

EXTRACTS FROM THE LETTER-BOOK OF
A DOVER MERCHANT, 1737—1741.

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THE glory of the Cinque Ports and of their satellites, "Antient Towns" and "Members" as they were named, has departed. Hastings, Winchelsea, Rye, Romney, and Sandwich may interest the historian, but have no touch with modern commerce. As a port Dover alone survives; nor does it owe this to any exemption from the causes which ruined its early rivals, for the never ceasing eastward sweep of sand or shingle which has blocked their havens has played equally upon it. If Dover remains an important harbour to-day, it owes it to its proximity to the French coast, and to the lavish expenditure of money which has been made on it, in order to keep open communication with the continent.

Eliminating the continental traffic, Dover was a far more important and a far more necessary port in the old days than it is now. Steam conquers wind and has no need to take shelter in a harbour until a favourable breeze shall enable it to work its way out from the narrow seas to the wider ocean. Sailing-ships bound through the channel had but little room to manœuvre, and, waiting a fair wind, perforce sought shelter; this they could find but in three spots on the south-eastern coast: under the slight promontory of Dungeness, in the Downs, or in Dover Harbour. In the latter alone could they take refuge when needing repair from damage, for the two former were useless for such a purpose.

Sailing-ships still to some extent survive, but even where they do, thanks to the help afforded them by steam tugs, they do not often need to put into Dover to repair, or to

await a fair wind. Dover's chief occupation is now gone, and only the necessities of the continental traffic and the demand for a naval harbour, have saved it from extinction.

The purpose of this paper is to look back on Dover in the eighteenth century, and to see what work the harbour then did, and how it was fitted to do it. First, let us realize of what the harbour then consisted. The two jetties stood where they now are, and gave access to a tidal basin, though this was then considerably smaller, for the land on which formerly stood the York Hotel and the Amherst Battery was not thrown into it until 1838. It is through this addition that the entrance to the Wellington Dock now passes; before 1838 this entrance did not exist. The sides of this tidal basin were not formed of quay walls as now, but were mud-flats, uncovered at low tides. Somewhere about 1661, however, the back part of this outer basin had been cut off by a cross wall, which is still there, and in this, at a later date, were fixed gates, thus forming an inner floating basin, now the Granville Dock.

This wall had not been built with any intention of forming an inner harbour, its original object having been one of the many devices adopted to throw the stream of water which came from the Pent, now the Wellington Dock, more directly upon the mouth of the harbour, and so help to sweep away the bar of shingle which was ever forming at that point. At its north-western angle this inner basin was connected with the Pent by a sluice-gate, but this gate was not made available for the passage of ships until about 1760, before which date the Pent cannot be regarded as part of Dover Harbour.*

At the north-eastern angle of this harbour was a ship-builder's yard where certainly small ships could be built—we know of the "Expedition" of 60 tons built there in 1738—and damaged ships repaired, by being floated at spring-tides on to a grid. Ships of considerable size could be thus dealt with, for in 1740 we have mention of a Dutch ship of

* The harbour in this state is well shewn in Buck's panoramic view of 1739.

400 to 500 tons, with masts and timber for Toulon, which put into Dover leaky; but as she was flat-bottomed they could not come to the leak.

Lining the inner side of the inner basin ran what is now known as Custom-house quay; on this stood many houses and warehouses belonging to Dover merchants. Among these was one known as Pier House, where lived Isaac Minet;* here he carried on his business, and from here were written the letters which form the authority for what follows.

Isaac Minet had been born in Calais in 1660, and escaped to England on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. A younger brother, Stephen, had preceded him, and had succeeded in getting together some small trade in Dover. Stephen died early in 1691, and Isaac, who had started in business in London, returned thence to Dover and took over and continued his brother's more promising venture. At first this was what we should call that of a ship's provision merchant; but it developed gradually, and by 1737 had become a general merchant's and ship-agency business. In later days it grew into a bank, well known in Dover as the house of Minet and Fector; but here we deal with it in its earlier and far more picturesque stage.

In those days office facilities were unknown, and every letter written was laboriously copied into a letter-book. Of these the business kept two series, one inland and one foreign. Volume 20 of the first series, extending from August 1737 to April 1741, has survived, and is now in my possession; its copies are all in the hand of the principal himself, and are all beautifully written, and carefully indexed under the names of the correspondents. They deal, as would be expected, with an infinite variety of matters, but all centring round Dover Harbour, and all having to do with ships and their cargoes. Let us begin with the cross-channel traffic which, while not relatively so important as now, even then formed no small part of Dover interests.

* The house was rebuilt in 1749, and remained till 1871, when it was pulled down. Its site is now occupied by Lukey's Ale Stores.

First there were the mail-packets sailing to Calais and Ostend; these were Government boats, carrying only mails and passengers, and they are sometimes complained of as competitors by Isaac Minet, who himself owned and employed boats crossing to Calais, Boulogne, and occasionally to Ostend. Of these there were four, the "Isaac and Mary," Captain Beale Jones; the "Jacob," Captain Boyket; the "Prince William," Captain Causey; and the "Expedition," Captain Sampson. The "Expedition" got too old for the service, and was followed, in 1738, by a new "Expedition" built at Dover. One disaster only is chronicled during these years, when the "Prince William" unfortunately ran on a sand-bank at Calais and filled, breaking her mast and bolt-sprit—"It is a loss we must bear with patience." No mast could be found at Dover, and one had to be sent for from London. These boats carried goods and horses when passengers were lacking, nor was this infrequent. They were all sloops of sixty tons, manned by a captain and six sailors; built at Dover, they cost about £700, as appears from the account of the new "Expedition," launched in 1738. A really good passage, with a fair wind, took four hours; but not infrequently the boats were unable to make their harbour, and sailing for Calais would perforce enter Boulogne; or, returning, run for shelter to the Downs, instead of making Dover. The boats could only leave or enter the harbour at high water, or a little before or after, according to the tides, as also to the momentary state of the bar, which was ever changing; more often than not they lay outside the harbour, and the passengers embarked by means of small boats from the beach, "which is usually effected without inconvenience, as the boatmen are extremely expert and careful, and have always displayed an intrepidity upon occasions of danger worthy of all praise."*

There was no regular day or time of sailing; they went as occasion offered, and as tide and wind permitted. Still less was there any connecting service with London, and the

* This was written in 1807, but was no doubt equally true in 1737.

following letter, addressed to M. de Bussy, London, 7th Feb. 1741, shews what delays were met with on the road :—

“ Il est arrivé que le cheval que votre courier a eu à Canterbury n'a pu fournir la moitié du chemin, et celui du postillion ne valant pas grand' chose a causé qu'il est arrivé ici après le départ du paquet boat et un de mes vaisseaux, de sorte qu'il est parti d'ici à 7 heures dans une petite barque moyenant 2½ guinées, que j'ai prié M. Pigault [a Calais merchant] de payer.”

