business at the island very profitable. In 1785, however, a new French East India Company was chartered, with a monopoly of French trade to all the French East Indies except the Isle of France. The small port of L'Orient, about sixty miles north of the mouth of the Loire, thereupon was designated as the only French port through which private French merchants could carry on this trade with the Isle of France. The result was that two hitherto unimportant places suddenly became the centres



of a very extensive commerce. L'Orient changed from an insignificant seaside town to a thriving port of entry, and the Isle of France from a thinly settled agricultural colony to a populous commercial centre where the goods of the East Indies were exchanged for those of Europe. French merchants established commercial houses in the island, and crowds of discontented Frenchmen of broken fortune and doubtful character hastened to the island in hope of making great wealth in trade and at the same time to escape from the mother country, which already was beginning to show signs of the great Revolution. This tremendous rush of population to the island soon became too much for its natural resources: Practically the only commodity produced in any great amount was coffee, and it soon became necessary to import many of the staples of life.<sup>1</sup> New England at that time exported few manufactured goods, but her products were principally fish, meat, butter, lard, rum, flour, and other provisions, and all these commodities were greatly wanted at the Isle of France. Accordingly a very brisk trade sprang up between New England and that island. When the Grand Turk was at the Isle of France in the spring of

<sup>1</sup> McPherson's *Annals of Commerce*, vol. iv, p. 81.

1786 this rush of population had hardly started and the great demand for provisions had not begun. In the winter and spring of 1787, however, when the Three Sisters and the Light Horse were at the island, the "boom," to use a modern phrase, was just beginning. The two vessels sold their cargoes of provisions at high prices, and after loading coffee and some Eastern goods returned to Salem, where they both arrived in January, 1788.

About two months before they returned, Mr. Derby had despatched the Grand Turk once more for the Isle of France with a cargo of provisions valued at £6424. The command of the vessel he gave to his eldest son, Elias Hasket Derby, Jr., a young man of about twenty-one years. John Williamson, who had been first mate of the Grand Turk on the Canton voyage, went with him as sailing master, but to Elias Hasket, Jr., all the management of the voyage was given. The young man had left Harvard in 1786 and sailed as passenger in the Light Horse on a voyage to the Baltic, and after an extended tour through Europe had returned to Salem to enter on a mercantile career. It was Mr. Derby's intention to have his son remain at the Isle of France after selling the ship's cargo, to act as his agent. Mr. Derby was

fully aware of the chances of profitable business at this island, and the great Derby fortune was practically founded on Mr. Derby's trade to the Isle of France during the early years of its "boom."

When the Grand Turk sailed, Mr. Derby gave his son permission to sell the ship if a profitable opportunity offered, promising to send two more vessels out to him during the year. The Grand Turk left in November, 1787, and in January, 1788, Mr. Derby despatched the ship Juno to the Isle of France with a cargo of provisions consigned to his son. This ship had been purchased by Mr. Derby expressly for this voyage. When only forty hours out, the vessel sprang a leak and began to sink so rapidly that the crew had only time to take to the boats before the vessel went down. They were soon picked up by a sloop bound to Demerara and eventually arrived safely in Salem. Although the vessel was a total loss, the cargo was largely covered by insurance. It is a remarkable fact that of all the vessels owned by Mr. Derby during his long mercantile career, this is the only one, so far as the records show, that he ever lost at sea. Undaunted by this misfortune, Mr. Derby bought another ship to take

the place of the Juno. This vessel he named the Atlantic, and in September he cleared her for the Isle of France with a cargo of provisions consigned to his son. About the same time he despatched the Light Horse for the same place, following up these two vessels in November with the brig Henry.

Thus within the space of a single year Mr. Derby had sent four vessels to the Isle of France with cargoes of lumber, beef, pork, butter, cheese, wine, rum, beer, and miscellaneous groceries, to meet the overwhelming demand for all these commodities caused by the rapidly increasing population of that island. The Grand Turk arrived at the Isle of France in January, 1788, and young Mr. Derby disposed of her cargo for about \$27,000, which gave a very considerable profit, and enabled him to purchase a brigantine named the Sultana, together with her cargo of cotton with which she had just arrived from Bombay. He then began to procure a home cargo for the Grand Turk, but while he was thus engaged a French merchant of the island offered him \$13,000 for the ship just as she was. As this was nearly twice the amount at which his father valued the Grand Turk, young Mr. Derby was not slow to take advantage of this



flattering offer, and the deal was soon closed.<sup>1</sup> With the proceeds of this profitable transaction Elias Hasket, Jr., purchased an American ship named the Peggy which was then in port and loaded both her and the brigantine Sultana, which he had previously bought, with general cargo for Bombay. About the middle of August, 1788, the two vessels left the Isle of France, Elias Hasket, Jr., going in the Peggy, and on September 8 they arrived at Bombay, being among the very first American vessels to be seen at that port. There was then no treaty between Great Britain and the United States permitting American vessels to trade at British ports in India, nor was this privilege granted until Jay's Treaty in 1794. The Americans, however, had been given permission to trade at the French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Danish settlements by the local governments

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Bowditch writes at the Isle of France in 1789: "Ships of almost every kind will sell well here, but those of about 300 tons and that have a great height between decks are generally preferred. Such a ship well furnished with good accommodations, a head quarter gallery & sound house would sell for 11 or 12 thousand dollars. The ship Grand Turk tho' not so well arranged sold for 13000 but it was to a man who wanted very much such a ship. But such a one would always fetch 10000 doll. A great deal depends upon the beauty of a ship & upon her sailing. A copper bottom always adds 1500 or 2000 dollars to her value."

of these settlements. Therefore, fearing that these foreigners would get all the trade of the Americans, the British Indian Government extended a similar privilege to American vessels as early as 1785. This was only a gratuitous license and revocable at pleasure, but, nevertheless, in 1788, during the régime of Lord Cornwallis, American vessels were treated as the most favored foreigners.<sup>1</sup>

On arrival at Bombay the cargoes of the *Peggy* and *Sultana* were unloaded and sold and two full cargoes of Indian cotton and blackwood bought. While engaged in loading, young Derby learned that a pirate vessel, well known on the Malabar Coast, had heard when his two ships expected to sail and was preparing to capture them as they left the harbor. Derby, therefore, decided that the safest thing to do was to sail immediately, before the pirate expected. Accordingly, with the two vessels about half loaded with cotton and leaving behind about \$5000 worth of his blackwood, Derby sailed from Bombay. Without even sighting the pirate, the two vessels arrived safely at the Isle of France on December 5. The *Sultana's* cotton was now transferred to the *Peggy*, and thus with a full cargo of nothing but cotton the

<sup>1</sup> Milburn's *Oriental Commerce*, vol. II, p. 137.

Peggy sailed for Salem. She arrived June 21, 1789, bringing the first cargo of Indian cotton that ever arrived in America. This proved to be a rather unfortunate importation. The elder Mr. Derby writes: "My ship Peggy has arrived here from India with a cargo of cotton which I find to be very unsaleable owing to our people being unacquainted with the kind. If sold at publick sale it would not bring more than one shilling as cotton is more plenty in this State than it has been these 10 years past." He greatly laments the fact that the Peggy brought no coffee, which was then commanding a high price.

Soon after young Derby's return from Bombay to the Isle of France, the Atlantic and the Light Horse arrived from Salem. He sold their cargoes of provisions at a good price and then despatched them to Bombay to load the blackwood he had left behind him there, and also some cotton with which they were to proceed to Canton, where he figured that at prevailing prices they should net nearly one hundred per cent profit. He then loaded the Sultana for Madras. In the mean time Mr. Derby's brig Henry had arrived from Salem under Captain Benjamin Crowninshield, young Derby's first cousin. Her cargo was also

sold at a good profit, and joining Captain Crowninshield on the *Henry*, Derby sailed for Madras. Here they found the *Sultana*, and together the two vessels proceeded to Calcutta, where the *Sultana* was sold. The *Henry* was then loaded with a full cargo of India goods, sailing thence direct for home. After a very long passage she arrived at Salem on December 31, 1790. Elias Hasket, Jr., had been absent from home three years, and the result of his transactions in the Isle of France and India was a profit of nearly \$100,000, a very large sum for those days. Moreover, his long stay at the Isle of France had established the Derby house as the most prominent of all American houses trading with that island. In his visits to Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta he formed a large acquaintance with the leading merchants, which was a great aid in the extensive Indian trade subsequently developed by the Derbys.

In the mean time, while building up this large business at the Isle of France, Mr. Derby, Sr., was turning his attention to still more distant markets. The profits of the Grand Turk's China voyage had convinced him that a direct voyage to that part of the world ought to be a successful venture. Accordingly, in 1788 he decided to despatch two



more of his vessels, one on a direct voyage to Batavia, and the other to Batavia and Canton. The ship *Astrea* and the brig *Three Sisters* were selected for the purpose. Thus the brig *Cato* was the only vessel of his fleet that had not already sailed or was not about to sail for ports beyond the Cape of Good Hope. A China voyage in those days was quite an undertaking, for it required nearly six months to collect a cargo suitable for the Canton market. The *Astrea* was sent to Gotenburg, Stockholm, and Copenhagen after iron, and the *Cato* to Madeira for wines, and Mr. Derby endeavored to buy in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania all the ginseng that he could, since this was one of the leading exports from America to China.<sup>1</sup>

The *Three Sisters* was the first of the two vessels to start on the long voyage. On December 4, 1788, she sailed for Batavia under the command of Captain Benjamin Webb, with Mr. Samuel Blanchard as supercargo and young Nathaniel Silsbee, who later became United States Senator, as clerk. The

<sup>1</sup> Ginseng is a root or herb easily grown in New England, which was used by the Chinese in compounding nearly all their medicines. In the early days of the Canton trade it was in constant demand and almost always brought a high price.

Astrea on her voyage back from the Baltic encountered very bad weather. Owing to the weight of her cargo of iron she was somewhat strained and had to put in to St. John's, Newfoundland. After landing part of her cargo she returned to Salem, where she was given a thorough overhauling and was passed through a survey of three eminent merchants who pronounced her fit for her long voyage. In the mean time Mr. Derby attempted to insure the Astrea for the trip but the lowest rate he could obtain was ten per cent. In writing to Messrs. Ludlow & Gould, of New York, in regard to this matter, he said: "Another remark I must make to you as a friend is that I have five Vessels out to that part of the World & this Ship is the sixth — which rather rubs hard to get her away with so large a stock as I am putting into her. Therefore if the insurance is made I shall not expect to take up the Premium Notes till the risque is off." Having been put in first-class condition, the Astrea loaded her cargo of provisions, ginseng, specie, and miscellaneous articles, and on February 16, 1789, she sailed for Batavia and Canton under the command of Captain James Magee, with Mr. Thomas Handasyd Perkins, of Boston, as supercargo.

One hundred and forty days out from Salem the *Astrea* passed in by Java Head, and on July 13 she cast anchor in the harbor of Batavia. Here she found the *Three Sisters*, which had arrived about a fortnight before, but owing to the government regulations had not been permitted to land any cargo. The Dutch East India Company, which held the monopoly of trade of the island, would allow no foreign vessel to land any cargo without a permit from the governing council of Java at Batavia. Such a permit had been very difficult to obtain, especially by Americans, who were just beginning to visit the island, but at that time the power of the Dutch East India Company was fast falling and there was much corruption in the government. Mr. Blanchard, the supercargo of the *Three Sisters*, and Mr. Perkins dined several times with the governor and members of the council and were so tactfully insistent in their demands that they finally obtained permission to sell their respective cargoes. While at Batavia Mr. Perkins kept a journal. A few extracts from it describing the place, its people, and commerce during the last years of the Company's rule will not be out of place here.

"Batavia," writes Mr. Perkins, "which is the

warehouse of the Dutch East India Company, and the most important by far of all their possessions round the Cape of Good Hope, is about fifty leagues from the entrance of the Straits of Sunda and about twelve leagues from Bantam. It has a fine harbor, which is well defended from the winds by the many small islands which surround it. The latitude of Batavia is  $6^{\circ}$  south, and about  $106^{\circ}$  east longitude. It is at this time well guarded by a stone wall, which is well built, and about twelve feet high. These walls are well stored with guns and the necessary appendages, which are always kept in order in case of necessity. The bastions are so laid out, that they would be serviceable as well against an insurrection as an invasion. The one or the other they would have great reason to fear, had either the Chinese, who were inhumanely cut off here, or the original inhabitants, who have always been under the lash of the present possessors, courage enough to retaliate; but fortunately for the Dutch, they have a people to deal with, in the Chinese, who do not appear to have the passions which govern men in general. They appear to have no resentment in their composition.

