

THE PRIVATES - THE NAVAL MILITIA OF THE COLONIES .

The history of Rhode Island has been so often and so well told, that anything new need not be expected but it nevertheless seems quite fitting that the Year Book of the Society should illustrate the history which it was instituted to perpetuate . A purpose all the more praiseworthy now that the divergence from the ways of our forefathers widens at a pace which to the passing generation is somewhat startling .

The Records of the Colony carefully edited by the late Mr Bartlett are of course the main source of authority. These were thoroughly digested by Mr Arnold in his comprehensive history in which the general subject is treated in a masterly manner. In fact there has appeared no new material except that supplied in the recent publication by the Society of Colonial ["] Correspondence of the ["] Dames of the [^] Governors of Rhode Island from 1723-1775 The letters previous to 1729 are it is there stated lost, but it is probable that the most important of these also are preserved in the archives of the London Board of Trade that branch of the Kings Council which had sole charge of his Majesty's Plantations . Besides these there are the numerous letters of the founders ~~of~~ of the Colony to their friends of the Massachusetts, Plymouth and Connecticut Colonies; such as those of Roger Williams to Winthrop, printed by the Massachusetts Historical Society,

2

which help us to understand the early period. After these we have the newspapers of the eighteenth century which if not so full in detail as their successors of the nineteenth, were more careful of the accuracy of their facts. In addition to this original material we have a special aid to the study in hand, an exhaustive and instructive monograph, "The Privateers and Privateersmen of Rhode Island," read before the Rhode Island Society by our distinguished townsman the Honourable William P. Sheffield, in 1882. This was freely used by me in several chapters on the Colonial Wars which made part of Bayles History of Newport County printed in 1888. The subject was again elaborated by Mr Edward Field in his History of the State of Rhode Island in 1902. A chapter on the Sea Trade and its development recites all that had been previously gathered and adds many details. This rather long exordium must be excused. Emerson somewhere says that there are two kinds of memory, one a memory of a saying or writing itself, another as to where that saying or writing may be found. A monograph to be thorough must include all attainable information on one or the other of these lines.

It is not surprising to find the water a familiar element to the hardy band who began these plantations on Narragansett Bay. The immediate followers of Roger Williams may not have ^{been} very venturesome on the water, as Mr Field says, but there must have been a taste for the salt sea in men who gave their names of

Portsmouth and Newport, to their island towns, in memory no doubt of their English birth places on the Hampshire coast, and surely a people must acquire semi-aquatic habits whose water front was so great as that which girdled their Narragansett Settlement.

The history of the colonies of Great Britain, shows that the mother country did not take much pains to protect her stray children. They were expected to look after themselves and it is natural to find that their earliest care was to raise a military force. With this land militia the home government did not interfere. It is true that it built forts in the chief towns and that the garrisons were sent out from England, and the officers were of the home army. This was for peace times, but the forts went to gradual decay and when war came were of little use.

But there was no such latitude in her marine policy. She jealously guarded her domination over the seas and persistently refused the right of the colonies to issue commissions to armed vessels to navigate the ocean. This contension never ceased to be a cause of bitterness and, maintained during the entire colonial period, culminated in the initial water struggle of the revolution in Narragansett Bay. Yet as England could not spare men of war enough to patrol the Atlantic coast it is ^awonder that some plan was not devised by which the colonies could be protected on water as on land by what we now call a navel militia, ^aduly

~~Least of all was the restriction applicable to the sea-faring~~

duly organized and maintained by themselves and distinct from the privateers which were only commissioned in times of war.

Least of ^{all} was the restriction palatable to the sea-faring race which gathered in Rhode Island. Individual independence has been a marked feature of this population from the time that
↳ sturdy Roger Williams stamped through the woods determined to have his own way. Miss Kimball in her introduction to the "Correspondence of the Governors" alluded to says with a frankness to the manner born, which an outsider may quote but not imitate
↳ ~~says~~ that Rhode Island was the first community in New England which began life independent of all restraint and as she began so has she continued. ^{The} unconventionaly verging on lawlessness of the early settlers of Rhode Island has become an historical proverb. Towards the close of the century of its memorable beginnings, Lord Bellemont, a high minded and impartial man, characterized its Government as the most irregular and illegal that any government was. She ^{was} the last to adopt the constitution of the United States; fully believing she could thrive alone. This spirit seems to be inherent in small states as in small persons. It is notorious that diminutive persons are ^{the} ~~the~~ most aggressive. South Carolina is another instance of this truth,

When Bellemont, who was the Governor of the New York province ^{of} and the Colonies of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, made this uncomplimentary comment on Rhode Island government privateering was the habit of the entire coast from cape Cod to the

Gulf of Mexico, The Manhattan Dutch had taken kindly to it. Indeed New Amsterdam was originally settled from Holland as a convenient harbour, in which to fit out vessels to vex the Spaniard their ancestral foes. And their English successors would not have been the legitimate descendants of Hawkins and Drake and the bold freebooters of Queen Bess had they not taken up the oars where the Dutch dropped them. The old quarry was the same.