Another courier, travelling for the French Ambassador, seems to have missed the boat through his own fault, as appears from a letter to M. de Vismes of the French Embassy, 14th Dec. 1739 :—

“ M'estant informé du sujet du retardement du courier de son Excellence le Conte de Cambis, j'apprends que ledit courier estant ici, et le paquet boat avec la malle estant pret à partir, les gens dudit paquet boat lui demandèrent une guinée pour son passage et il leur dit ne vouloir payer qu'une demie guinée, estant le prix ordinaire lors qu'ils portent la malle. Sur quoy ledit courier estant retourné à son logement pour prendre sa selle ou bagage, ledit paquet boat mis à la voile et partit avant qu'il put être de retour, et il ne lui fut pas possible de s'embarquer, et il ne partit aucun vaisseau depuis, à cause du gros vent. Ledit courier ayant fait ses plaintes à M. Hall, agent des paquet boats, celui ci a appelé le Cap. Balderstone qui commande ledit paquet boat mais qui ce voyage est resté à terre. Il le réprimande fortement en presence du courier, et dit qu'il étoit fort fâché de son retardement. Le contre-maitre du paquet boat qui a laissé le courier se nomme Henry Styles. Je suis fâché de cette imprudence qui n'est pas excusable.”

The communications on the French side were equally liable to delay. There were three main roads from Calais to Paris: one by Boulogne, Abbeville, and Beauvais; one by

St. Omer and Amiens; and a third by St. Omer, Arras, and Péronne; and the time taken was about fifty hours. On the 19th December 1740 we read:—

“The Lord Mayor [of London] arrived here last night. The wind is contrary to come out of Calais and very thick weather. I told him I had writ to his lady and offered a bed at my house which he takes very kindly. The Lord Mayor is gone back, having heard by a messenger come over that the roads from Paris to Calais are full of water and not fit to travel. He was four days coming from Paris to Calais.”

On the 26th the Lord Mayor again came to Dover:—

“Having writ me to have Sampson or Causey to be at Calais to bring his lady over and they have been there several tides expecting her coming. I believe the Lady Mayoress will be here this evening.”

The lady finally disembarked at Deal, instead of Dover, at 4 a.m. on the 27th; not a comfortable voyage.

Illustrious passengers often took a boat to themselves, and here the usual price was five guineas; the humbler traveller, taking his luck with others, seems to have paid about half a guinea. Constantly, we learn from these letters, prospective passengers came recommended to the firm; but, as an amusing account shews, did not always adopt the recommendation:—

“There arrived at the ‘Ship’* Messrs. Walner, Gartner & Vianna. Causey [captain of one of the packets], who was there at their arrivall, told ’em he belonged to me and was to go the first opportunity. They gave no ear to him, but to the Master of Mr. Hall’s boat.† They going by my kay, where I was, I asked them if they knew Mr. Meyer, they said yes, and telling ’em that my name was Minet, one said he had a letter

* A famous Dover inn.

† Superintendent of the Government mail packets.

for me and gave it. I then desired them to go with Causey who belonged to me and was a much bigger vessell, and it should not cost 'em more, and that it would oblige Mr. Meyer and myself; yet nothing would do. I had told 'em that Causey was to carry seven horses, at which they made no objection, but left me unresolved, and are gone by the small vessell. I own it vexed me to find they had so little regard for me and the recommendation. I do not remember to have met persons so little civil."

There was also evidently a good deal of what one must call touting employed to influence intending passengers to take passage on the firm's boats. This appears from a letter written to the landlord of one of the Canterbury inns:—

"I am sorry to have occasion of complaining of James Walker, your coachman, who I have been told several times hath taken upon him to speak ill of Mrs. Austin's house* and hindering her all he can and also passengers from making use of my vessells, and last night Captain Westfield's† mate being at Mr. Jennings' door about speaking with some of my friends which are gone with him, the fellow took the liberty to ask him what business he had to come there, that he might go to the King's Head, and that if it was in his power he should not come there, etc., and I am well persuaded that he hath more than once endeavoured to persuade passengers not to go in my vessells. I would not put hardship upon a poor man, but I cannot suffer such usage, and I desire you'l please to prevent it."

Special difficulties beset the Channel-service in those days. War with Spain had been declared in 1738, and both in that year and again in 1740 the Government decreed an embargo, which meant that no vessel was permitted to leave any English port for foreign parts. This difficulty was to some extent met, for the packet-boats, so long as the

* A Dover inn.

† Captain of one of the firm's boats.

weather allowed, never entered the harbour at Dover, but lay outside in the roads, or sheltered in the Downs, and so appear to have conformed with the letter of the law.*

Press-gangs were also busy, a danger which was partly guarded against by obtaining protection for the seamen employed. Of the work of the press-gangs we have glimpses in two letters, 31 July 1738 :—

“Friday last came in three boats of press-gangs, one rowed on board Westfield [one of the Channel-service captains] and took two men; the others found none; when they boarded, the pier men soon got together. The boat with my two men rowed out of the harbour, but having got a constable, he brought the other two Lieutenants in my counting house, Mr. Gay Matson, deputy mayor, and Hollingbury came and threatening to secure them, they sent to the other Lieutenant and the two men were released. They said they had order to have no regard to protections, which I could not believe, but find by your letter it was so. On that noise all our men remained at Calais; eleven of them are come back in a French boat last night, we make shift with old men, and Boyket went yesterday morning with eight horses, and Causey last night with Mr. Singleton. Westfield is expected with Lord Rockingham.”

Thus it would appear that the interruption to the Channel-service was not very serious on this occasion. On the 7th June 1739 :—

“The pier is in great consternation, all the men of the fishing boats were pressed early this morning, and

* A letter written to George Onchterlony in London, whose vessel was lying wanting a crew in Dover, may be quoted in illustration of this embargo (7 Feb. 1740) :—

“I observe that you have obtained a protection for the seamen who are to go in your ship ‘Triton,’ which men you would send down here if the ship is not detained by the embargo, which you desire to know. In answer the said ship is detained as well as 23 Hollanders who came in this harbour by contrary winds. I have writ to the Holland Ambassador for an order to permit their sailing.”

The “Triton” was bound to Rotterdam, and sailed in the middle of March.

none left but the Master and boys; when they could have got something it is very great damage to them. They all come in and cannot find men, and our vessells are in the same condition, so that there must be protection got for them so soon as any are granted, for the men are not willing to go without protection."

The next year the question was again serious, and Isaac writes :—

"That a petition may be made to the King and Council shewing that having at a great expense established four passage vessells for the carrying over to Calais and back, by which means twenty families subsist, and said boats being navigated by old men and boys not fit for His Majesty's service, humbly pray that the said four vessells may be exempted from the embargo and have leave to go out of Dover."

By August 1740 the war had affected Dover a little more closely (28th August) :—

"Sampson [who commanded the 'Expedition'] was to have sailed next tide with several passengers, but by a boat come over express from Calais this morning I have a letter advising that about one hour after Captains Dalglish and Boyket got in, there came in a Spanish privateer rowing shallop with 60 men double armed, but that upon application made to the Commander of the Marines there was order that he should not sail till 24 hours after an English ship that was there ready to sail. I am informed that a Man-of-War is ordered to go to Calais road to convey over the Duchess of Dorset* for whom Captain Dalglish is gone to Calais. I have sent to Walmer Castle to know when said Man-of-War is to be there, for the passengers are very desirous to be gone. It is very hard we should be so insulted."