“There are said to be forty thousand Chinese in Batavia and its vicinity. They are governed



by their own officers, but are all restricted to the general outlines of the Dutch policy. Many of them are immensely rich, and enter very largely into trade; have stores in town, and elegant country seats without the gates. They parade about in their carriages with a great degree of state, and seem to feel their consequence. They are the principal mechanics, and the best husbandmen. Their merchants deal for the largest and the most trifling article; for the same man who will sell you to the amount of fifty thousand dollars will bring you a pot of sweetmeats which cost a couple of ducatoons. Great care, however, is to be used in purchasing from them; for they are in some instances employed as spies upon the conduct of strangers by the Dutch Company; and in others they will deceive you in whatever they sell, if they find you are a green hand; so that it is necessary to have one's eye well about one to deal with these people, the character of whom is to me unfathomable.

“The Chinese have a free trade to Batavia, where they bring tea, china, japanned wares, nankins, silks, &c., and take, in return, Spanish dollars and ducatoons, though the former are preferred. Spices, bird's-nests, pepper, tin, sugars,

coffee, candy, beeswax, oil, hides, burning-canes, ratans, sandal-wood, and, when there is probability of scarcity in China, rice, which will always pay a good freight, are exported.

“There is at Batavia a great medley of inhabitants. The principal persons in business, after the Hollanders, are the Moormen. Many of them are very rich. They have an ease of address and an air of good breeding which one would not expect to find in their countrymen. They are the best shaped of any of the Eastern nations whom I observed while there; their complexion nearly the same as that of the aboriginals of America; their features regular and well-set, with the most piercing eye of any people I ever saw. Their religion is Mohametanism. They carry on a great trade to the different islands in the Indian seas, and by their traffic make great fortunes.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Astrea's* stay at Batavia lasted about a month. On August 15, after unloading part of her cargo, she sailed for Canton. The Three Sisters, on the other hand, disposed of her entire cargo at Batavia and accepted a charter to carry to Canton for a Batavian merchant a cargo of sandalwood, beeswax, rattans, betel nuts, and

<sup>1</sup> T. G. Cary's *Thomas H. Perkins*, pp. 23-41.

spices. On September 18, the *Astrea* arrived at Whampoa and Mr. Perkins proceeded to Canton, engaged a "Hong" merchant to secure the cargo, and attended to the many formalities already described in the account of trade conditions in China. The unloading of the cargo was well under way, when, on October 5, to the surprise of the *Astrea's* crew, two American ships were observed coming into the anchorage at Whampoa. They both were flying the Derby house flag, and proved to be the *Atlantic* and the *Light Horse*. These two ships, it may be remembered, had left Salem in August and September, 1788, for the Isle of France with cargoes of provisions consigned to Elias Hasket Derby, Jr., who was then resident at that island. Having disposed of their cargoes at the Isle of France, young Derby had sent them to Bombay to load cotton and blackwood for Canton. The two ships reached Canton on October 5, and two days later the *Three Sisters* arrived from Batavia. Thus there were four Derby vessels lying at Whampoa, although only the *Astrea* had been despatched for China by Mr. Derby.

Unfortunately it happened that this season there were more American ships at Canton than ever before, or for some years after. No less than

fifteen sail of American vessels were lying in the anchorage at Whampoa in November, 1789, among them being the ship *Columbia*, from the Northwest Coast, on her famous voyage around the world.<sup>1</sup> The price of ginseng and other American products fell considerably on account of the large amount thus put on the market, and the price of teas rose somewhat under the increased demand. The result was that the hopes of the Derby captains and supercargoes for a successful voyage were much dampened. After conferring together, it was decided best for Mr. Derby's interests to sell two of the vessels and bring home the property in teas in the two remaining ships. Accordingly the *Atlantic* was sold to a Parsee merchant for \$6600 and the *Three Sisters* to an Armenian for \$4000, and the proceeds invested in teas and Chinese goods. No less than 728,871 pounds of tea were

<sup>1</sup> The ship *Columbia* sailed from Boston in October, 1787, for the Northwest Coast of America via Cape Horn. She arrived on the coast in August and remained there a year bartering her cargo to the Indians for furs. She then sailed for Canton, where she exchanged her furs for teas, and returned via the Cape of Good Hope to Boston, where she arrived in August, 1790, being the first American vessel to circumnavigate the world. In September she sailed again for the Northwest Coast, and on this voyage discovered the river which bears her name. Mr. Derby's son John was a part owner of the *Columbia*.



loaded on board the *Astrea* and the *Light Horse*, together with a large assortment of Chinese goods. The crew of the *Atlantic* took passage on the *Light Horse* and that of the *Three Sisters* on the *Astrea*, and on January 22, 1790, the two vessels left Whampoa for home with their valuable cargoes.

In December, Mr. Derby had heard that the *Astrea* and *Three Sisters* were at Batavia in the previous July, but of the *Atlantic* and the *Light Horse* he had heard nothing except that in the spring of 1789 his son had despatched them from the Isle of France to Bombay. His anxiety must have increased as the spring of 1790 wore on, for nearly all his property was in these four vessels. Not a single word did he hear from them till June 1, 1790, when the *Astrea* was sighted in the bay, and was soon anchored in Salem Harbor. The *Light Horse*, having left China with the *Astrea*, was now momentarily expected, and on the afternoon of June 15 she too appeared in the offing. The wind, however, died away as the ship neared the land, and there being no tugboats in those days, she was forced to come to anchor off Marblehead. During the night while in this exposed position a very sudden and heavy storm sprang up from the

east. The ship was too near the land to beat offshore and so it was necessary for her to ride out the gale at anchor. Early in the morning she began to drag, and before long had drifted within a few feet of the rocks. Nearly the whole population of Marblehead gathered on the shore waiting to see the vessel go to her destruction. Mr. Derby hurriedly drove over from Salem in his postchaise, expecting to see his valuable argosy, which had come safely half around the globe, lost at his very doorstep. But his good fortune, which had kept him so free hitherto from marine disasters, once more stood by him. When the ship was within only a few yards of the rocks the anchors held and continued to hold until the storm subsided. The Light Horse was then brought around into Salem Harbor and safely moored beside the Astrea.

One of the most valued treasures of the old Salem Custom-House is the manifest of the Astrea for her inward cargo on this voyage, a document no less than eight feet long. Together the Astrea and Light Horse were assessed \$25,000 in duties on their cargoes. In their absence in China the present form of government in the United States had been established, and the original tariff of 1789 had gone into operation. The import duties

of the national tariff were considerably in excess of those of the Massachusetts state tariff which had previously been in force, and the duty on teas, which were the principal items of the *Astrea* and *Light Horse* cargoes, had increased from five per cent ad valorem in the Massachusetts tariff of 1786 to from six to twelve cents a pound in the national tariff. Moreover, this duty had taken immediate effect, no allowance being made for cargoes on the way. The result was that Mr. Derby found himself in a difficult position. The importation of tea into the United States in 1790 was unprecedented, amounting to 2,601,852 pounds, and of this total 728,871 pounds had come in the *Astrea* and *Light Horse* to Mr. Derby's account. As the annual demand for tea in the United States had rarely if ever exceeded a million pounds, this tremendous importation sent down the price to a very low figure, and Mr. Derby saw the only way to save himself from a great loss was to keep his teas in his storehouse until the quantity on the market had decreased and the price had been restored to a remunerative level. At that time, however, there was no bonded warehouse system whereby a merchant could keep his goods stored and pay the duty on them as he sold them. Mr.

Derby accordingly addressed a memorial to Congress asking to be permitted to pay the duties on his tea as he from time to time succeeded in selling it. Congress immediately granted his request, and by keeping his teas until prices rose, it is probable that Mr. Derby eventually realized considerable profit from his great importation.

These early voyages beyond the Cape of Good Hope encouraged Mr. Derby to embark more extensively in commerce to that part of the world, and he soon became recognized as one of the leading American merchants in the trade to the East.



## CHAPTER IV

### A CHAPTER OF EAST INDIA VOYAGES

FROM 1790 to his death in 1799, Mr. Derby devoted his main energies to commerce with the Far East. His principal business was with the Isle of France, and he soon became the leading American merchant trading to that island. To-day people in this country know little of the Isle of France, or Mauritius, as it is now called, but in the days of sailing-ships it was a very important port, as nearly all the vessels bound out to the East Indies used to stop there on the way. Saint-Pierre, the French writer, visited the Isle of France in the late eighteenth century, and a very good description of this beautiful tropical island is found in his "Voyage à l'Isle de France" and also in his well-known story, "Paul et Virginie," the scene of which is laid there. The principal products of the place were sugar and coffee, but there was also a large exchange of European and Indian goods. It has been shown before how an extensive trade in provisions had sprung up between New England and the Isle of France to supply the

growing population. This trade was checkered with unexpected profits and losses. One of Mr. Derby's vessels, with a shipment in her cargo of twelve thousand plain glass tumblers, costing one thousand dollars in Salem, arrived at the Isle of France when there was no glassware on the island and sold her shipment for twelve thousand dollars. Another Derby vessel, with a cargo largely composed of common wine from Madeira, arrived at a time when this commodity was in great demand and sold her cargo at a price sufficient to load two vessels with coffee which was then worth twenty-five cents a pound in America. Nevertheless, occasional voyages entailed considerable loss. The disturbed state of affairs in France leading up to the Revolution was reflected in the Isle of France. An active Jacobin Club was formed, and for a time gained control of the government. The members erected a guillotine in the public square, murdered Admiral McNamara of the French fleet at the island, and in many other ways copied the actions of their brethren at home. Such proceedings naturally inconvenienced trade. Vessels and property were often seized, and the frequent embargoes were of great expense to those ships that were unfortunate enough to be detained. A

number of losing voyages resulted from these causes, but on the average Mr. Derby's ventures to the Isle of France were very profitable.

Although Mr. Derby carried on most of his business with the Isle of France, he occasionally sent a vessel on a direct voyage to Batavia, Manila, or Calcutta, and many of his ships that carried goods out to the Isle of France proceeded to India for a return cargo. After 1794 American vessels trading to India enjoyed many advantages, for in that year the privileges accorded to them by the Indian Government in 1787 were confirmed by the British authorities in Jay's Treaty. Moreover, after 1793, when war broke out between France and England, American vessels enjoyed a great advantage from their neutrality. In the decade from 1794 to 1804 the number of American ships trading to India increased several times over. Many of these ships flew the Derby flag, and in the last ten years of his life Mr. Derby carried on a very extensive commerce with Calcutta.

In 1793 his ship *Astrea*, while on a voyage in the Indian seas, took a cargo of rice from Madras to Rangoon. At the last-named port she was impressed by the Sultan of Pegu to carry troops to Siam, with which country he was then at war.

Captain Gibaut, her commander, was kept as a hostage at Rangoon while the first mate navigated the ship to Siam, where the American flag was displayed for the first time. After performing transport service to the satisfaction of the Sultan, though at a financial loss of about \$10,000 to the ship's owner, the *Astrea* was returned to Captain Gibaut and permitted to resume her original voyage. Another Derby ship, the *Recovery*, visited Mocha, in Arabia, in 1799, and was the first American craft to visit that part of the world. A Salem historian tells us that "the arrival of the strange ship was viewed with great interest by the authorities who could not divine from whence she came, and made frequent inquiries to know how many moons she had been coming."<sup>1</sup>

Besides the ships engaged in this Eastern commerce, Mr. Derby employed a number of vessels in trade to the Baltic, Hamburg, France, England, the Spanish Peninsula, the Western Islands, and the West Indies, and in the space of nine years from 1790 to 1799 he appears to have increased his property at least fivefold.

It would be interesting, indeed, to relate the story of many of Mr. Derby's voyages, but the

<sup>1</sup> Felt's *Annals of Salem*.





