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THE EAST INDIA COMPANY—AND INTERLOPERS.

BY H. S. VAUGHAN.

THE answer to the first part of Query No. 95 is contained in the following extract from a Letter from the Court of Directors of the East India Company, dated 17th April, 1711, to the Governor of St. Helena :—

“ The style of the Company changed from that of ‘ The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies ’ to that of ‘ The United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies.’

“ Fourteen ships had been taken up for all parts of India this season from 180 to 500 tons each. When any of these vessels outward bound take stores to St. Helena we pay six weeks demorrage for their deviation to St. Helena and also for all the time they stay there above the working days.”

Prior to this extract there are in the St. Helena Records the following entries which seem to mark a transition stage :—

“Oct. 6. 1701.—The Captain of the *Mountague* a ship belonging to the *new East India Company* threatens to use violence to obtain water and provisions if permission to purchase them is refused. Sends a boat well manned and armed to one of the leeward valleys.

Capt. Fowlis sent with a party to oppose them.”

“ 1702. Feb. 9.—Mr. John Chappel Agent for the *New East India Company* prohibited from remaining on the Island. The Governor consents to receive and deliver letters to their ships there being nothing in them against our Masters Interest only how to direct their ships homewards to escape a greedy enemy—and if for want of those letters the ships were taken the whole nation will accuse us of intelligence with the Enemy and make us bear the effect of ye said nations just anger.”

“ Oct. 5, 1703.—Cornelius Sodington Deputy Governor arrived. Both Companies now happily united as the United East India Company.”

The Union of the two companies was effected, after Godolphin's Arbitration, in 1709. Sir John Kaye's *Administration of the East India Company*, Danver's *Records of the E.I.C.*, and later works, give the story of the Company in formal manner; but I

have recently found a little volume relating to a particular sphere of the Company's operations which endows with life some of the dry bones of official history. It is entitled "Extracts from the St. Helena Records," and was printed in 1885 at Jamestown by Benjamin Grant (reprinted 1908). It was compiled from the Government records of St. Helena, and consists of Letters from the Court of Directors in London and reports from the Governor and Council, from 1673, when Sir Richard Munden recaptured the Island from the Dutch, until 1835.

These letters are full of vivid interest—small beer, some of it, as when "Serjeant Hailes complains that Parrum's wife did say openly 'God curs the Island and all that is upon it'—but coming near to tears more often in the appalling chronicle of ferocious brutality mixed with nauseating religious cant which distinguished this awful example of British administration for more than a hundred years.

Whether this fascinating little book is obtainable in England or not, I do not think it can be very well known, so perhaps I may be allowed to make some extracts from it with particular reference to the word *Interloper*, the use of which in the St. Helena Records is not quite clear. The word seems to have been in common use at sea during the 16th and 17th centuries, to denote a poacher in other people's preserves. Smyth has the following, but it seems to indicate later usage:—

INTERLOPER.—"A smuggling or forced trade vessel. As a nautical phrase it was generally applied to the "letters of marque" on the coasts of S. America, or a cruiser off her Admiral's limits (poaching)."

Mr. Hannay ("The Indiaman," *Ships and Men*) alludes to the emoluments and privileges of the East India Company's Officers and the fraudulent use that some of them made of their favoured position. "They shipped more goods than they were authorised to carry" (i.e. from the East), "and transferred them at sea to *Interlopers* from Liverpool and Scotland."

The following extracts from St. Helena Records seem to refer to vessels employed upon the East India trade, although except in the quotations above (1701–1703) not definitely to the ships of the rival company.

"April 25th, 1681.—The ship *Roebuck* an *Interloper* in great distress for supplies"—notwithstanding the Company's resolutions against all trade with interlopers provisions were allowed—"Wee were induced to these conditions because thay were Christians and our fellow subjects who by the laws of God

and man are to be relieved in a time of such great exigency—and because most of the inhabitants discovered high discontent tending even to sedition and mutiny upon some doubt that they should not have liberty to stay and buy provisions.”

Letter from Court of Directors. August 1, 1683.

“ But most impudent it was to salute Interlopers, and as vile for our minister Mr. Church (if our information be true) to be first aboard the Interloper Pitt that came in last voyage and to entertayne him at his house.

“ For answering salutes we doe enjoyne for the future never above the number of 3 guns to be fired to any of our own ships at arrival, nor any guns fired at feasts or going aboard of Commanders nor over the number of 7 to any French, Dutch, &c., nor any at all upon any occasion to Interlopers.”

“ July 14, 1684.—Gabriel Powell for trading with an Interloper sending off two cows at Friars Valley and attempting to send two more at Breakneck Valley but was prevented by the arrival of a party of soldiers, also receiving a black woman slave—fined £15 and cows seized. The Interloper obliged to get water by stealth at Friars Valley by digging holes on the beach.”

“ 1700. April 23.—‘ Shrewsbury galley ’ an Interloper made to pay 20s. a ton before being allowed to obtain water and provisions.”

The gentleman named Powell appears in the Records again a few years later, when he got off more cheaply !

“ Jan. 17, 1704.—Gabriel Powell on Tuesday whipt his slave boy aged 8 years till his back was in some places raw and on Wednesday his master threw him with his hands tyed into a bed of nettles which venomd and stung him to that degree that he immediately fell into convulsions and dyed. For this he was fined by a jury 40s. ”

Will it be believed that this brute was afterwards made Governor of the Island ?