* A not very flattering account of the lady will be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. Sackville, Charles, 2nd Duke of Dorset.

By September 1st the same or another privateer was still about:—

“Here is yet no order to protect the passage, and another Spanish Privateer come out of Dunkirk chased a market boat yesterday during three hours, so that our vessells dare not venture tho’ Jones [Captain of the ‘Isaac and Mary’] went out this morning. I hope he got safe over. If no ship is appointed to secure the passage I must arm and double-man two of our four vessells.”

The risk seems to have continued some time longer, for on the 15th October he again writes to Messrs. J. and W. Catnach, London:—

“Cap. Thos. Moire came and desired my advice if he might sail for Havre without fear of Spanish privateers. I did tell him that I did not think there was much danger, and that if I had a ship bound there would not think it any risk, on which he sailed out of this harbour the afternoon, and about seven at night I was told that a Spanish privateer had taken two or three vessells and that Cap. Moire was one of them, which caused me no small vexation but was very glad to hear the next morning that he was come back. I did think I was pretty cautious in giving advice, but this will make me more. It is a shame we should be insulted hereabout by such pitiful small boats and no care taken to clear the Channel of them.”

A question of shipping a cargo of corn illustrates other methods of avoiding war-risks. In 1739 the firm writes to a correspondent*:—

“Je crois qu’on pourroit trouver acheter un vaisseau de 80 a 100 tonnes à juste prix au nom de Pigault† qui pourroit le faire naviguer par des Francois sous son

* Many of these letters are in French, for the writer, as one would expect, had many Huguenot business relations.

† A French merchant of Calais.

nom; et on pourroit, estant à Calais [*i.e.*, the ship purchased], le charger de bleds envoyés d'icy qui seraient mis de bord à bord sans grand frais. Cela pourroit tourner à compte; le tout allant sous son nom ne seroit exposé à aucun risque d'être pris par les Espagnols. Je crois le dit Pigault brave homme et de toute confiance. Le vaisseau se pourroit payer en peu de temps par les frets qui sont à present forts. On demande à Calais 1300 l. [*circa* £54 sterling] par mois pour un dogre de 90 tonnes, 6 mois certain. Je vous marque ceey par spéculation."

Let us now turn to a few letters which will give some idea of the dangers of the harbour. In October 1738 Alexander Pigott of Winchester is written to:—

"I am sorry to advise you that Cap. F. Breton of the sloop 'Four Brothers,' from Southampton for Havre, coming into our pier by the boldness of our pilots who well know that our harbour is well nigh stopped up by the shingle occasioned by long W. and S.S.W. winds came on shore by mismanagement. I blame him for venturing in, but the pilots had persuaded him there was no risk. Tho' I call them pilots, they are not such, but common sailors or hovellers who for a premium undertake to bring ships right or wrong. However the damage was not very serious, and the ship got away again in ten days time."

The same month another disaster is recorded to F. Wynants of London:—

"The Schiper [skipper] of the 'King David' had agreed with a pilot and boat's crew to help him out, and there being a great sea, and the wind bare to sail out of the harbour, the pilot did not think fit to venture and went away, when another pilot acquainted with the Schiper told him he could get out well enough; on which he sent back for the first pilot and boat and told him he would go to sea, on which both pilots and two

boats assisted, but in such a hurry that they did not take time to set the sails as should be, so that for want of way she struck on the bar and by reason of the great sea the boats and crews left her and some of the ship's men being drunk and not capable to help, and her rudder unhangd, she drove in the bay and would have been on shore and lost had not another boat ventured out and assisted her. The men of said boat set her sails, got her to sea and carried her to the Downs where they came to anchor, and did hang her rudder, and the ship proving very leaky they have this day brought her back in our harbour. The men expected £50, but having desired our Mayor and an antient pilot, and our Harbour Master, they have allowed them £20 which I have paid. I shall see the ship refitted as soon as possible."

These delays were serious, as the damage occurred on October 26th, and the "King David" did not get away until November 19th, 1739.

A similar disaster befell the "Hamilton," and is thus chronicled in a letter to H. Lascelles, London (25 December 1740):—

"Cap. Francis Yewart in the Brigantine 'Hamilton' from Rotterdam, being in this road, designing to come in the harbour, the wind blowing very hard, and contrary to sail to the westward where he is bound, and the sea being so high that none of our boats could go out to him he sailed for the harbour: but the eddy of the sea drove the ship behind the north pier head, where she stuck fast. The night tide following, a very good cable of 12 inches that was made use of to heave her off, broke, and she drove further and higher upon the shore. It was then thought necessary to lighten her, which was done at low water, and yesterday noontide she was with good help got into the harbour, and is very tight and has very little damage."

The "Fane" was not so fortunate, as appears from a letter to Ed. Stephens of Bristol (24 January 1741) :—

"The 'Fane,' brigantine, Cap. Stephen Richman, Bristol for Rotterdam, having sprung a leak, did yesterday design to come in our harbour, and had a signal of distress out, but no boat coming to him he made for the harbour and by reason of the eddy and sea struck against the south pier head, was drove behind it and fell on her side, and the violence of the sea broke her upper deck and carried away what tobacco was between decks. I immediately sent a carpenter who scuttled her, she being bilged and not capable of being got off or repaired. By working all the night we have got most part of the goods out of her hold. I observe that you shipped 48 hogsheads of tobacco, I cannot yet tell how many came on shore, but believe some are partly dry, which I shall examine and secure the best I can, but know not what to do with what is wet. The wreck being exposed to be carried away by the sea I had it sold after publication, and was sold for £8. The anchor, sails and cable, being ashore, shall also sell if you order. The vessell I find was sufficiently ballasted, it was the great fall of sea that laid her on her side."

The tobacco and other cargo, dried we must suppose as far as might be, were reshipped on board Isaac's own sloop the "Expedition" and sailed on February 15th for Rotterdam, the freight being £41. The anchor, etc. (including the £8 brought by the hull), produced £24; and the charges for warehousing, drying, etc., came to £16 1s. 8d. "I wish for better occasion for doing you service," concludes the letter conveying this information to the owner, who was, we are glad to know, insured.

When, as in the last instance, a ship was wrecked at Dover itself, the goods were saved as far as might be; but a wreck elsewhere was in worse case, as appears from the account forwarded to Messrs. Mello and Amsinck, London,

of the wreck of the "St. John," 200 tons, of Hamburgh, which took place near Hythe on the 10th January 1738:—

"I find that there is saved only about 9 casks beeswax and 2 bales coarse painted callicoos which contained 80 pieces each. I have had them brought here and the latter being wet and sandy I have given them to be washed and put in order. There is saved of the ship's materials the best cable and anchor, some other parts of cables, one hawser, some parts of masts and yards, the main mast being broken in half. It is a lamentable thing to see the barbarity of the people who prevented the ship's company from saving anything by shoving them away and cutting all the sails and rigging to pieces and stealing all away, insomuch that of 2 suits of sails not one piece is saved, nor of the shrouds or rigging. Although I have paid six custom officers for their service, yet I cannot get any information from them of the persons who have cut and carried away, yet I am persuaded that they must know many of them."