SHIP RECOVERY OF SALEM

From the painting by William Ward in the Essex Institute, Salem'

TO THE  
MEMBERS OF THE  
ASSOCIATION

records of very few remain.) One of the most remarkable incidents in the history of the American merchant marine was the voyage of the Derby ship Benjamin to the Isle of France in 1792-94. Although all the officers of the vessel were under twenty years of age, the venture proved to be one of the most successful and profitable ever undertaken by Mr. Derby. Captain Nathaniel Silsbee, who later became United States Senator from Massachusetts, was but nineteen when he sailed in command of the Benjamin, and his first mate, Charles Derby, was the same age. Moreover, the captain's clerk, Richard Cleveland, the grandfather of President Cleveland of later days, had not reached his nineteenth birthday when the ship left Salem. Two very interesting accounts of this voyage have been left us in the journals of Silsbee and Cleveland,<sup>1</sup> and the story is best told in their own words:—

“On the 11th of December, 1792,” writes Captain Silsbee, “I sailed from hence in the new ship Benjamin of one hundred and sixty tons burden, and with a cargo consisting principally of merchan-

<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Cleveland's *In the Forecastle, or Twenty Five Years a Sailor*. 1842.

*Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Silsbee*. Essex Institute Historical Collections, vol. xxxv, 1889.

dise which cost about eighteen thousand dollars (then considered a large stock for such a ship) for the Cape of Good Hope and India, and with such instructions as left the management of the voyage very much to my own discretion. On leaving home every dollar I possessed was much less than I wished to leave with my mother for the comfort of herself and family during so long a voyage as I had then undertaken; therefore in addition to all my own small means, I left with her also some money which I hired for that purpose; consequently (as heretofore) I had no property with me beyond what I had hired upon a respondentia-bond, to enable me to pay my five per cent of the cost of the outward cargo, my perquisites, as consignee of the cargo, being to put in five per cent of the outward cargo, and to receive, at the close of the voyage, ten per cent of the return cargo. Neither myself nor the chief mate of the ship for that voyage (Mr. Charles Derby) had attained the age of twenty-one years when we left home on that voyage (I was not then twenty years of age) and it was remarked to me by the naval officer (the late Mr. Wm. Pickman) on taking the ship's papers from the Custom House that it was the first instance in which papers had been issued from that office to



a vessel to the East Indies the captain and chief mate of which were both minors.

“In an intensely cold and severe storm on the first night after leaving home, our cook (a colored man somewhat advanced in age) having preferred his cooking house on deck to his berth below, for a sleeping place, had his feet so badly frozen as to cause gangrene to such an extent as to render amputation of all his toes on both feet absolutely necessary for the preservation of his life. Having neither surgical skill nor surgical instruments on board the ship, the operation, which had become necessary, was a very unpleasant and a very hazardous one, so much so that no one on board was willing to undertake the direction of it, and I was most reluctantly compelled to assume, with the aid of the second mate, the responsibility of performing the surgical operation, with no other instruments than a razor and a pair of scissors, and which, in consequence of the feeble state of the cook’s health, required two days to accomplish. The cook was very desirous to be landed and left at one of the Cape de Verde Islands, and for that purpose I proceeded to the Island of St. Jago where I found, at anchor, an English frigate, the surgeon of which, at my request, came on

board our ship and examined the cook's feet and (to my great satisfaction) pronounced the operation upon them well performed, assured me that there remained no doubt of his recovery, furnished and prescribed some future dressings and advised me, by all means, to keep him on board ship under my own care, in preference to putting him ashore. With the cook's approbation I followed the surgeon's advice, and in the course of a few weeks thereafter the cook was able to resume his duties, recovered his usual health and made several subsequent voyages.

“After the transaction of some business at the Cape of Good Hope, and while on the passage from thence to the Isle of France, we fell in with a French frigate bound to that island from France, from the officers of which vessel I obtained information of the war which had then recently taken place (and which was of long duration and of great vicissitudes) between France and England. That frigate reached her port of destination a few days in advance of me and the news of which she was the bearer caused such a change in the commercial market of the place as was beneficial to my voyage by enabling me to dispose of the merchandise of which my cargo was composed at much higher

prices than could have been obtained before. On my arrival at the Isle of France, it was my intention to proceed from thence to Bengal for the purpose of procuring a return cargo, and, with this view, as fast as my goods were sold, the proceeds were converted, from the paper currency of the place, into Spanish dollars. On the arrival of the aforesaid frigate, an embargo was laid on all foreign vessels in port and was continued for more than six months, in the course of which time the Spanish dollars which I had purchased had become worth more than three times as much of the currency of the colony as they had cost me, whilst the price of the products of the island, in the same currency, had advanced comparatively but little. Finding myself enabled, by that circumstance, to purchase considerably more than double the quantity of those products than I could have done at an earlier period, I relinquished the plan of proceeding to Calcutta, and concluded to sell my Spanish dollars and invest the proceeds of them in coffee and spices and return from the Isle of France direct to the United States."

The account of the remainder of the voyage we will quote from the narrative of Richard Cleveland.

“In the mean time,” writes Mr. Cleveland, “all the ships being sheathed with wood, the worms were making such havoc, that a long detention would be scarcely less worse than confiscation. There is probably no place in the world surpassing Port North-West, now so called, for the destructive power of the worm. On going into the hold of a ship when empty, I was astonished at the noise they made; not unlike a multitude of borers with augers; but fortunately when they had pierced the sheathing their further progress was arrested by the hair which is placed between the sheathing and the bottom of the ship.

“On the 6th of July, several American ships being ready for sea, their masters went together on board of the Admiral’s ship, and had an interview with him on the subject of obtaining leave to sail; but this he refused them, on the ground of its endangering somewhat the safety of some merchant ships then on the point of sailing for France. A second application was made on the 31st of July with like result; nor was it till the arrival of the American ship Pigou, with French passengers, direct from Bordeaux, on the 20th of November, that the authorities were satisfied that America would maintain a neutral position,



and, as a consequence, were willing to raise the embargo.

“Being thus relieved from a painful state of anxiety, and from an embargo of nearly six months’ duration, we sailed from the Isle of France on the 25th of November, being only partly laden; and proceeded to the Isle of Bourbon to take on board a quantity of coffee already prepared for us. Having anchored at St. Dennis, and taken on board a part, we proceeded to St. Benoit, and took in the remainder. The anchorage at this latter place is so bad that it is rare that any other than small coasting vessels attempt to land there. We came to in fifty fathoms, the cable being nearly up and down. The Benjamin was the first foreign vessel that had ever anchored in that port; and having fine weather and a very smooth sea, and receiving every facility from the agent on shore, we succeeded in the accomplishment of our object, after remaining four days at this dangerous anchorage. We then sailed on the 7th of December for the Cape of Good Hope, touching again at St. Dennis for the settlement of accounts, which caused a detention of a few hours only.

“Our passage from St. Dennis to the Cape of Good Hope was attended with no circumstances

worthy of note. It was performed in about thirty days and we arrived there on the 4th of January, 1794. A few days afterward the ship Henry arrived from the Isle of Bourbon, only partly laden; and on the same day the brig Hope arrived from Salem. Such a coincidence was not lost on the enterprising mind of Captain Silsbee, who seizing the advantage presented by it, determined on returning to the Isle of France with a cargo of Cape produce, which was greatly wanted there; and on freighting home, in the above vessels, the cargo then on board. Having made arrangements for carrying this plan into execution, he caused to be shipped in these vessels, to the owner in Salem, such portion of the cargo from the Isle of France as would considerably more than pay for the cost of our ship and of her whole outward freight; and the proceeds of the remainder, beyond what was put on board the Henry and the Hope, were invested in wine and other articles suited to the market of the Isle of France.

“A few days before the completion of our business at the Cape the British frigate Diomedé anchored in the bay; which was rather an alarming incident, as at that period the thirst for plunder among the officers of the British navy, and their



CAPT. NATHANIEL SILSBEE

Salem ship-master and merchant and United States Senator. From the portrait by Chester Harding





consequent annoyance of neutrals, were very great. It was soon afterwards rumored that they had information of our intention of going to the Isle of France, and meant to prevent it: although we had not violated any known law or regulation of the place, or compromised any of the rights of neutrals, nor was the island blockaded. Our exertions, therefore, were unrelenting to be off with the least possible delay. Accordingly, being ready for sea, we went on board in the afternoon of the 4th of February, in a strong southeaster, and with a prospect of its increase. We had been on board but a short time before we saw a boat put off from the Diomedes and row towards us. If it had been their intention to board us, as we supposed to be the case, they were unable to do so, from the violence of the wind, and they landed about a mile to leeward. As, in going out of the bay, we should be obliged to pass the Diomedes, we waited till after dark for this purpose. In the mean time the gale had increased to such a degree, that, when we attempted to heave ahead, we found it to be entirely impossible, and as the only alternative, we slipped our cables, hoisted the fore-topmast staysail and were soon at sea, out of the reach of molestation.

“Arriving safely at the Isle of France on the 13th of March, our cargo was disposed of immediately to great advantage. The ship was again loaded with a cargo of the produce of the island, and we sailed for home on the 8th of April; having been only twenty-six days in selling and delivering one cargo, purchasing and lading another, and getting off. Here again we had to leave rather abruptly and a day or two sooner than had been contemplated, in consequence of information which was received on a Sunday morning that at a meeting, the preceding evening, of the Jacobin club (which then governed the place), it had been decreed that an embargo should be laid on Monday morning on all the foreign vessels then in port. Having previously, as has been seen, suffered here from a six months’ embargo, it was determined, if possible, to escape another such detention, even at some hazard.

“In pursuance of this determination, a number of sailors were hired, and brought on board; one of the pilots of the port, who was an influential member of the Jacobin club, was, by means of an exorbitant price for his services, and by a little stratagem which was acquiesced in by him, prevailed upon to be on board the ship and to conduct

her out of port; the ship's papers were procured from the government bureau by an officer of the port, for which he was rewarded by a free passage to Salem; and all other preparations being made, — as soon as the port bells rang to call the populace to dinner, the three topsails with the jib and spanker, were hastily bent, the cables slipped and the ship put to sea before their return, — the long-boat being given to the hired sailors, to convey themselves and the pilot on shore. Not having a sufficiency of provisions on board for a passage to America, no other alternative was left us but to stop at the Isle of Bourbon; accordingly with only one anchor and one cable left, we anchored the next day in the roads of St. Dennis. The account of the transactions here I copy from Captain Silsbee's notes: —

“On landing at St. Dennis, I called on the Governor of the island (whose residence was immediately contiguous to the wharf, and who was one of the old Royalists), as was usual, though not obligatory; and, immediately after leaving him, devoted myself exclusively to the procurement of such provisions as I could find, and the addition of a few bags of coffee to the cargo; which business was not accomplished until towards night, — when

just as I was stepping from the wharf into my boat, with a determination to be at sea before morning, the Governor ordered me to his presence; which order I obeyed from necessity, and with strong apprehension that some restraint was to be placed upon me. On meeting the Governor, he asked, — “How long do you contemplate staying at Bourbon?” My answer was, “No longer than is necessary to complete my business.” He added, “Can’t you leave here to-night?” I replied, “I can do so if you wish it.” He then said to me, “As you had the politeness to call on me this morning, and as I should be sorry to see you injured, hearken to my advice and leave here to-night, if practicable.” I thanked the Governor for his advice and was on my way towards my boat, when he called me back and said, “Let no one know what I have said to you.” I was in my boat and on board the ship as soon as possible after leaving the Governor. There was a brig-of-war at anchor in the roads, a little to windward of our ship. Towards midnight I caused the anchor to be hove up without noise, and let the ship drift to leeward (the wind and current being favorable) without making sail, until from the darkness of the night we had lost sight of the brig; when we made all sail directly from the land. At



daylight in the morning the brig was out and in pursuit of us; but in the course of the day gave up the chase.

“I never knew the cause of the Governor’s advice, but attributed it to an apprehension on his part, that my stopping at Bourbon might be supposed by the populace to be for the purpose of taking off the French admiral, St. Felix (another of the old royalists), who had rendered himself obnoxious to them, and who was known to be then secreted somewhere on the island; and that this suspicion might compel him, the Governor, to cause the detention and perhaps the seizure of my ship, if I remained there until the next day.’