The relations between Rhode Island and the New Netherlands, unlike those of the Massachusetts colony were always friendly. There was also a close intimacy between the settlers of the east end of Long Island who were of the same stock as their Rhode Island neighbors. The Dutch well knew the waters of Narragansett Bay. They visited it in 1625 thirteen years before Roger Williams invaded it from the east. The name of Dutch Island in our waters today is still a reminder of their occupation. The Dutch were hereditary smugglers, of whom Scott has given us an admirable picture in Dirk Hatteraick. They found the English settlers of Narragansett Bay ready for their supplies which were naturally more varied than the English ships brought in to Massachusetts Bay. This intimacy continued even to the time of and through the English War with Holland.

The story of early American privateering has not been, may not be written. Roger Williams in a letter to John Winthrop of Connecticut tells of a prize brought into Newport in a

1649 or

6

frigate by one Clarke and of another the same year by a Frenchman,
but the first regular commissions issued by the Rhode^{Island} Colony, under
authority of the British Government, was in 1652. The commissions
expressly forbade the harassing of the Dutch without special
authority and it was ordered that the writs and warrants were to be
issued in the name of the Commonwealth of England. This was at the
time of the Coddington troubles when the Island of Rhode Island and
the Providence Plantations were divided into two rival governments.
This concession to the crown was hardly in accordance with the
spirit of the people. A court of Admiralty was established in May
of this year, but it never had other than an ephemeral and disputed
jurisdiction.

The war with Holland threatened trouble between the English
of the East and the Dutch of the west of Long Island, a war which
the firm friendship between the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam and
the Pequot tribe, which lived at the mouth of the Connecticut river
Thames, made perilous. While the Providence section of the colony,
true to the peace principles of their founder, deprecated war the
sailor bold population of the Island eagerly embraced the opportu-
nity for adventure. Four vessels were fitted out and commissions
were issued at Newport to Captains Underhill, Dyre and Hull, to go
against the Dutch or any enemies of the Commonwealth of England.
In the course of the summer many prizes were captured and many
controversies ensued as to the colony's share. The courts demanding
the same from the governor in the name of Cromwell then Lord
Protector of England. It is worth while to record that Massachusetts

7

who was ever hankering after ~~him~~ the stray lamb, complained of the manner of captain Hulls capture of a ^{French} small ship. This was the first or at the least the first recorded instance of privateering by the Narragansett Bay Colony .

That the Rhode Islanders took kindly to ~~the~~ this method of acquiring property and that their morals were not improved by success appears from the fact that in 1658 four years after war had closed it was necessary to pass an act forbidding the making prize of such Dutch vessels as came to trade with the English in the colony, and the practise was declared to be punishable as felony. It is not to be inferred that the declaration of peace between England and Holland 1654 put an end to privateering . The race struggle embittered by religious prejudice ruled the policy of nations and the practise of ~~the~~ peoples. The canceling or withdrawal of commissions by no means put a stop to these adventures, On the contrary the very fact that their license was unbridled was rather an encouragement than hindrance. Governor Sanford could report to the Board of Trade in 1680 that our coast is little frequented and not at all at this time with privateers or pirates. But that there were not Rhode Island privateers or pirates, a distinction without a difference if there be no commission in the case - is quite another thing. At that date he says there was no shipping in the colony, only a few sloops. Indeed the first wharf in New-Port was built in 1679. But in ~~that~~ quarter century of peace, privateering reached its height. and in

1685 the coast swarmed with privateers. The gentlemen of the colonies were always ready to venture their money in the outfit of the vessels and often risked their persons on the quarter deck. The west Indies with their easy coast and its innumerable inlets became the field and Jamaica the centre of the lawless traffic. But the vessels now and then entered on some pretext a north Atlantic port. In 1683 Captain Thomas Paice a Rhode Island man came into Newport with a privateer ship from Jamaica. The captain showed Jamaica papers. The British custom officers from Boston claimed that they were forged but Governor Goddington refused to give up the vessel. The next year the Home Government sent orders to Jamaica and all the Atlantic colonies to stop the harboring of suspicious craft.