The Mayor of Hythe, though in a more legal fashion, participated in the plunder, for he "insists on two guineas for a consideration of his pretended right to the best cable and anchor, the ship being stranded in his Mayoralty; which, though an unjust thing, I think it is not worth disputing, it being an old custom." The Commissioners of Customs in London were appealed to to obtain a disclosure from their six officers, who had been present at the wreck, of the names of the thieves. "They must know," says Isaac in a later letter,

"most of the offenders; but, between us, I fear that the officers will have more regard not to disoblige their neighbours than to justice. As for any hope of any information I find none is to be expected. The chief of the officers at Hythe, Mr. Thomas Clare, writes in answer to mine that although the six officers were present at the plunder and knew most of the inhabitants

about those parts, yet they knew of none that cut and carried away, and seem rather to excuse than accuse the plunderers.”

A wagon-load of sails and rigging from the ship was traced into the possession of one Cherton, who sold it to Stephen Marsh of Folkestone, but no prosecution followed, seemingly for lack of any evidence that Cherton had himself stolen the property.

Another case in which actual violence was used is recorded in 1740 :—

“ An Amsterdam ship of 500 or 600 tons from Cadiz ran on shore the 24th of April, with salt and brandy for Amsterdam. The Master and men came on shore here that forenoon and in the afternoon went back to her with two large boats, but found 20 English boats about her, and the English men would not suffer them to take anything out of the ship. I hear some pieces of brandy are brought ashore at Deal, Ramsgate, etc. I have sent the Schiper with Thos. Pascall to Deal to take account of what they can hear. There were 100 pipes under the salt.”

But little of the 100 pipes seems to have been recovered, and the Customs were defrauded. But on another occasion they were successful :—

“ Here is a ship of about 90 tons in the road, of and from Bayonne for Hamburgh, seized by Ridley [a Revenue Officer] for his having delivered half a hogshead of wine in the Folkestone road, and some broil happening by the Folkestone men getting away without paying, three of his men are kept prisoners at Folkestone; it will be a very troublesome business and hinder the voyage, if not worse.”

This was in April 1740, and Isaac's fears were realized. In June he writes :—

“ Le Capitaine Dulez est parti ce matin avec un vent favorable, mais foible d'hommes, il est facheux pour les

trois matelots de se voir retenu prisonniers. Il m'a donné ordre en cas qu'ils soient relâchés de leur payer 24 livres, qui est une guinée chacun ; mais s'ils continuent prisonniers il serait à propos de leur allouer quelque chose pour les soulager."

The men continued in jail, and Isaac did what he could for them in endeavouring to induce the owners of the ship to make them some allowance. In July he writes:—

"Les propriétaires du vaisseau le 'Sauveur' ne veulent rien payer pour les trois prisonniers ce qui est fâcheux pour ces pauvres misérables qui sont détenus pour avoir voulu rendre service à leur capitaine et par son ordre. Leur géollier est venu me représenter qu'il n'y a rien alloué pour leur nourriture et qu'ils seraient mort de faim si il ne leur avoit assisté, ce qui est assez vraisemblable. Il me dit aussi que les prisonniers doivent être transportés à Rochester ou ils doivent être jugés. La charité demande qu'on les assiste puisqu'ils ne sont point autrement criminels."

We hear of them once again as having been taken to Maidstone on the 30th July, no doubt to the Assizes, but with what result is not reported.

The pilots were in those days an important body of men. They formed a fellowship governed by the Court of Lodemanage, one of the three courts presided over by the Lord Warden. The pilots' house, which must have been the centre of harbour life, stood where is now the Lord Warden Hotel. When the house was taken over owing to the coming of the railway in 1844, pilotage was still to some extent a necessity, and the pilots were provided for in the tower which stands over the arch under which the railway now passes down to the pier. In 1853 all pilotage became centralized under the Trinity House, and the Dover fellowship vanished, and with it the Court of Lodemanage which had governed it.

There were yearly meetings of this Court at which its business was transacted, and these the letters note on two occasions :—

“Here was a general Court of Lothmany (*sic*) yesterday, where Cap. Hammerden was chose Master of the Fellowship of the pilots of Dover, Deal, and Margate” (26 July 1738).

“The Court of Lodmanage held this day where Richard Hutson was elected Master in the room of Hamerden. Old Henry Pascall, Treasurer; old Kindness and John Earle, who were put out of their wardenship, restored, and very great rejoicing among the pilots” (29 December 1739).

Another letter of the same date mentions the fees which were paid for pilotage :—

“Here are several persons of experience who undertake to pilot ships from hence to Hambro, Bremen, etc.; as there are also several at Deal, and some of them have had £20 to 20 guineas paid them, especially in winter, and in summer about £18. As they are now most at home no need of agreeing before your ship arrives. Here is in our harbour a Dutch ship from Bordeaux for Hambro, and an English Brigantine for Bremen. The Dutch ship takes no pilot. There is at Deal Edw. Hutchens who I can recommend to you, a very good Hambro pilot.”

It is evident that the business carried on by the Minet house was very large in extent, and of the most multifarious character. As local agent for the Dutch East India Company, Isaac Minet was constantly reporting to Gerard Bolwork in London on what he had done to assist the passing ships of the Company. On 28 August 1738 he writes :—

“Four Dutch East India ships are at anchor near Dungeonnest, I sent provisions to Cap. C. Kroon of

the 'Adricken,' and a pilot to Cap. Cagias of the 'Knappenhof,' belonging to the Chamber of Zeeland. This morning the enclosed letter from Cap. Dirk Bosen of the 'St. Laurens' for the Directors of the Chamber of Middleburg. I have also an order from Cap. Gerit Brinkman of the 'Hofwegen' of Horn, from Batavia, to send him an ox and three sheep. The wind is now northerly and moderate. There is another Dutch East India ship arrived yesterday, so that there are now five ships."

Ships in distress were assisted and repaired, and damaged cargoes unloaded and reshipped; provisions were provided in readiness for vessels which called in on starting for some long voyage; letters, largely for America, were received and kept till some opportunity offered to put them on board some vessel for New York or Carolina, for there was much traffic in rice with the latter place. A considerable capital must have been needed for all this, as money had to be advanced both for repairs and to the captains for the expenses and wages they incurred while in port.

Owning the boats which carried on the channel-service led to what one may call a general forwarding-agency. Among the many things dealt with in this way horses came first; there was a constant stream of horses to France. On 18 June 1739 Isaac writes to Mr. Devisme, Secretary to the French Ambassador:—

"J'aprends que Mr. Butler est parti de Londres avec 38 chevaux tant Irlandois qu' Anglais qu'il doit mener en France pour sa Majesté très Chrestienne; et comme il est arrivé ici hier au soir un ordre de ne laisser sortir de ce port aucun vaisseau [*i.e.*, the embargo above referred to] je prends la liberté de vous le faire savoir pour que vous ayez la bonté de faire représenter la chose au Seigneurs de la Trésorerie pour qu'un ordre soit envoyé ici pour permettre que les chevaux soient embarqués pour Calais."