“Whatever might have been the Governor’s motive, we could perceive in his advice only a disinterested and friendly act to us; by means of which mischief was probably averted. Pursuing our course to the westward, we struck soundings in fifty-five fathoms on L’Agulhas Bank, the 4th of May; passed the Cape of Good Hope the next day, and on the 30th came to anchor at the Island of Ascension. The time we passed here in fishing, catching turtle, shooting wild goats and rambling about the island, formed a pleasing and healthy interlude to the monotony of our voyage. Having

obtained a good supply of all such refreshments as the island afforded, we left it on the first of June, and after a very pleasant passage, anchored in Salem harbor on the tenth of July; having been absent nineteen months; and having the satisfaction of returning all our men, in health, to their families and friends.

“This voyage, thus happily accomplished, will be viewed, when taken in all its bearings, as a very remarkable one, — first from the extreme youth of him on whom the whole duty and responsibility of conducting the enterprise rested; aided by a chief mate younger than himself and by a second mate but a few years older. Captain Silsbee was not twenty years old when entrusted with this enterprise; the chief mate, Charles Derby, had not entered on his twentieth year; and the second mate, who was discharged at the Isle of France, and whose place I afterwards filled, was about twenty-four years old. Secondly, — from the foresight, ingenuity, and adroitness manifested in averting dangers, in perceiving advantages, and in seizing them opportunely and turning them to the best account; and thirdly, from the great success attending this judicious management, as demonstrated by the fact of his returning to the owner four or five times

the amount of the original capital. Mr. Derby used to call us his boys and boast of our achievements; and well might he do so; for it is not probable that the annals of the world can furnish another example of an enterprise of such magnitude, requiring the exercise of so much judgement and skill, being conducted by so young a man, aided by only those who were yet much younger, and accomplished with the most entire success."

Another interesting voyage of a Derby vessel was that of the ship *Astrea II* to Manila in 1796-97. She had as her supercargo Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch, the great mathematician, who for a number of years sailed in Mr. Derby's employ. The log of this voyage was kept by Dr. Bowditch himself and is at present preserved in the Boston Public Library. It is not much larger than a standard octavo volume, but every page contains enough calculations to cover several pages of print. Each day Dr. Bowditch ascertained the vessel's position by a number of different observations which are all worked out in great detail and in almost microscopic figures, and the data which he obtained on this voyage formed the basis for his noted works on navigation which to the present time remain standard authorities.

The *Astrea* sailed from Salem in March, 1796, about half loaded with provisions and miscellaneous cargo. She proceeded first to Lisbon, where she took on a quantity of wine and a large sum in Spanish dollars. Thence she went to Funchal, Madeira, where she completed her cargo by loading wines. On May 17 she sailed from Madeira, and on September 7 passed Java Head and entered the Straits of Sunda. The voyage through the Java Sea, the Straits of Banca, the South China Sea, and the Palawan Passage to Manila required the most careful navigation. As the way was filled with countless coral reefs and the chart was very inaccurate, progress was difficult. The lead was kept going steadily and Dr. Bowditch made constant observations on every point of land to correct the errors in his chart. It was necessary to anchor at night for fear of running upon a reef, and calms and head currents caused much delay. Malay pirate proas often came near the ship, but a discharge of cannon usually kept them off. On October 3 the *Astrea* arrived at Cavite and the next day anchored off Manila.

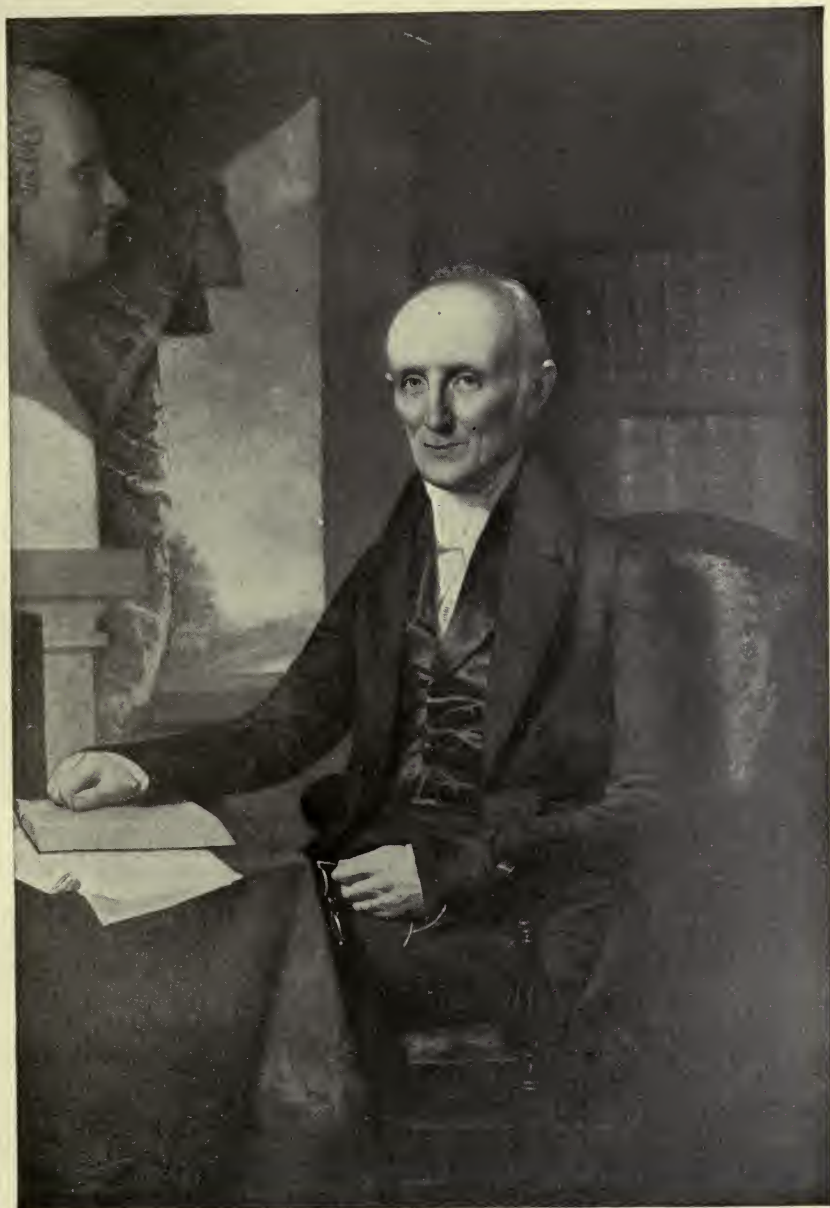
Dr. Bowditch and Captain Prince then took up their residence ashore in Manila at the house of a Mr. Kerr, an American and a native of Philadel-



phia, who had been living in the Philippines for some time. Kerr acted as broker for American vessels that came to Manila, as it was almost impossible for foreign captains to do business without such a middleman. An arrangement, therefore, was made with him to take charge of the *Astrea's* affairs, and for the use of his storehouse on the river front. Dr. Bowditch was greatly disappointed in the demand for his wine and brandy, "there not being above 3000 Europeans in the city and suburbs who make use of liquors." The market was already overstocked and his fine Madeira wine brought no better price than the very poorest wine on the market. He was obliged to sell some of it at a very low figure and barter off the rest at a great sacrifice. The remainder of his cargo was disposed of at fairly good prices, including some compasses which cost only two dollars in Salem and which he sold for eight. The large consignment of Spanish dollars, however, which had been taken on at Lisbon was easily converted into goods. Dr. Bowditch writes, "In general vessels ought never to bring anything to Manilla but Dollars." He was very fortunate in his purchases. The largest part of his cargo he laid out in sugar, which he bought in small lots

from various merchants. He also secured a considerable amount of indigo and a consignment of hides. Molasses of a very fine quality was procurable at so low a cost that he obtained a few hogsheads. "It is worth so little," he wrote, "that a woman offered eight hogsheads of it as a present if we would only take it away."

While he was purchasing his cargo, a Malay trading proa arrived at Manila from Borneo with a very valuable consignment of pepper. Dr. Bowditch made a visit on board the vessel and thus described her: "The Proa mounted 16 guns, 2 & 4 pounders. Great numbers of people belong to her all of them having each his adventure. They are nearly of the same color as the natives here & not much different in their dress, wearing a turban & trousers. The captain of the Proa was fond of showing the scars he had received in War. On being asked whether he ever made prizes of European vessels he replied that the only prizes he ever made was from the earth by cultivating pepper & bringing it to Manilla to sell, but it is said that the moment the Proa is out of port she would attack a vessel if she met with a good opportunity." With view to a good bargain, Dr. Bowditch offered to purchase a large part of the proa's cargo of



NATHANIEL BOWDITCH

Mathematician and navigator





pepper, and the Malay captain agreeing, Bowditch procured seven hundred peculs of this valuable commodity at a price which netted a very high return in Salem.

In his journal Dr. Bowditch gives a very interesting account of Manila. He describes in detail the city, its fortifications, and the harbor, and touches on the mode of government, the great power of the church, and the methods of trade. His stay at Manila lasted about two months, and on December 10, 1796, after loading her cargo of sugar, indigo, pepper, and hides, the *Astrea* weighed anchor and sailed for home. She arrived in Salem in May, 1797, and sold her cargo at a great profit.

At present, when one can rush across the Atlantic in four and a half days, it is interesting to look through some of the old log-books in which the incidents of these long East India voyages are quaintly recorded by the captains. For weeks at a time when the vessel bowled along before the fair trade wind and the sails needed no tending, the monotony and the absence from friends must have been hardship. At other times when caught in heavy gales, the courage and clever seamanship of the captain was necessary to bring the ship through safely. An old log-book kept by Captain Hodges,

of Mr. Derby's ship Grand Turk II on a trip to India and back, is still preserved, and a few extracts give us an idea of one of these voyages:—

“Sunday 11th March 1792. At 3 P.M. weighed Anchor and came to sail. The wind West & a strong Gale which occasioned the Gentlemen that accompany<sup>d</sup> me onbo<sup>d</sup> to leave the Ship immediately. Great numbers of our Friends assembled at the old Fort, & expressed their good Wishes in the old English custom of three Huzzas which was cheerfully returned by all on board.

“May 31st. Passed Tristan d'Acogna.

“June 22. Passed Cape of Good Hope.

“June 30th. A ship passed us that hath been in sight 6 days — an imperious Englishman and would not speak us.

“May 4th. Our rigging keeps us constantly employed being made of bad Hemp. It stretches down to nothing it is impossible to keep it taught.

“July 5th. In letting reef out M. T. Sail split in three places. bent a new one at 4 A.M. & in four hours the canvas was so much Broake at the foot of the sail was obliged to replace it with

a spair Fore topsail. Our Salem Sail cloth has proved very rotten in all our Sails.

“Wed. July 18th. These 24 hours blowing rainy weather. for three days we have not seen Sun or Stars. The clouds Low & very Gloomy.

“The darkened sky how thick it lowers  
Troubled with stormes & big with showers  
No cheerful gleam of light appears  
But nature pours forth all her tears

“Long passage dark Gloomy weather, very unpropitious the Blue Devils hover round. Neptune seems determined to be unfavorable.

“Saturday August 18th, in the afternoon the Grand Turk anchored off the mouth of the Hoogly River and took on a pilot. The wind began to blow a strong gale from the northeast and the next day greatly increased. At 9 A.M. started our anchor and dropt the Best Bower. Brought up in 5 fathoms Water which made our Situation very unfavorable & brought us in the Horse of our Pilot Schooner which obliged him to cut his cable. our ship rides hard & pitches Bowsprit under. Oblige to expend the Pump Leather that is in Cargo for the Service of our Cables. The wind wears easterly the Gale continues extreme hard & a

most terrible sea which breaks over the ship. Towards sun setting the wind moderated & veered southerly & soon increased & blew harder than it had from the N. E. — which made our situation very dangerous. All hands kept constantly employed attending our cables. In the morning found our Nable Woods of the Horse Holes split. The wind moderated some & the tide favourable began at daylight to heave in our cables which were badly situated from the shift of wind & tide which took an elbow in them. We soon found it necessary to cut one for the preservation of the other & the ship then pitching Forecastle under rendered it impossible to pass a Hawser round the other cable by which had it been practicable we might have saved the anchor. The wind SW and appearance of blowing hard. At 3 P.M. we got our anchor after much difficulty, the cable much strained, the more as it is much under size. The ship then came to anchor in the river mouth, and the next morning started up for Calcutta which was reached August 24th.