The opening of King Williams' war against France, proclaimed in 1689 again gave legal colour to this mode of warfare which differed but little whether prosecuted for private plunder or public advantage. Moreover a new stimulant had been added by the opening of the slave trade. The first beginning of which in Rhode Island being ^{the bringing of} in forty seven negroes from Africa in 1696. This trade took the course from Barbados the indirect source of supply. Certain it is that the services of this hardy craft were important in the defence of the sea board and fairly entitle them to the honorable name of the Naval Militia of the Colonies. In May seven French privateers swept the coast from Cape Cod to New London. Vessels went out in pursuit but without letters of marque.

9

of

Later this shadow authority was given by Rhode Island, as appears from the fact that the Assembly of 1696 required bonds from all privateersmen. There had been many abuses since 1694 and as yet the colony had persistently refused to organize the board of Admiralty created by the King's warrant. In 1697 the High Court of Admiralty made appointments of Judge and Register but Governor Clarke declined to recognize the authority. The war closed in 1697 and the colony passed an act of punishment for all guilty of illegal practices, and ordering all found with foreign gold or costly merchandise in their possession to show how they came by the same.

This brings us to the most curious affair in the history of the colonies, that romantic episode in which the notorious Captain Kidd was the hero and Lord Bellemont a principal figure. And here ^{we} must refer ~~our readers to~~ ^{to} and ~~own our own~~ obligations to the two monographs in the Memorial History of New York, one a chapter on Governor Fletcher and the rise of piracy 1692-1698 by Charles Burr Todd a painstaking gatherer of facts, the second a scholarly account of the Earl of Bellemont and ^{the} suppression of piracy 1697-1704 by the Rev Dr Vermilye of New York.

Some account of William Kidd is necessary to an understanding of this episode. While Newport was busy in this venturesome business of privateering and with great success as her vessels though small were fast sailers, ^{also} the guild flourished in New York always a cosmopolitan town and of easy manners, and we have the authority of Burnet for saying that in Governor's Fletcher's time 1692-1696,

10

pirates had settled on the streets of the city and devoured their
prey with the wealthy merchants and no one was inclined to complain
until in 1695 the seizure of one of the sacred ships of the great
Mogul laden with offerings for the shrine of the Prophet at Mecca
by English corsairs, and the threat of reprisals by that potentate
alarmed the King and his council. The most powerful member of the
board of trade was the Earl of Bellemont who in turn was influenced
by Robert Livingston of New York, one of the magnates of that
Province. Livingston had charged Governor Fletcher, among other
abuses of authority, with receiving bribes, and no less a person
than Colonel Nicholas Bayard was brought to book for having
tendered bribes to Fletcher from which he easily cleared himself.

< All these quarrels were but instances of the bitter strife between
those whom had supported Leisler in his misguided, but in no way
criminal assumption of power, at the time when the overthrow of
King James seemed to demand some change in authority.

It is just to say of Fletcher that he amply justified himself
from any complicity direct or indirect with illegal trade, yet like
many other gentlemen he had not scrupled to associate with these
legalized freebooters and to entertain them at ^{his} their table. An
instance of the profits of one of these vessels may be cited, those
of the ship Nassau which sailed from Madagascar laden with Jamaica
rum Madeira wine and gun powder which was sold to the freebooters
who had their lair on this island which was the store house of the
plunder of the Indies by pirates of every colour and every clime

11

This voyage netted the share holders thirty thousand pounds .

Among those with whom Fletcher later admitted an infidelity was one Captain Thomas Tew who was recommended for a commission by the Kings Council in New York for his sloop Amity with five guns and eighty men to go against the French. Tew dined at Fletchers table and rode in his coach. He was of a good Newport family which gave more than one deputy to the Assembly in the seventeenth century. He made a fortune and returned to Rhode Island ^{as} did many others. Tew went out again but was killed. He was granted a commission by Rhode Island in 1698 .