There must have been great delay in obtaining the permit, for it is not until 6th July that we read :—

“ Sampson [of the ‘Expedition’] went out yesterday with fifteen horses, and Boyket [another Captain] is come in with passengers this morning and will carry the rest of Mr. Butler’s horses.”

For this purpose the two vessels came into Dover, but the writer adds :—

“I had an order for two vessels and now they will keep out as long as they can till the embargo is off.”

The vessels, we are told in another place, could carry as many as twenty-four horses.

This Mr. Butler was clearly an important personage at the French Court, as having to do with the provision of horses for the royal hunt. We hear of him in this connection not long afterwards. Hughes Minet, Isaac’s grandson, was in France in 1752 and writes of Louis XV :—

“I was introduced to him at the hunt at Fontainebleau by Mr. de Butler, to whom I was recommended by my uncle [William Minet of Fenchurch Street], who knew him [no doubt as having financed the buying of horses in England]. It was his province to hold the stirrup while the King mounted. The King did me the honour of speaking to me, I being handsomely dressed in green and gold, the livery of the hunt, without which no one could be there. He asked me how my grandfather at Dover dead long before [1745] did, who had sent him so many fine English horses ; how I liked France, &cra. He appeared affable, and his debaucheries had not ruined his countenance.”

One wonders how far the King realized that only sixty-six years before the grandfather had been driven as a refugee out of France.

Amongst minor matters which were arranged for ships by the house at Dover was the payment of the light dues.

Lighthouses at this date were farmed out to private individuals, and ships arriving at Dover had to pay for the lights they had benefited by in coming up the Channel. A receipt for these dues is in my hands; on it is a charming seventeenth-century woodcut of a lighthouse; on the top of it stands a man tending an open coal fire, while a crane projecting at the side is hoisting up a basket of fuel. The receipt is a printed form, filled in in ink, and runs:—

“Received here at *Dover* of *Charles Hughes* Master of the good ship called the ‘*Bosphrous*’ of *London*, of the burden of *100 tons*, from the *Streights* bound for *this place*, the duty (*Eight shill’ & 4 pence*) due for the maintenance of one Lighthouse at *Dungenness* in the County of *Kent*.

Per me *Hen. Henshaw jun.* Collector
for the executors of the *Right Hon.*
the *Earl of Thanet* deceased.

Received also for the lights endorsed, viz. :—

Dungenness	8.	4
Portland	4.	2
Caskets	4.	2
Edystone	8.	4
Scilly	4.	2
	<hr/>	
	1.	9. 2”
	<hr/>	

A good instance of the work done by the firm at Dover, as also of the delay which disaster, aided by the law, could cause to a ship, is found in the story of the “*Sant’ Ambrogio*,” Captain *de Limas*, a Portuguese vessel from the *Canaries* and *Lisbon*. Meeting with heavy weather, she put into *Dover* for repairs, in order to effect which the cargo had to be landed; and the casks, being damaged, required recoopering. Seeing that we were at war with *Spain*, the suspicions of the local authorities caused them to arrest both vessel and cargo, the latter consisting of *57 bales* of wool and *125 pipes* of wine, *10* of which were found empty by damage. *Isaac*

Minet appealed to Christopher Gunman, the Dover collector, but in vain; so he advised the captain to go to London to see the agents there, "mais comme il n'est pas cavalier assez pour aller à cheval et qu'il ne se trouve pas de carrosse ce jour" the Captain prudently waited. The intervention of the Portuguese Ambassador was invoked, but the matter was complicated by the action of one of the seamen, who gave false information as to the ownership of the cargo to the authorities. This man must have been a thorough scoundrel to judge from the following letter:—

"An Irish fellow who spoke Portuguese, whom Cap. de Limas picked up in Dover and kept on board as interpreter, is absconded and proves to be a rogue. Last night he went to Thomas Walker, the butcher who provides meat for the ship, and told him that the scrivener wanted half a guinea and desired him to send it to him and to set it in account as so much meat delivered. Walker told him he could do no such thing; the man has not been here since, and being a rogue he may have told Captain Ridley [Revenue Officer] some false stories which no doubt he will not stick to swear to. I think fit to let you know this; he is a pretty tall fellow and wears an old blew coat."

One of this man's stories was that some ingots of silver had been secretly landed and deposited in the Minet counting-house, which Isaac Minet indignantly denied.

By the 24th of October the ship was ready to sail, but the case had by that time got into the Court of Admiralty in London. Now the Cinque Ports were very jealous of their autonomy, and had their own Court of Admiralty, and the Duke of Dorset, Admiral of the Cinque Ports, was not going to allow his jurisdiction to be ousted, and sent his officers who also seized ship and cargo. The matter was now in the hands of the lawyers, and it speaks well for them that it should have been decided as early as the 5th of December that the ship might be released. The Captain came back to Dover on the 8th and arrived very much

fatigued, "being come from Canterbury on horseback and not being used to ride, he had a fall from his horse and hurt his side."

The "Sant' Ambrogio" might now have sailed, but—

"Our pilots conclude that the rivers are frozen in Holland, and it is terrible weather, and great winds, and not fit to go to sea. Two ships with rice for Amsterdam sailed hence the 13th inst., and after having been near the coast of Holland with stormy weather, were obliged to come back here, having met with much ice. The pilots say it would not be safe to carry the ship into Midlebleek, that she being a very sharp ship would run great hazard of over setting."

Finally, on the 20th of January 1741, they got out of the harbour "this noontide, but it being very dark and misty and no wind, she is come to anchor in our road." However, she must have got away, and to Amsterdam, as later letters shew. The total delay was 104 days, the costs incurred in Dover came to £420 10s. 2d. for repairs and warehousing; what may have been paid to lawyers in London and Dover we are not told. The voyage cannot have been a profitable one, but is a good example of what went on in Dover in those times.

Another curious story is that of the "Robert and Mary," which we first hear of in a letter of the 28th October 1739:—

"Here is by contrary wind the 'Robert and Mary,' brigantine, Cap. Robert Pomeroy, from Leghorn for Bremen with 350 chests of lemons. The Captain came to me for advice, as he hears that lemons are scarce at London, and if this easterly wind and cold weather continues he may be detained here some time and the fruit may decay, and therefore it may be well to send them to London. As you have correspondents at Bremen you may know something of the adventure, please to give the Captain advice."

By the 10th November it became evident that the Captain's anxiety about his fruit was but a cloak to conceal his unwillingness to go to Bremen.

“The ‘Robert and Mary’ is still here, though the Captain hath had opportunity of fair winds. I hear he leads a loose life, and that he is not inclineable to proceed to Bremen, having heard that his wife, who hath a right to the vessel, is gone there to wait his arrival. Please let this be entre nous.”

The owner's agent in London agreed to the proposal to send the lemons thither, and they were accordingly transhipped and forwarded by the “John and Constant” sloop. The Captain, however, had landed 40 cases, which he claimed as his own, and sold them in Dover for £70. Of the 310 remaining only 292 could be found. With the money thus obtained the Captain went to London, leaving his ship in charge of the mate and two old seamen, whose wages he omitted to provide. On the 27th he had not reappeared, and it became known that he had raised £100 in Leghorn on a bottomry-bond.