“December 30th the Grand Turk left Calcutta and dropped down river to Culpee where she



was detained three days by calms. Our boats went on shore & procured considerable wood & saw many Dear, Wild Hens & Cocks the same as our domestick Fowles & many Tyger Tracks. The Tyger here is very dangerous & it is necessary to be cautious & not adventure in the Woods. Our people killed one Dear which is a proof they are not very shy.

“Jan. 7th. Cleared the Hoogly for Madras.

“Jan. 17th. Arrived at Madras.

“Feb. 2nd. Left Madras for Salem.

“March 9th. Everything favourable yet feel two great wants, namely Society & Exercise.

“March 13th. Fine wind & weather. The ship we saw yesterday came up & spoke us. She proved to be the Cornetta from Bengall & spoke the Ponsborn E. I. Co. ship three days ago. The Ponsborne left Madras 8 days after us & must now be ahead of us as she outsailed the Cornetta which outsails us a knot in 6. This is most certainly discouraging.

“April 2nd. Passed Cape of Good Hope.

“April 19th. Passed St. Helena.

“April 24th. Passed Ascension.

“June 12, 1793, the Grand Turk arrived safely

home in Salem, after a voyage of one year and three months.”

One might relate the history of many more interesting voyages of Derby ships, but from the three which have been described we have obtained a good idea at first-hand of the manner in which the trade of the East Indies was carried on in those days.

## CHAPTER V

### VOYAGES DURING THE EARLY NAPOLEONIC WARS

IN a previous chapter it was shown how in colonial days the New England merchants carried on their commerce, and how their trade was affected by the regulations of France and England, by the French and English wars, and by the American Revolution. Under the provisions of the English Navigation Acts, colonial vessels had shared with English ships a monopoly of the commerce of the British West Indies, but when the United States became an independent nation, her vessels, like those of any other foreign country, were excluded from this trade. On the other hand, in 1778 France had thrown open the commerce of her West India islands to American ships, although colonial vessels had traded there for a century or more contrary to the laws of France. Thus the legal status of American shipping in the West Indies was completely reversed from the situation in colonial days.

From 1783 to 1793 there was a short period of peace in western Europe, but in 1793 England and

France once more took up arms in the great struggle which soon involved all the nations of Europe and that did not terminate till Waterloo. With these two nations at war, American vessels soon became among the most important neutral carriers on the Atlantic, and as such transported a large amount of the commerce of both France and England. In May, 1793, the French Convention issued a decree authorizing French men-of-war to capture vessels of any nation bound to an English port, but, in deference to the treaties and amicable relations between France and the United States, American vessels were excepted. In June, England retaliated by authorizing English men-of-war to seize all vessels loaded with provisions and bound for France, and in November ordered further that any vessel loaded with the produce of a French colony should be captured. The effect that these decrees of England had on American shipping can be observed by some extracts from Mr. Derby's correspondence.

On February 22, 1794, he wrote to Captain Moseley of his ship *Grand Turk*, about to sail from Virginia to Hamburg: "Capt. Thos. Webb arrived here last Evening from St. Eustatia in 25 days, he brings advice that the Frigates & British Cruisers



in the West Indies is taking every American vessel that is going to or coming from the French West India Islands. — this is done in consequence of a Proclamation from England of the sixth of November. There was 20 Sail in at St. Kitts, 15 at Mont Serat — the most of these if not all will be condemned. — of course it will bring on a War. I therefore order you to come with the Ship to Salem as soon as you can — even if the Ship is not quite loaded. I do not think there is immediate danger on this coast, but it is best to keep from any Vessels you see on the passage home.”

In the following month he wrote to his insurance agent in New York as follows: —

“SALEM 22nd March 1794

“Mr. Edward Goold,

“SIR, —

“I do not yet get the arrival of either of my Ships from India — I much fear those pirats the British have them in possession — You say in your last there is but very little danger of a War — when great Britain will give instruction to their ships to take our Vessels — & not publish those instructions till two Months after they are given out & some time after they have been put in Execution — I do not see that we have anything to

expect but War from such a piraticall Nation — I have two valuable Vessels I believe among the number Captured — Should my Ship arrive I think the risk even from here to N York would be too great to Venture — I have offer'd 6 C<sup>t</sup> on Capt. Mosely from Virginia to Salem & cannot get any Insurance on him at that premium —

“From Yr humb<sup>le</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>—

“ELIAS HASKET DERBY.”

About the same time Mr. Derby wrote Hon. Benjamin Goodhue, the Congressman of the District, in regard to the capture of American vessels by the English. “I trust my Government,” he says, “will never submit to such treatment, while we have it in our power to make them due us Justice. We have spirit & ability to stand in our own defence. I am sure there is a disposition to do every thing Congress may think for the best & I hope you will not suffer us to be further insulted by those Pirats.”

In Parliament it was stated that nearly six hundred American vessels were detained, and many of them seized between November 6, 1793, and March 28, 1794.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Derby did not escape un-

<sup>1</sup> McPherson's *Annals of Commerce*, vol. iv, p. 285.

harméd, for no less than three of his vessels were captured. His old brigantine *Rose*, in which so many of his captains made their first voyages, was seized in the West Indies, as was his schooner *Hope*; and his famous ship *Light Horse*, which had made the first voyage to Russia and one of the first to the East, was captured on a voyage to France.

The mission of Jay to England in the summer of 1794 was the means of somewhat improving conditions between the United States and England, for in the treaty drawn up in November of that year England allowed the United States \$10,000,000 for her capture of neutral American vessels. Mr. Derby appears to have benefited by this, for he eventually received damages for the loss of the *Light Horse*, and probably for the loss of the *Rose* and the *Hope* as well. Another provision of Jay's Treaty was the opening of the trade between the United States and the British West Indies to vessels of under seventy tons. Although it had been hoped in America that Jay would obtain free trade to these islands for all American vessels, the opening of this commerce, which had been closed since 1783, was a boon to American merchants, even if it was restricted to such small craft. The result of the treaty was somewhat to lessen the

ravages of British men-of-war and privateers on American commerce. England, nevertheless, retained her order authorizing the capture of vessels trading to France, although her payment of \$10,000,000 to the United States was virtually an acknowledgment that this policy was in violation of neutrality.

During all this time American vessels had been carrying on a brisk trade with England, and this was looked upon by the French as a breach of their treaty of 1778 with the United States. Moreover, the "Genet affair" had somewhat strained relations between the two countries, and in the mean time England had been freely seizing American vessels bound to France. In July, 1795, therefore, France decreed that American ships if found trading to England would be captured like those of any other nation. In March, 1797, she went further and decreed that any American vessel, wherever bound, might be seized unless she carried a "Rôle d'Equipage" made out in a form prescribed by the French Government. To require that neutral vessels carry a French document to save them from capture was certainly a bold demand for France to make, but she nevertheless proceeded to carry it out.



In August, 1797, while on voyage from the Isle of France to Salem, Mr. Derby's ketch John was captured by the French sloop-of-war Jean Barb, as she had no "Rôle d'Equipage." A prize crew was put on board and the John started for the French West India island of Guadeloupe. While on her way there she fell in with the British frigate L'Amable, which captured her on the ground that she was French property and thus a lawful prize. The John was carried into the English West India island of Tortola and condemned by the British vice-admiralty court at that place. On October 31, Mr. Derby wrote from Salem, "I have a report that the Ketch is taken by a French privateer and ordered for Porto Rico — it is said for not having the rôle d'équipage. Ever since I have known such a paper to be requisite I have not let a ship of mine go without it. At the time the Ketch sailed from Salem I never heard of such paper, and when the Captain Derby sailed from Bordeaux there was no such paper required, and when the Ketch left the Isle of France such paper was not heard of there." Mr. Derby immediately sent an agent to Tortola, but he was unable to obtain the release of the vessel until he had paid the captors a sum of money equal to over one fourth the value of the vessel and

her cargo. In 1800, however, as a part of a treaty with France, the United States assumed the financial responsibility for the, so-called, "French Spoliation Claims." These were the claims of American merchants for damages for the depredations of France on American property during the Napoleonic wars. Taking advantage of this circumstance, Mr. Derby's descendants made four different efforts to obtain from the United States Government compensation for the expenses incurred by the seizure of the *John*, and finally, in November, 1904, one hundred and seven years after the capture, the Court of Claims allowed the heirs of Elias Hasket Derby \$12,962.92.<sup>1</sup>

By 1798 affairs between France and the United States had reached such a stage that war seemed almost inevitable, and the United States Government had authorized the construction of several frigates. Much difficulty was experienced in obtaining the money to pay for these ships, as the Government was unable to borrow except at a very high rate of interest. In June, 1798, therefore, Congress passed an act authorizing the President

<sup>1</sup> Up to the present time this sum of money has not been received by the heirs, because Congress has never passed the bill authorizing the payment of this just claim of one hundred and fifteen years' standing.



SHIP JOHN, BENJAMIN BULLOCK, MASTER

From the painting by Corné in the Essex Institute, Salem. The John was originally rigged as a ketch





to accept such vessels as citizens might build for the national service, and to give in return six per cent notes. During the summer the patriotic people of Salem decided to build a frigate for the navy, and in October subscriptions were opened. Mr. Derby and his fellow townsman and merchant, William Gray, headed the list with \$10,000 each. Within a very short time \$75,000 had been collected, which amply covered the cost of the vessel. Enos Briggs, who had built most of Mr. Derby's fleet, was given the contract for the construction of the frigate, and on September 30, 1799, the fine new ship was launched. She was named the *Essex*, and Mr. Derby's nephew, Richard Derby, was selected as her captain, but, as he was then absent on a foreign voyage, the command was given to the famous Captain Preble. The *Essex* proved to be one of the best as well as one of the cheapest vessels in the navy. In her eventful career she won many creditable victories and captured nearly \$2,000,000 worth of property from the enemy.

The difficulties with France having grown by this time into an informal war, Mr. Derby was seized with some of his old Revolutionary spirit, and in 1798 had built in Salem a fine ship of three hundred and fifty-five tons which he named the

Mount Vernon. She was a veritable little frigate, being equipped with twenty guns and carrying a crew of fifty men. Her first voyage was to Havana and back in the winter of 1799, and on July 14 of that year she sailed for the Mediterranean under the command of Mr. Derby's son, Elias Hasket, Jr. Europe was at that time disrupted by the Napoleonic wars, and a favorable opportunity was offered for a profitable voyage to the Mediterranean, as the devastations of the war and the requirements of the great armies in the field had created a heavy demand for commodities of every sort. The Mount Vernon carried a cargo of sugar and other provisions valued at \$43,275, and under the able management of young Mr. Derby made a remarkably profitable voyage. As her log- and letter-book are still preserved, we have thus an excellent record of a most interesting voyage. The Mount Vernon's first port of call was Gibraltar. On arrival there, Captain Derby wrote to his father the following letter giving an account of the Mount Vernon's narrow escape from capture by a French fleet:—

“GIBRALTAR, 1st August, 1799.