By the 12th January certain enquiries began to be made concerning other cargo which had been shipped, notably for six bales of Cordovan leather from Gibraltar. Two of these were found on board; it was discovered that the Captain, having put in to Portsmouth, had there sold the other four for his own account. Bills of lading for 337 pieces of eight were produced by another shipper, but these also were not forthcoming. It was evident by this time that the Captain had no intention of proceeding on his voyage to Bremen. The ship was arrested under process of the Court, it would seem by the holders of the bottomry-bond; the cargo, what was left of it, was landed and forwarded to London, the duties and charges on the two remaining bales of leather being £178 18s. 3d., and on the rest of the cargo, currants and almonds, £263 13s. 4d. On the 28th of June the ship was put up for sale, at a reserve of £100, and was bought by Isaac Minet for £115. The net proceeds, however, only

amounted to £86 13s. 6*d.*, as deductions had to be made for costs, and the wages of the crew, which came as a first charge.

The French Ambassador at this date was the Count de Cambis, who seems often to have availed himself of the firm's services. On the 23rd May 1738 is a letter to him on the adventures of his courier, which goes to shew that even Ambassadors were not above smuggling :—

“ Le visiteur de notre coutume vient me prier de vous faire savoir que le sieur Coney courier d'Espagne qui arriva ici hier de Calais avait avec lui une petite caisse qu'il dit contenoit des confitures. Mais l'ayant ouvert elle se trouve contenir une coiffe et un manteau de taffeta garni de dentelles, une coiffure et manchettes de gaze, trois papiers de frange, deux colliers et deux pendants d'oreilles et une livre de tabac en poudre. Ledit visiteur dit n'avoir pu se dispenser de retenir laditte caisse, mais que sur un ordre de la part de votre Excellence elle sera envoyé à Londres.”

There is, of course, the very possible explanation that the courier was bringing over this assortment of finery for his own account; if this were so one would like to hear what his master said to him when he received Isaac's letter.

On another occasion we have the same Ambassador importing horses for his own use (letter to him 29th September 1739) :—

“ J'ai reçu un paquet adressé à M. des Angles Commandant à Calais que j'ai envoyé par un vaisseau parti ce matin. Je vois qu'il doit venir à Calais quelques chevaux de carosse qui ont déjà été en Angleterre. Cela n'empêchera pas qu'il en faille payer les droits d'entré qui est pour chaque cheval de tous pays, excepté France, 28/6, mais si ce sont des chevaux Francois ils payent £6 5s. 6*d.* par cheval. Si ils arrivent je ferai de mon mieux et ferai mon soumission pour les droits selon l'ordre de votre Excellence. J'ai marqué à M. Dunoquet que je suis en avance de £1 2s. 8*d.* pour les droits de 4

chevaux Anglais de votre Excellence; il ne m'en a pas fait raison."

It would appear from this that there was an export as well as an import duty on horses, and that the latter differentiated very heavily against France.

Isaac himself seems to have been not unwilling to assist occasionally in evading the Customs. The Earl of Ailesbury was living in Brussels, and sent over a parcel to his connection, Lady Cardigan. Concerning this we have a letter of the 29th March 1740, written to a Mr. Shuckburgh in London:—

"The two mantelets which the Earl of Ailesbury sent for Lady Cardigan are come over, but having been informed that they are made of cloth, which is prohibited, I have been obliged to prevent their being carried to the Custom House, where they would have been stopped. I hope they will come safe to your hands next week. Pray let it remain between us that the mantelets were not carried to the Custom House."

The Earl of Ailesbury was a Jacobite nobleman who found it more convenient to live in Brussels, where he died in 1741. He had not, however, lost his taste for English delicacies, which were often forwarded to him through Dover and Ostend, collared brawns, dried neats' tongues, cakes of orange-flower, milk water, citron water, apples, cider, trees and seeds being sent at various times. On one occasion he sends some pictures home, and a letter to his agent in London gives some curious information on how the duties on works of art were appraised:—

"I am advised by Mr. Michot of Bruges of a case with two small pictures of the Emperor. He writes the pictures cost 50 florins, which is about 4 guineas. You know, I doubt not, that all pictures, good or bad, new or old, pay, if under 2 feet square, 20/- each, if above, but under 4 feet, 40/-, and if 4 feet or bigger £3 each. Therefore please to let me know if I must send for them

and pay the duties or if you will run the risk of them, for if they cost but 50 florins, they will be dear when the duties are paid."

The pictures came over, and the duty was £2 on each.

Another letter shews a possible device for evading the duty on pictures, by which the Customs were not defrauded, though the owner of the goods might pay less than the duty. How this was possible appears from a letter to Mr. Hervart of Southampton (3rd April 1738):—

"J'ai l'honneur de votre lettre par laquelle vous m'ordonez de payer les droits de vos trois tableaux qu'on a retenu à notre douane. Je sais fort bien quels droits ils payent, et j'aurai ce jour exécuté vos ordres si il ne me sembloit que vous pourriez les avoir à meilleur marché si vous trouviez à propos de les laisser où ils sont jusqu'à ils y aient esté six mois, après quoy on doit les exposer en vente au plus offrant. Je me flatte qu'alors je pourrais les faire acheter pour moins de £6 de droits qu'il faut payer ; c'est pourquoy j'ai differé."

Mr. Hervart, however, declined the suggestion, preferring to pay the duties, and the pictures were forwarded to London at a total cost of £7 15s.

From Dover goods were forwarded to London by the carrier, then one Stringer, whose wagon took three days, stopping on the way at Canterbury and Rochester, and arriving at the King's Head, Southwark. A letter to one Alvaro Lopez Suaro (9th October 1738) is a good example of the use made of the carrier:—

"Captain Bandon of the 'Switzer' arrived in this road this morning. He hath left in my hands to be sent to you a bag of Barbary silver and two parcels of gold, the three bills of loading are here enclosed, and a box with two gold watches. Finding the carrier going this day for London, and it having gone free from robbers these fifty years, I did think fit to send them. You have here enclosed Stringer's receipt, who is to

have 15/- for the carriage. My commission is 10/-
I have paid Cap. Bandon £10 on his bill on you."

The absence of banking facilities must have hampered trade much in those days. Isaac Minet's son, William, was a merchant in London, "next the Golden Ball, Fenchurch Street," and the course of business between them well illustrates the gradual change by which many firms resembling this Dover one, from being merchants became bankers. The Dover house needed cash for advances made to captains, as well as to pay for repairs and provisions supplied to ships. This was obtained from London, there being no bank in Dover, and came in the form of notes sent down by William. The sums so advanced in Dover were repayable by the owners of the ships, who might live anywhere. Bills were drawn on the latter by the Dover house in favour of William, who presented them for acceptance, and received the proceeds as and when they became due. In this way William was repaid the advances he had made to Dover. The profits of the Dover business thus came to William's hands, and the accounts between the two houses were of course adjusted from time to time.