“E. H. Derby, Esq., Salem:

“HONORED SIR:—I think you must be surprised to find me here so early. I arrived at this

port in seventeen and one-half days from the time my brother left the ship. In eight days and seven hours we were up with Carvo, and made Cape St. Vincent in sixteen days. The first of our passage was quite agreeable; the latter, light winds, calm, and Frenchmen constantly in sight, for the last four days. The first Frenchman we saw was off Tercira — a lugger to the southward. Being uncertain of his force, we stood by him to leeward on our course, and soon left him. July 28th, in the afternoon, we found ourselves approaching a fleet of upwards of fifty sail, steering nearly N. E. We run directly for their center; at 4 o'clock found ourselves in their halfmoon; concluding it impossible that it could be any other than the English fleet, continued our course for their center, to avoid any apprehension of a want of confidence in them. They soon dispatched an 18-gun ship from their center, and two frigates, one from their van and another from the rear, to beat toward us, we being to windward. On approaching, under easy sail, the center ship, I fortunately bethought myself that it would be but common prudence to steer so far to windward of him, as to be a grapeshots distance from him, to observe his force and maneuvering. When we were abreast of him, he fired

a gun to leeward, and hoisted English colors. We immediately bore away, and meant to pass under his quarter, between him and the fleet, showing our American colors. This movement disconcerted him, and it appeared to me he conceived we were either an American sloop-of-war or an English one in disguise, attempting to cut him off from the fleet; for while we were in the act of wearing on his beam, he hoisted French colors, and gave us his broadside. We immediately brought our ship to the wind, and stood on about a mile — wore toward the center of the fleet — hove about, and crossed him on the other tack about half grape-shot distance, and received his broadside. Several of his shot fell on board of us, and cut our sails — two round-shot striking us, without much damage. All hands were active in clearing ship for action, for our surprise had been complete. In about ten minutes we commenced firing our stern-chasers, and in a quarter of an hour gave him our broadside, in such a style as evidently sickened him; for he immediately luffed in the wind, gave us his broadside, went in stays in great confusion, wore ship afterward in a large circle, and renewed the chase at a mile and a half distant — a maneuver calculated to keep up appearances with the fleet, and to



Braille text at the top right of the page.



SHIP MOUNT VERNON

From the painting by Corné owned by Charles S. Rea, Esq., of Salem, showing the encounter with the French fleet on July 29, 1799



escape our shot. We received seven or eight broadsides from him, and I was mortified at not having it in my power to return him an equal number, without exposing myself to the rest of the fleet; for I am persuaded I should have had the pleasure of sending him home, had he been separate from them.<sup>1</sup>

“At midnight we had distanced them, the chasing rocket signals being almost out of sight, and soon left them. We then kept ourselves in constant preparation till my arrival here; and, indeed, it has been requisite, for we have been in constant brushes ever since. The day after we left the fleet, we were chased till night by two frigates, whom we lost sight of when it was dark. The next morning, off Cape St. Vincent, in the latitude of Cadiz, were chased by a French lateen-rigged vessel, apparently of 10 or 12 guns — one of them an 18-pounder. We brought to for him; his metal was too heavy for ours, and his position to windward, where he lay just in a situation to cast his shot over us, and it was not in my power to cut him off: we, of course, bore away, and saluted him with our long

<sup>1</sup> Without doubt this was the French fleet under Admiral Bruix returning from its fruitless dash into the Mediterranean while Napoleon was in Egypt. The fleet arrived at Brest on August 13 and must have been in this neighborhood about this time.

nines. He continued in chase till dark, and when we were nearly by Cadiz, at sunset, he made a signal to his consort, a large lugger whom we had just discovered ahead. Having a strong breeze, I was determined to pass my stern over him, if he did not make way for me. He thought prudent so to do. At midnight we made the lights in Cadiz city, but found no English fleet. After laying to till daylight, concluded that the French must have gained the ascendancy in Cadiz, and thought prudent to proceed to this place, where we arrived at 12 o'clock, popping at Frenchmen all the forenoon. At 10 A.M., off Algeiras Point, were seriously attacked by a large latineer, who had on board more than 100 men. He came so near our broadside as to allow our six-pound grape to do execution handsomely. We then bore away, and gave him our stern guns in a cool and deliberate manner, doing apparently great execution. Our bars having cut his sails considerably, he was thrown into confusion, struck both his ensign and his pennant. I was then puzzled to know what to do with so many men: our ship was running large, with all her steering-sails out, so that we could not immediately bring her to the wind, and we were directly off Algeiras Point, from whence I had reason to



fear she might receive assistance, and my port (Gibraltar) in full view. These were circumstances that induced me to give up the gratification of bringing him in. It was, however, a satisfaction to flog the rascal in full view of the English fleet, who were to leeward. The risk of sending here is great, indeed, for any ship short of our force in men and guns — but particularly heavy guns. Two nines are better than six or eight sixes; and two long twelves, or thirteen pounders, do better than twenty sixes, and could be managed with few men.

“It is absolutely necessary that two government ships should occasionally range the straits and latitude of Cadiz, from the longitude of Cape St. Vincent. I have now, while writing to you, two of our countrymen in full view, who are prizes to these villains. Lord St. Vincent, in a 50-gun ship bound for England, is just at this moment in the act of retaking one of them. The other goes into Algesiras without molestation.

“I find that nothing is to be done here to advantage, except to obtain information from above. I have been offered \$30 to deliver my sugar at Naples, where I think I shall go; but I rather expect to sell at Venice, Constantinople, or Genoa, in case the French are driven from there. I have

concluded to touch at Malaga, with Capt. Young, of Boston, and obtain what information I can; and think I may direct Mr. White how to lay out the property in his hands, against my return, as I think it for your interest to have it out of Spain. You need have but little apprehension for my safety, as my crew are remarkably well trained, and are perfectly well disposed to defend themselves; and I think, after having cleared ourselves from the French in such a handsome manner, you may well conclude that we can effect almost any thing. If I should go to Constantinople, it will be from a passport from Admiral Nelson, for whom I carry a letter to Naples.

“Your affectionate son,  
“ELIAS HASKET DERBY.”

Captain Derby was about to sail for Naples to dispose of his cargo there, when he met in Gibraltar a certain Mr. John Williams, of Baltimore, who had just sold a cargo of brandy and was anxious to invest the proceeds in a new venture. Williams persuaded Derby to join him in chartering and loading for Naples the American brig *Three Friends*, which was then in port. The brig was loaded with sugar, coffee, cocoa, and tobacco, and

Derby paid for his share by means of notes on London. On August 10, the two vessels sailed for Naples in company with the ships Governor Sumner, of Boston, and Elizabeth, of Baltimore. The four kept together for mutual protection, the Mount Vernon being the flagship, but no hostile craft troubled them, and on August 23 the little squadron arrived at Palermo. Finding the markets here to be poor, they once more got under way, and on September 2 anchored off Naples. On the passage from Gibraltar the chartered brig Three Friends proved to be such a slow sailer that most of the way she was towed by the Mount Vernon, but the log tells us that even with "the brig in tow the Mt. Vernon sails  $\frac{1}{3}$  faster than the other ships."

The markets for all commodities at Naples proved to be very high, and the sale of the cargo of the Mount Vernon and Derby's share in that of the Three Sisters amounted to no less than \$120,000. Under date of October 29, 1799, Derby wrote from Naples to his father as follows:—

"NAPLES, 29th October, 1799.

"HONORED SIR:—That this may find you in better health than when I left you, is my sincere

wish. It has been an unhappy circumstance in my voyage, that I cannot bring it to a close, agreeable with your wishes, this fall, without too great sacrifices. My manufactured silks cannot be ready, and the red wine of Port Iolo is not yet in season to ship. My sales have been handsome, though not so great as I could have wished. I have been obliged to use a great deal of address, and exercise all my patience to effect them.

“They are now complete, all to 200 quintals of roll tobacco, brought by Capt. Allen from Gibraltar, who is discharged, and is now on his passage from Palermo to Charleston. They will amount, with the tobacco, to \$120,000. I have bought 16 brass guns, at one shilling sterling per pound, expecting them to be as good a return as almost any thing. Also 65 boxes of manna, containing about 8,332 pounds, together with \$50,000 contracted for principally in ormazine silks, satins, and about 700 casks of wine, in 58 gallons (French-fashioned casks), at about \$12, which I expect will compose the Mount Vernon’s cargo for America. In the mean time, whilst the silks are in the loom, I have thought it for your interest to purchase two polacca-rigged ships, of 290 and 310 tons — both of them very fine ships, almost new, and great



sailers. They are now ready to proceed with the Mount Vernon for Manfredonia, to take, on your account, cargoes of wheat to Leghorn, which, from the rising state of the market, I think will more than clear the ships. They cost, with all expenses, about \$16,000. By means of the brass guns, and others bought with them, they mount 12 and 14 sixes. Wages, \$9 per month. I think, if I have the good fortune to bring them home, you will allow either of them to equal the Mount Vernon. My present intention is, to make all the dispatch in my power, to return with the three vessels to this port, and load them with wine for Salem — which will be in some preparation for them. I hope the arrangement will meet your approbation, for I assure you I did not know how I should otherwise invest my funds.

“Exchange on London, besides the uncertainty of it, is very disadvantageous. To invest \$100,000 in silks, would not certainly do; and to leave property in a distracted country like this, where they guillotine six a day, three or four times in a week, would be madness. Mr. Bruce takes the Lucy, and Mr. Dana the Nancy, named for my sister Pickman. They are both well off for officers; and I trust, with Mr. Collins and others, I shall do per-

fectly well. If we are fortunate, I shall be here in two months, or, at farthest, I hope, in ten weeks, to take my manufactures and wines for home, as I think, with good voyage. We are all in fine health and spirits.

“I am, with many wishes for you and the family’s welfare, your affectionate son,

“ELIAS HASKET DERBY, JR.

“P.S. The English minister, Lord Nelson, and Commodore Trowbridge, have been very polite to me.”

While making these profitable transactions at Naples, Captain Derby several times enjoyed the hospitality of Lord Nelson and the beautiful Lady Hamilton. The English fleet was then idly lying in the bay, although at the very moment Napoleon was safely making his way from Egypt to France. One of Captain Derby’s descendants thus describes an amusing incident that took place at one of these functions: “Mr. Derby was invited by Lord Nelson to dine with him and the officers of the fleet at Naples, and was called upon to relate his encounter with the French fleet, for which he was much commended. In the course of the evening, one of the English officers, becoming a little excited, began

to inveigh against the ingratitude of the United States, in throwing off her allegiance to the mother country. Mr. Derby disarmed his opponent and restored the good-humor of the company by stating that they did not understand the true causes of the Revolution; that the colonists, like themselves, had a great fancy for punch and Madeira and were disturbed by a set of custom-house harpies, who were constantly seizing their wine and spoiling their lemons by running their rapiers through the boxes, and they fought, as any true Briton would, for their punch and their Madeira." Nelson aided Captain Derby to quite an extent in the success of his business while at Naples and gave him a signed passport which is still one of the cherished heirlooms of the Derby family.

On November 8 the Mount Vernon sailed from Naples for Manfredonia, accompanied by the two newly bought polacca ships. All three vessels were in ballast, and for most of the voyage around the south of Italy and up the Adriatic they were forced to beat against strong head winds. When off Cape Otranto the little fleet was attacked by two Turkish ships, which attempted to capture the polaccas, but a few broadsides from the Mount Vernon drove them off. Manfredonia was reached on November 28,

and arrangements were made to load three full cargoes of wheat. On December 27 the little fleet sailed for Leghorn, and, after a tediously long passage around the south of Italy and up the west coast, arrived at their destination early in February and sold the wheat at great profit. The two polacca ships by this voyage netted in two and a half months a gain of \$30,000 over and above the cost of the vessels and their cargoes. After unloading their wheat, the fleet sailed for Naples on March 8, and forty hours later passed in by Capri. One of the polacca ships was now sold, and the other loaded with miscellaneous goods for Gibraltar. In the mean time Mr. Derby's brig *Cruger* had arrived from Salem and had sold her cargo at a good price; and as the wines, silks, and satins for which Captain Derby had contracted had now been delivered, they were loaded on board the *Mount Vernon* and the *Cruger*. When nearly ready to sail, Captain Derby was approached by a young Italian artist, Michael Felice Corné, who weary of his service in the Italian army against Napoleon, asked to be allowed to take passage for America in the *Mount Vernon*. Derby consented, and thus there came to this country a man who soon established a reputation as the leading marine artist of





SHIP MOUNT VERNON, ELIAS HASKET DERBY, JR., MASTER

From the painting by Corné, owned by Charles S. Rea, Esq., of Salem



the day. Corné made paintings of many Salem ships, but the Mount Vernon was his favorite subject. He depicted the ship during her engagement with the latineers off Gibraltar,<sup>1</sup> with the French fleet, and in many other situations.

Towards the end of April the Mount Vernon and Cruger sailed from Naples, accompanied by the remaining polacca, and after a two weeks' passage arrived at Gibraltar. Here the polacca and her cargo were sold, and on May 28 the Mount Vernon and Cruger sailed for home. The former arrived at Salem on July 7, 1800, and the latter on August 1. The result of the Mount Vernon's voyage was a net profit of over \$100,000 on an investment of \$43,275.