All inland trade was carried on by this method, nor is there any evidence of the intervention of any third party in the form of a bill-broker or banker to discount these bills, which were generally of short term, ten days or twenty; they were evidently paid from principal to principal, though no doubt mutual indebtedness was used to cancel liabilities, a process carried out by entries in the ledgers of the firms concerned. Already, however, we have the beginnings of a general banking business, as when Isaac writes to William (1st September 1740) :—

"Here is a bill of Mr. Gunman's on Mr. Manley £359 0s. 4d., of ten days date, of the 30th instant. I want £300 or £400 of bank bills against the arrival of two ships from Holland."

James Gunman, Mayor in 1737, was one of a well-known Dover family, and the transaction looks as though Isaac

Minet had discounted the bill, and, as its holder for value, was intending to collect it through his son in London.

These letters deal only with inland matters, but constant references to the passing of bullion between Dover and abroad more than would be necessary to adjust the balance of international trade, proves that bills arising from foreign commerce, though occasionally mentioned, were not nearly so frequent. The letter quoted just above speaks of Barbary silver and parcels of gold arriving in Dover, and constantly we have notices of bullion passing through Dover in discharge of foreign trade debts. This took many forms: guineas, louis d'or, écus, moydors, dollars, sequins; but whatever the form the metal might assume, it was never reckoned at its face-value, but always by weight, and several times we have it noted that coins were short in weight.

“I have received a bag from Mr. J. Lasablionière [a Boulogne merchant] containing £252 6s. 6d., well told, but have sent him back five Moydors overweight which I reckon he'll send me back five others in lieu of them.”

The arrival of five moydors of full weight in a fortnight's time is duly reported to London, on which account the shipment had come. Another note of the same kind gives us the value of the Moydor as £1 7s. :—

“I have received from Calais from Mr. Dusaultoir £106 0s. 0d., but one Moydor is too light to pass, which shall be sent back to him, remains £104 13s. 0d.”

The same letter shews how this bullion was sent up to London, where, it would seem, some doubts existed as to the safety of the transit:—

“As to Stringer [the carrier] there has no misfortune happened these fifty or sixty years, and if he be careful he can secure 400 to 500 £ at all events at a time, without an iron chest, which he has not now got.”

The extent of this foreign banking business, as it justly deserves to be called, was very large. To take a few instances only, occurring close together. On the 5th of January 1746 Isaac writes:—

“I have received from Boulogne two bags, one £161, the other £61, and also from Mr. Clerq [a foreign correspondent] £422 2s. 0*d.*, for which he orders me to send him Louis d’or of 21/-. I write him I cannot get any here and shall keep the money until further orders.”

On the 15th January, again from Boulogne, three parcels of gold arrive containing £204, three bags containing £182 from Mr. Coilliot of Calais, to be exchanged for Louis d’or; and from Mr. Clerq again £105 to be exchanged for guineas; while reference is made to a further sum of £412 13*s.* recently received from abroad, with which the London house is credited. On the 22nd of January £216 11*s.* in gold comes from a Mr. Friocourt for the same credit. Here then, in a space of seventeen days, we find £1962 6*s.* in specie coming from abroad into Isaac’s hands, and one may fairly say that the business only needed the addition of the idea of a running cash to become a bank.

In addition to all this shipping agency and banking business, the house carried on a considerable general trade, both on its own behalf and in conjunction with the London branch. This consisted mostly in corn, which was shipped abroad in large quantities, and in the importation from abroad of brandy, mainly it would seem in fulfilment of contracts for the supply of the British Fleet. Into the details of those transactions it would be superfluous to enter. The brandy was bought at Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk, having come thither from Bordeaux, Cette, Nantes and la Rochelle.

Our trade with foreign countries has ever been hampered by differences in currency, measures and exchange, but in the eighteenth century the calculations due to these causes must have been even more difficult than they are to-day.

This can be well illustrated by a proposal for a contract for brandy to be bought at Dunkirk:—

“Having been advised by Mr. Pigault that there were but 80 hogsheads in Calais, I made the computation that 120 butts at 130 gallons each is 15,600 gallons, which at $2/6$ the gallon makes £1950. The 15,600 gallons at 3 gallons to 5 stoops makes 26,000 stoops, which at 30 sols per pott makes £1706 5s. 0d. I asked $2/7$ per gallon, but said I was willing to take $2/6$. I find that at $2/3$ per gallon it will be £1755, and if it is to be had at 29 sols [per stoop] it will come to £1649 6s. 10d., which, considering some charges, would leave about 5 per cent. profit. At Calais or Boulogne it must pay duty out at 3 livres per hogshead [3 livres = 2s. $7\frac{1}{2}$ d.].”

A further letter introduces us to yet other measures.

“Mr. Coilliot writes,” says Isaac Minet, “J’espère vous fournir 25 tonnes d’eau-de-vie de la Rochelle, Bordeaux, et Cette, de toute bonne qualité rendu à bord icy [Boulogne] à raison de 4s. 7d. la verge où velte qui vous produira autour de 2 gallons. Nous avons un vaisseau venant de Cette de 100 tonnes d’eau-de-vie en gros futailles de 65 à 80 veltes préférable par leur qualité à celle de Nantes et Rochelle.”

The Rotterdam velt, moreover, differed slightly from the French, 30 of the former making 32 of the latter. If we add to such a bewildering variety of measures and quotations an ever-shifting monetary exchange, we shall scarcely be surprised to read that “the brandy affair is of consequence, and demands great attention to be well managed.”

The exchange with France, for most of the dealings were with that country, added not inconsiderably to the complication. French currency at that date consisted of livres, sols and deniers, which stood in the same relation to each other as do our pounds, shillings and pence, but their value was far lower. The pound sterling was generally worth somewhere

in the neighbourhood of 24 livres, but on one occasion varied to 32 livres. Moreover, there were livres and livres, but the only standard one was the livre Tournois, which is often distinctly specified.

There is but little in these letters of anything but business interests. Here and there, however, in those to his son William a note of family matters is struck. Fifty years had passed since Isaac had left his native land, and one often wonders what connection these Huguenots kept up with the relatives they must have left in the old country. One glimpse of this we get in 1740:—

“Here are two women, daughters of the widow Minet of France, who are come to see me, a widow and a lusty young woman. I make them welcome, being the nearest relations I have in France.”

Three days later he refers to them again:—

“The two women of France will not stay long, I will endeavour to send them back satisfied; they behave modestly and well for their condition and send their civilities.”

They left after a stay of six days, when Isaac writes again to his son:—

“Les deux parents de France sont partis hier par Causey n’y ayant autre chose à faire. Je les ai renvoyé fort contentes; leur visite me coute autour de 12 guineés. Elles sont modestes et me paroissent fort honestes and assez sensibles, and ne m’ont rien demandé; et, quoique parents de loin, ce sont les plus proches que j’ai en France et je benis Dieu de ce que je puis leur faire plaisir.”

Constant little gifts of delicacies passed between the two houses in Dover and Fenchurch Street, of which two forms may be noted as being Dover specialities. Samphire, a plant which grows on the cliffs round Dover, the leaves of which were used to flavour pickles, was often sent up.