The owner of the Mount Vernon, however, was destined never to enjoy the fruits of this prosperous venture. On September 8, 1799, at the age of sixty, Mr. Elias Hasket Derby had ended his eventful career.

<sup>1</sup> See Frontispiece.

## CHAPTER VI

### A GREAT MERCHANT

ELIAS HASKET DERBY was a man of rare ability, and the large and successful business which he created was due to his remarkable energy, wisdom, and skill. At his death his house was one of the largest mercantile establishments in the United States, and his extensive trade to the East Indies had done much to stimulate American commerce with that part of the world. In these days, when the telegraph and the cable so greatly facilitate the transaction of business, it is difficult to imagine how foreign commerce was carried on without these modern necessities. A general survey, therefore, of the manner in which Mr. Derby built up his large trade and of the causes of his success may not be out of place.

While employing his larger vessels in the trade to the East or to Europe, Mr. Derby always had a number of small schooners plying to New York, Philadelphia, Virginia, South Carolina, or the West Indies, gathering or distributing the cargoes of his large ships. On the arrival of a ship from the East,



only a small part of her cargo would be disposed of in Salem. Much of it would be sent to Boston, New York, or Philadelphia to be sold, and often, when certain imported goods came to a bad market in America, Mr. Derby would send them to Europe in one of his vessels in hope of obtaining a better price abroad. Thus we find coffee from the Isle of France, which arrived at Salem when the price was low, being exported to the Baltic, and cotton from India, which could not find a purchaser in America, being sent to London.

In many of his voyages Mr. Derby employed a simple system of barter. The outward cargo was exchanged for the return cargo. Often, however, it was impossible to obtain a return shipment at the same port or from the same merchant who had received the inward cargo. In such cases Mr. Derby's captains and supercargoes paid their balances by letters of credit on London, where Mr. Derby always had a considerable sum deposited for the purpose. In many places in the East, however, Spanish dollars were the only medium of exchange for foreign merchants. Specie of all kinds was very scarce in the United States in the decade following the Revolution, and therefore, when Mr. Derby despatched vessels to the East Indies, he often sent

them first to Lisbon, where they obtained a supply of Spanish dollars in exchange for drafts on London.

Mr. Derby usually insured his vessels and cargoes only in part, and by dividing his risks over his extensive property he could afford occasionally to lose a ship. As a matter of fact, he enjoyed great immunity from loss at sea, for although during the American Revolution and the early period of the Napoleonic wars several of his vessels were captured, we have but one record of his losing a ship by marine perils. This good fortune may well be considered as one of the causes of Mr. Derby's success, but there were many other reasons for the rapid growth of his business.

In the first place, the United States Government had from the very beginning adopted a policy of fostering and protecting American shipping. The First Congress had provided in the original tariff act that all goods imported in American vessels should be admitted at a ten per cent ad valorem reduction in the duty. The effect of this measure was greatly to encourage the importation of goods in American rather than in foreign bottoms, and Mr. Derby and other American shipowners accordingly benefited greatly. In fact, in the ten years from 1789 to 1799 the proportion of our combined

imports and exports carried in American vessels increased from twenty-three and one half per cent to eighty-eight and one half per cent. Moreover, in the period which we are now describing, American vessels could be built and operated at about one half the cost of similar English ships.<sup>1</sup> These advan-

<sup>1</sup> COMPARISON OF COST OF OPERATION OF AN AMERICAN WITH THAT OF AN ENGLISH VESSEL, EACH OF 250 TONS, IN 1805.

*On a voyage between England and America and return*

Cost of American vessel of 250 tons, £2000.

Cost of English vessel of 250 tons, £4000

A ship of 250 tons would carry 3000 bbls. of flour at 9s. £1,350

The average freight from England back 600

£1,950

| <i>American Charges</i>                   | £ s. d.         | <i>English Charges</i>                                 | £ s. d.         |
|---|-----------------|--|-----------------|
| Insurance out and home<br>on £2500 @ 4½ % | 95              | Insurance out & home<br>on £4000 @ 6%                  | 360             |
| 8 men, 5 months @ £5                      | 200             | 12 men, 5 months<br>@ £5                               | 300             |
| Captain and mate<br>@ £10 each            | 100             | Captain and mate<br>£10 each                           | 100             |
| 2400 lbs. bread<br>@ 16s.                 | 19 4            | 360 lbs. bread<br>for 14 people for<br>5 months @ 32s. | 57 12           |
| Beef 10 bbls. @ 32s.                      | 16              | 15 bbls. of beef<br>@ £4                               | 60              |
| Pork 10 bbls. @ 50s.                      | 25              | 15 bbls. pork @ 90s.                                   | 67 10           |
| 150 gallons rum                           | 16 17           | 220 gallons rum @ 5s.                                  | 55              |
| Interest of £2000,<br>5 months            | 41 13 4         | Interest on £4000<br>5 months                          | 83 6 8          |
|   | <u>513 14 4</u> |  | <u>1083 8 8</u> |

(Report of the Committee of Correspondence on Trade with the East Indies and China, British Parliamentary Papers, 1815.)

tages naturally were of great aid to American merchants in meeting foreign competition. Mr. Derby, however, owed his success primarily to the thorough and able manner in which he managed his business.

The vessels of Mr. Derby's fleet were all of good, seaworthy model, and he always exercised great care and forethought in their maintenance and equipment. This is well shown by the following extract from his papers:—

*“Orders for B. Hodges mastr & Jos Moseley mate of  
Ship Grand Turk 7 Mar. 1792.*

“CAPT. HODGES, —

“In such a Voyage as you are now going upon there are many things that you must ever bare in mind — a few that respects the safety of the Ship I will mention. Never suffer any *spirit* to be drawn after night — nor at any time under Deck — but at the Store Room — nor allow of any Powder to be kept in any place except in the Magazine on Deck — Make it a constant practice every Saturday to have the Chimney of the Galley swept down least by this neglect it might set the Ship on Fire — and I believe it will be safer for the Ship without the Funnel — Keep a constant watch on Deck while in Port & the more so on acct. of the danger



of fire in the Galley — You must make the Ship leak so much as to give two good spells a Day at least — Keep the Hatches open so as to keep the ship cool & have a wind sail if there is occasion, as heat in the hold will damage the Ship — Have the hold & Decks examined every Day, as perhaps after some Gale you may find some defect & may prevent the damage of considerable of the Cargo — Be very careful in the Dunnage of the Ship to take in her cargo — there need be no ballast left in provided there is very particular care taken in making Stowage of the Sugar in Bags & Hogsh<sup>ds</sup>, the ship will I suppose load without much on the Gun Deck — let the Ginger, pepper & every light article be on that Deck — When the ship is unloaded in Calcutta I wish you to make 2 or 3 Hogshds of very strong pickle & let some of your hands take a cloth & wash the Ship in the hold & in the lower Deck in every part, the same as you would scower of a Floor & if you have any Salt left put it on the Knees.”

Captain Richard Cleveland, who was long in the Derby employ, writes of the great merchant as follows, — “Without possessing a scientific knowledge of the construction and sparring of

ships, Mr. Derby seemed to have an intuitive faculty in judging of models and proportions; and his experiments, in several instances, for the attainment of swiftness of sailing were crowned with a success unsurpassed in our own or any other country."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the best vessel ever owned by Mr. Derby was the *Astrea*. She was a ship of three hundred and sixty tons, built in Salem in 1783, and was distinguished for her great speed. On her maiden voyage she went from Salem to France in eighteen days and returned in twenty-two, and later on a voyage to the Baltic, it is said, she ran from Salem to the Irish coast in eleven days. If this is true it is one of the fastest trans-Atlantic passages ever made under sail.<sup>2</sup> The *Astrea* was in Mr. Derby's service for many years and was sold in Calcutta in 1793. Many advancements in ship-building were made by Mr. Derby. His ship *Grand Turk II* of five hundred and sixty-four tons, built in Salem in 1791, was said to have been the largest

<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Cleveland's *Narrative of Voyages and Commercial Enterprises*, 1842.

<sup>2</sup> Capt. Clark in his book, *The Clipper Ship Era*, states that in 1854 the American-built clipper ship *Lightning* ran from Boston Light to Eagle Island, on the Irish coast, in just ten days. This is probably the fastest land-to-land trans-Atlantic voyage under sail. Unfortunately the *Astrea's* eleven-day passage is founded only on tradition.

merchant vessel constructed in America up to that time. He also was the first shipowner in America to copper-bottom his vessels, which was soon done on all ships frequenting tropical waters.

Mr. Derby's success in trade was due, more than anything else, to the officers and men he employed on his ships. His captains and supercargoes were nearly always young and energetic men, and besides paying them well he made it a practice to give them a large interest in the voyage. The crew also were often entitled to "privilege and adventure," that is, they were allowed a certain space in the vessel's hold in which they might carry out and bring back goods on their own account. On the vessel's portledge bill, or pay-roll, it would then be stated that a certain seaman was entitled to so many tons or hundredweight of "adventure" or "privilege" in addition to his wages. At the same time other persons in all walks of life would often send out "adventures" by entrusting the supercargo with a certain sum of money or a small consignment of goods to be exchanged in the distant markets for valuable articles. Even the merchant's minister turned over his hard-earned savings to the supercargo and eagerly awaited the return of the ship, while the young Hepsibahs and Mary

Janes of the old Puritan town shrewdly invested their "pin-money" in adventures to be brought home in the form of India shawls and trinkets.

The sailors who made up the crews of Mr. Derby's vessels nearly all lived within a few miles of Salem. As many of them had large families dependent upon them, we find a considerable number of agreements among the Derby papers like the following:—

"Whereas Henry Neill is gone in the Ship Grand Turk as Mariner, & has left a family in Marblehead I agree to pay said Family eight dollars every three months, the first payment to be on the first day of June next, the second payment the first day of September next, and so on until the Ship shall arrive at Salem, excepting we hear of any accident happening to said Ship then the quarterly payment to cease.

"ELIAS HASKET DERBY."

"SALEM 2 March 1792."

Among the officers who sailed for Mr. Derby were Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch, Captain Benjamin Bullock, Mr. Samuel Blanchard, Captain Richard Cleveland, Captains Benjamin and Jacob Crown-



inshield, Captains Richard, Jr., Elias Hasket, Jr., and Samuel Derby, Captain James Gibaut, Captain Benjamin Hodges, Captain Jonathan Ingersoll, Captain James Magee, Captains Ichabod and Jacob Nichols, Mr. Thomas Handasyd Perkins, Captain Stephen Phillips, Captain Joseph Pratt, Captain John Prince, Captain Joseph Ropes, Hon. Nathaniel Silsbee, Captain Benjamin Webb, and Captains Benjamin and Ebenezer West. Many of these gentlemen, who began as boys in Mr. Derby's employ, rose to be wealthy and influential merchants. They usually left school when about fifteen and then served several years in Mr. Derby's counting-house. Here they received free instruction in the art of navigation from an old retired mariner, Captain Jonathan Archer, whom Mr. Derby employed for the purpose. Each was then sent on several voyages as captain's clerk, and later would be promoted to a position as supercargo of some small vessel. For many years Mr. Derby owned an old brig named the *Rose* which traded regularly to the West Indies. On this ship he always sent his young men making their first voyage as supercargo. After they had made a trip or two in the *Rose*, Mr. Derby would then put the young men in charge of vessels bound to the

East Indies, giving them such a large interest in the voyage that it was possible for them very soon to amass a sufficient sum of money to set up for themselves as merchants.

Among those who sailed as officers for Mr. Derby and later became successful merchants were Benjamin and Jacob Crowninshield. While in command of one of Mr. Derby's vessels, Jacob Crowninshield, with the proceeds of the sale of his cargo at the Isle of France, bought a ship of about one hundred and seventy-five tons named the Henry. On the return of the new vessel to Salem, Mr. Derby sold her to Benjamin and Jacob for \$10,500, the payment to be made after the Crowninshields had made a round trip to India with the ship. Of this generous transaction, Jacob writes as follows:—

“Ben no doubt informed you that we had bot the Henry, the ship I came home in. Mr. Derby gives Ben and myself a credit for her till she returns, with our notes upon interest and the policy of insurance lodged in his hands. The price was 10,500 dollars, the 500 dollars to be paid in two months. Thus we have a good ship without paying for her this 18 months and in that time I calculate she will more than clear herself in India. Do not you think it extraordinary that Mr. Derby should

trust us so long for 3000 pounds, however 't is good money at interest. We only bought her yesterday and five minutes after might have sold her for 3500 pounds, but Mr. Derby made it an express condition to the contrary when we bot her." <sup>1</sup>

This generosity of Mr. Derby's was the means of establishing the Crowninshields in business for themselves, and their house soon became one of the largest and most influential in Salem.

Another gentleman who grew up in Mr. Derby's service was Hon. Nathaniel Silsbee, for many years United States Senator from Massachusetts. Mr. Silsbee's father had sailed as captain for the Derbys, and at his death his young son entered Mr. Derby's counting-house as clerk. So rapidly did the boy learn the methods of trade that in 1788, when only fourteen years old, he went as supercargo's clerk on the *Three Sisters* to Batavia and Canton. On his return Mr. Derby sent him on a couple of trips to Madeira, and then, although but nineteen years of age, gave him command of the ship *Benjamin* bound to the Isle of France. The story of this remarkable voyage has already been told in a previous chapter and clearly shows to what a great extent Mr. Derby's success was

<sup>1</sup> Letter in possession of W. C. Endicott, Esq., of Boston.

due to the very able men he placed in charge of his ships.

The most noted person ever in Mr. Derby's employ was Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch. Mr. Derby was always his great friend and patron, and the famous mathematician made four long voyages in Derby ships. Although Dr. Bowditch knew little about actual seamanship, he was one of the world's greatest authorities on navigation. While at sea he used to employ his time by instructing the crew in navigation, until all hands, even down to the cook, were proficient in the art. In this connection, Rev. Alexander Young, in his memorial of Bowditch, tells an amusing incident in the voyage of the *Astrea II* to the Philippines: "On their arrival at Manilla, a Scotchman, by the name of Murray, asked Captain Prince how he contrived to find the way there, through such a long, perplexing, and dangerous navigation, and in the face of the north-east monsoon, by mere dead reckoning, without the use of lunars, — it being a common notion at that time, that the Americans knew nothing about working lunar observations. Captain Prince told him that he had a crew of twelve men, every one of whom could take and work a lunar observation as well, for all practical purposes, as Sir Isaac New-



ton himself, were he alive. Murray was perfectly astounded at this, and actually went down to the landing-place one Sunday morning to see this knowing crew come ashore. Mr. Bowditch was present at this conversation, and as Captain Prince says, sat 'as modest as a maid,' said not a word, but held his slate-pencil in his mouth."

To quote again from Mr. Young: "Captain Prince says that one day the supercargo said to him, 'Come, Captain, let us go forward and see what the sailors are talking about, under the lee of the long-boat.' They went forward accordingly, and the captain was surprised to find the sailors, instead of spinning their long yarns, earnestly engaged with book, slate, and pencil, and discussing the high matters of tangents and secants, altitude, dip, and refraction. Two of them in particular were very zealously disputing, one of them calling out to the other, 'Well, Jack, what have you got?' 'I've got the sine,' was the answer. 'But that ain't right,' said the other, 'I say it is the cosine.' At Salem it was considered the highest recommendation of a seaman, that he had sailed in the same ship with Mr. Bowditch, and this fact alone was often sufficient to procure for him an officer's berth. In illustration of this statement, on

his second voyage the first and second mates had been sailors in the same ship on the previous voyage."

By administering his business with great ability, by keeping his fleet up to the highest standard, by giving his crews large interests in their voyages, and by employing such capable officers as Silsbee or Bowditch, Mr. Derby created one of the greatest mercantile establishments in the United States. In 1799 his fleet consisted of six ships, one bark, four brigs, one ketch, and one schooner, aggregating 2280 tons.<sup>1</sup> He died, leaving an estate of over \$1,000,000, one of the largest fortunes amassed in America up to that time.

The last few years of his life Mr. Derby was an invalid, often for several weeks at a time being unable to go to his counting-house. In April, 1799, Mrs. Derby had died, and her loss was a blow from which he did not recover. Mr. Derby's family life appears to have been a most happy one, and his affection for his wife and

<sup>1</sup> Although Mr. Derby was one of the principal American shipowners of his time, the tonnage of his entire fleet was not as large as that of one modern five-masted schooner. The biggest ship he ever owned was only 500 tons and he sold her because she was too large. Many of his craft which voyaged to the Far East were no larger than fishing smacks.

his seven children was unbounded. Although blessed with great riches he disliked ostentatious display. It is said, however, that nothing gave him more pleasure than on Sunday afternoons to drive out to his estate at Danvers with Mrs. Derby in his coach, followed by his children and grandchildren on horseback. Here, a few miles out of Salem, he had an extensive farm where he carried on agriculture on scientific principles. The place was under the supervision of a famous German horticulturist named Heussler, who was brought from Europe for the purpose. During most of his life Mr. Derby had lived in a house of fairly modest proportions, but towards the end of his days he had erected a magnificent mansion, the finest in Salem. The plans of the house were drawn by MacIntyre, to whom we are indebted for much of our best colonial architecture. The spacious grounds extending from Essex Street to the river were laid out with walks, terraces, and gardens; an extensive conservatory, where rare plants were cultivated, surrounded the main house. The planning of this elaborate establishment was due principally to Mrs. Derby, as she was more ambitious for show and elegance than her husband. In 1798 Mr. Derby wrote his agents in London: "Mrs.

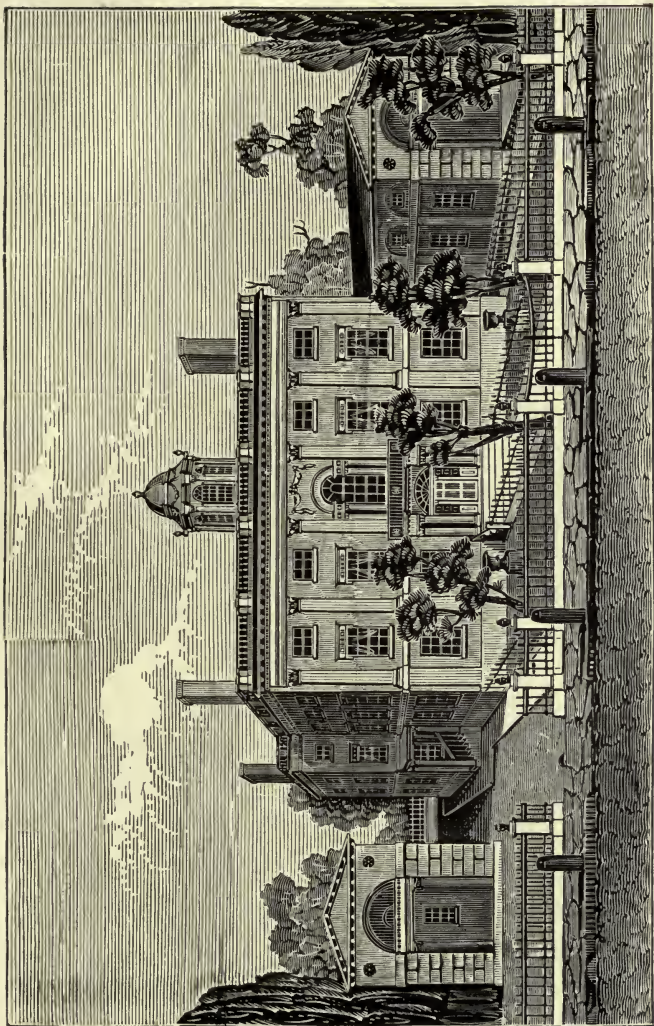
Derby wants something to complete her house; she will write you. It is business I know nothing of. I have given her an order for £120; you will do as she may direct with it." The great mansion was magnificently furnished, and a choicely bound collection of books was imported from England for the library. Mr. and Mrs. Derby, however, enjoyed their new home for but a short time, as it was not finished till a short time before their deaths.

No better memorial of Mr. Derby exists than that which was written by his son-in-law, Hon. Benjamin Pickman, and which gives a fitting sketch of the great merchant:—

[*The Salem Gazette of September 10, 1799.*]

“Died, in this town, on Sunday last, at the age of 60, Elias Hasket Derby, Esq., having survived his amiable consort but a few months. Though Mr. Derby’s natural disposition led him rather to retire from public observation, yet his character had been of too much importance in the community of which he was a member, for his departure out of life not to be sensibly felt and regretted. By a regular application to commercial pursuits, by a careful attention to all parts of his business, and by a remarkable course of good fortune, he arrived





THE DERBY MANSION

Erected in Salem in 1799 for Elias Hasket Derby



to a high degree of opulence. He possessed an uncommon spirit of enterprise, and in exploring new channels of commerce has frequently led his countrymen to sources of wealth. He was among the first who embarked in the trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope, which has since become so extensive and lucrative; he made various improvements in navigation, and the many excellent vessels, built according to his own plans and under his immediate direction, are proofs of his skill in naval architecture.

“If that man is deserving of the gratitude of his country ‘who makes two blades of grass grow where one only grew before,’ the memory of Mr. Derby has a claim to the affectionate regards of his fellow-citizens, for he possessed a good taste in gardening and agriculture, and most judiciously — both for his own enjoyment and the benefit of his country — applied a part of his wealth to improvements in that department. By his successful experiments in his excellent garden and farm, in Danvers, he taught the neighboring farmers that their lands are capable of productions which they had before thought could be prepared only in more genial soils. It was in these improvements that Mr. Derby found some of his most tranquil enjoyments,

and they imparted delight to all who had the curiosity to visit them.

“In his dealings, Mr. Derby uniformly regarded the principle of justice, and his engagements were sacredly fulfilled. In the possession of riches, he did not forget the duties of charity. Providence had blessed him with abundance, and others partook of the gift; his hand often cheered the heart of poverty and affliction, and his charities were always applied with judgment — often in secret, never with ostentation. His deportment was modest and grave. In the hours of relaxation he was affable, mild, and cheerful.

“In the interesting domestic character of husband and father, he was particularly amiable, and possessed the unbounded affections of his family. He was a sincere believer in the Christian religion, which he evinced by an habitual regard to its precepts, by a uniform attendance upon public worship, and by a firm expectation — expressed through his last sickness — of inheriting its promises. In short, he has well discharged the duties of life, and we trust he is removed to a better world.”

Mr. Derby's children did not maintain the great



business which he had established. It had always been carried on personally in his name, and at his death the vessels and other property were sold at auction and converted into cash. His sons undertook several mercantile ventures. Elias Hasket, Jr., made a number of voyages, and the second son, John, was one of the owners of the ship *Margaret*, which was the second vessel to go from America to Japan. The great fortune, however, was scattered, and Mr. Derby's sons being discouraged by several losing ventures, turned their attention to industries ashore. After the embargo of 1807 the Derby flag disappeared entirely from the high seas and the Crowninshields, Peabodys, and others succeeded the Derbys as the leading mercantile establishments of Salem. But to-day even the names of these great houses are but memories. Derby Wharf stretches out into Salem Harbor without a vessel moored at its side. The old warehouses which once held the riches of the East are fast decaying and rotting away. To-day not a single ocean-going vessel hails from Salem. Her harbor, where once ships with rich cargoes arrived almost daily from all parts of the world, is now never visited except by unromantic coal schooners and barges from Philadelphia or

Norfolk. With the growth in the size of ships Salem's harbor was too shallow, and the better railroad connections of her neighbor, Boston, soon lost for her the great commerce she had once enjoyed.

The student of our national history is familiar with the names of our great statesmen and military and naval heroes. To them alone he is apt to attribute the growth and prosperity of our country in its early years. He forgets that, while Washington or Jefferson was holding the reins of government and Green or John Paul Jones was winning victories ashore and afloat, the foaming wakes of our merchant vessels were showing the way for American commerce to all parts of the world. The country owes great credit to those venturesome merchants and bold navigators who in the early years of our national existence carried the Stars and Stripes to the markets of Europe, Africa, and the East, extended American influence to the most distant parts of the globe, and created a world-wide respect for the new nation.



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