“Whittings have not been very large this season, I have ordered a rumball to be bought when good to be had,” is a phrase which drives one to the dictionary, and here Wright does not fail us:* “An old custom used by the fishermen of Folkestone; they choose eight of the largest and best whittings out of every boat when they come from that fishery, and sell them apart from the rest: and out of this separate money is a feast made every Christmas eve which they call Rumball. Probably the word is a corruption from ‘rumwold,’ and they were antiently designed as an offering for St. Rumwold, to whom a chapel, which stood between Folkestone and Hythe, was once dedicated, but is long since demolished.” He says the word is obsolete, but it was clearly still in use in 1740, and Isaac intended to send his son some specially fine whittings when they were to be obtained.

The labour involved in carrying on such a business must have been great; one would like to know how many clerks were employed, but Ruth Colebran is alone named of these. Isaac himself was 77 when this series of letters begins, and was therefore unable to do any of the travelling to neighbouring towns which was often necessary, or to go off to ships which lay either in the Downs or off Dungeness; we are often told that Colebran did this. It is during these years that we have the first notice of one who became well known in Dover as one of its foremost citizens, as later did his son, John Minet Fector. Isaac Minet’s brother Thomas had a daughter Mary, who had married one Jeremy Fector, originally from Mulhausen, but settled in Rotterdam, where their son Peter was born in 1723. Sent over to Dover in 1739 at the age of 16, partly perhaps that he might learn English, partly in the hope that his great-uncle might be able to find some employment for him, we first hear of Peter in a letter of February, 1740, when Isaac writes of him:—

“Le jeune Fector, qui est ici parle assez bon Anglais, et est assez intelligent & sage et capable de servir dans

* *Eng. Dialect Dict.*, London, 1904; *s.v.* Rumbal. The explanation he gives is quoted from Harris’s *History of Kent*.

un comptoir ; si vous lui pouvez trouver quelque place cela ferait plaisir à ses parents.”

Clearly then at this date there was no intention of taking him into the Dover office, but by May of this year we find him there, probably on the advice of William, who evidently took a fatherly interest in the lad, and must have written to him, as in August Isaac writes again to his son :—

“ You wrote to Peter Fector, it is very well to admonish, but as I observe he does all he can to improve and his inclination good, too much reproof is not necessary.”

Peter Fector was, as his later career proved, endowed with great ability. On Isaac's death William, of London, put him in charge of the Dover business, though he was only 22, and in 1751 he married Mary Minet, his old master's granddaughter, and became a partner in the firm, which was thenceforward known as Minet and Fector. His son John Minet Fector (1754—1821) was well known, as of Kearsney Abbey. The family is now quite extinct in the male line, and survives only in the Lauries and Bayleys, who derive from the marriage of Charlotte Mary, a granddaughter of Peter Fector, with Sir E. G. Bayley.

Of general Dover matters we have but little noted. In 1739 there was question of a new organ. It does not appear for which church this was intended, but in all likelihood it would have been for St. Mary-the-Virgin. Both Isaac Minet and his son subscribed, and the former says of it :—

“ The organs are to be played both by an organist and engines, and promise to be very good : to cost about £300 and about half is subscribed, I suppose parliamenting may bring the rest.”

Of Dover men at this date by far the most celebrated was Philip Yorke, son of a Dover attorney, and born in Snargate Street in 1690. His success in life had been notable, and in 1737 he became Lord Chancellor under the title of Lord Hardwicke. The town was naturally anxious

to mark its appreciation of such a citizen, and in 1739 comes this brief note of how this was done:—

“Mr. Papillon got my Lord Chancellor to sit for his picture to be put up in our Court Hall.”

An approaching parliamentary election, at which Mr. Revell was one of the candidates, is also referred to. He had evidently been canvassing, and Isaac Minet supported him:—

“Mr. Revell,” he writes on the 4th March 1741, “just now came to me with Mr. Matson. I made him sensible of the grumbling of some of the company which followed him at his visits, who, not finding provision when they came to the Maison Dieu, went away dissatisfied. It is true there was more people than was expected, and it was no way Mr. Revell’s fault. However, as I heard that V. V. was one of them I advised Mr. Revell going to him to make apology, though I do not conceive it can hurt our cause. Things are quiet here as to parliamenteering, and I believe that Mr. Revell is very safe. My respects to him.”

One little scandal is mentioned, of which we are told nothing but the fact that “Captain Ridley and Captain Hammerden boxed one another yesterday. I am told Ridley was victorious, though they were parted.” Both were well known in Dover; Ridley, as Captain of a Revenue vessel, and Hammerden, as Chief of the Pilots.

Isaac himself was closely connected from early days with the civic life of Dover. In 1706 he had become a common Councillor, and in 1731 he was elected a jurat. Pressed to allow himself to become Mayor he twice refused. In 1738 he writes:—

“Captain Dalglish was yesterday elected Mayor, cela fait plaisir à John Matson. J’ai fait en sorte de ne pas être mis en election, cela ne me convient pas.”

He again refused the post at a later date, and left the honour to his grandson, Hughes, who became Mayor in 1765.

The life of the writer of these letters was a striking one. Purely French for its first twenty-six years, it became as purely English for its last fifty-nine. From such a continuous series of documents, and they number some 2500, one can gather somewhat of the business aptitudes of the writer. Thoroughness in every detail; unremitting attention—there is never once a trace of any holiday; uprightness; these seem to have been the main factors which built up his success. By 1737, the date of these letters, he was a made man, but a man who had made himself. One would wish to know something of the business side of his early life, but of this nothing has survived, and we can only reason from the known to the unknown. The qualities which kept his business at the level we find it in 1737 were the selfsame qualities which had brought him success in his first years at Dover. We have found him at this date admirably seconded in all his enterprises by his son in London, but we must not forget that, in his first struggles, he had but himself to rely on. Of Isaac in all his other relations in life this is not the place to speak; for this much material exists, material which has been put on record elsewhere.* Here I have used his letters to throw a ray of light on life in Dover 180 years ago. This slight glimpse of the story of the harbour and of its activities will perchance be of interest to those who know and love the Dover of to-day, and their number is not few.

* *The Huguenot Family of Minet*, London, 1892.

This poem takes the form of a letter from a lonely wife who has not seen her husband in five months. She begins by reminiscing about meeting him during childhood. She was pulling flowers at the front gate and he came by on stilts, playing horse. Pound was not the creator of this poem; he translated it from the original Chinese version by Li Po. The Chinese original likely had a specific form and identifiable meter, but Pound did not know enough about Chinese poetry to preserve it in his translation. Pound wrote his translation in free verse, structured around the chronological life events of the river-merchant and his wife. This form, though perhaps not Li Po's intent, does actually align with the content of this poem. In 1741, Manhattan had the second-largest slave population of any city in the Thirteen Colonies after Charleston, South Carolina. The governor of New York in 1737 told the legislature, "the artificers complain and with too much reason of the pernicious custom of breeding slaves to trades whereby the honest industrious tradesmen are reduced to poverty for want of employ, and many of them forced to leave us to seek their living in other countries." [5] Some whites went out of business because of this. The winter of 1740-1741 was a miserable period for the poor in the city. Oglethorpe's letter left little doubt that the colony was part of an international conspiracy, one which not only planned to infiltrate and destroy the city of New York, but also to engage its Protestant citizens in religious warfare.