In the scarcity of regular Men of War during the hostilities with France and the Continent, fear of an invasion of Ireland by King James and the French forces the Kings Council were at a loss how to meet the Moguls demands but at this juncture Livingston proposed to Lord Bellemont to fit out a private expedition against the pirates, the prizes to be the reward of the promoters of the expedition. The offer was accepted and five of the chief noblemen of England, Lord Chancellor Somers the Duke of Shrewsbury the Earl of Bellemont the Earl of Romney, and Lord Oxford agreed to the enterprize. The Captain chosen to command the was William Kidd then a shipmaster of New York whose residence was in Wall street, New York—the centre of fashion—and who was a personal friend of Livingston. Heavy bonds were given and the King himself became a shareholder. The Adventure Galley was purchased and Kidd sailed for

2

the Red Sea in February 1696. It must be remembered that the favorite habit of these adventures was not to commit piracy themselves but to trade with pirates. Bellomont was appointed to succeed Fletcher as governor of the New York Province in 1695. His command included Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire, Boston, Portsmouth and New York were the chief Naval Stations at that period. His appointment was chiefly to examine into the affairs of the pirates. Though his commission was dated in November 1697 he did not arrive in New York till April 1698. Among his instructions was a distinct order from the king to suppress piracy.

He at once found himself in hot water, and though he found the city flushed with Arabian gold and East India goods,

< He was unable to refuse clearances to the ships owned by the merchants and openly destined for Madagascar. Such men as Colonel Bayard and ^{eric} Fred. Phillipse were not to be controlled except by the strict letters of the law. The Fortune which ^{Bellomont} he seized had twenty-two merchants concerned in her lading, and more than 100,000 pounds was brought in, taken from the English, not the Dutch wrote Bellomont, The recent publication of Abstracts ^{of} Wills of New York by the New York Historical Society throws some light over this period.

There are constant legacies of India merchandise ^{and} of gold in coin and bullion. One curious bequest may be cited, Henry Jourdain mariner of the ship Dolphin leaves a bulk of gold containing 10 ounces 8 penny weights, likewise 61 elephants tusks marked H.J. The will dated 1702, strangely enough these privateers which Lord Bellomont

attempted to stop made no pretence of going out to meet the enemy or to prey on the enemies commerce but sailed directly for Madagascar .

Kidd, Scotch born, had been trained in youth in the merchant service, but during the war with France had sailed with a Jamaica privateer commission in the ^{Briga} Argentine brig Antigua. He left Plymouth in October 1696 sailed for New York where he increased his force by one hundred men. For a year he waited for the Mocha fleet. When it appeared it was conveyed by an English and a Dutch ship which he attached unsuccessfully. His first leap into piracy After some trifling captures in 1697 he took the Quedah Merchant ^L an Armenien vessel; a prize worth 64,000 pounds, and for these outrages was proclaimed a pirate. He returned from Madagascar on a sloop he had bought. Taking course for New York he put into Delaware Bay, then sailed around the Montauk Point into the Sound to Oyster Bay. At Block Island he was visited by his wife and daughter. Thence ^{he} went to Gardiners Island where ^{he} left part of his plunder which were later given up. From ^{allowed} ~~there~~ ^{who was on a visit there.} he sailed for Boston where he was to land by Bellomont ^{Kidd} but [^] unable to clear himself of the charges against him, [^] was arrested, carried to London where he was tried found guilty of piracy and hanged in May 1701 .

This may be taken as an example of the manner in which adventures originally within the law degenerated into piracy and yet it is not impropable that Kidd was ready to divide with the King and his council Bellomont included and expected to be held harmless

by them, There had been general suspicion in England that the Ministry was in collusion with the adventurers and there was even a motion made in the House of Commons to deprive all officials concerned of their offices and several persons were impeached in the House of Lords but were cleared .

This execution did more than anything else to suppress piracy but as late as 1699 Bellmont wrote that Arabian gold was in great plenty in New York and that the Attorney General James Graham was lax in his labor to suppress piracy. Before the next summer Bellmont and Graham had gone to their last account. One thing is certain that the check of piracy or perhaps it would be more just to say of barter and trade with Madagascar pirates cut off the supply of Arabian gold and compelled the Colonists to look elsewhere for the necessary medium of foreign trade .

It is not known that Kidd had any Rhode Island men in his crew, but in a Representation of the London Board of Trade in December 1698 among other specific complaints ^{was} that of granting commissions by the Colony authorities which ~~was~~ breach of the privileges of the Board of Trade. They instanced the case of one Mayes or Mayo who cleared at the Rhode Island Custom House for Madagascar who assisted Captain Avery in taking the Moguls ships the Gunsway. ^{came back} Mayes or Mayo lived at Portsmouth. He never ["] from his voyage. ["] He was the only person ever commissioned by Rhode Island, said Governor Cranston in 1698, who has been to the southward of Cape Good Hope and he denied that he was a pirate, but that Averys men

plundered him and destroyed his company. When Bellemont was in Rhode Island in 1699 he learned that one Gillan a notorious pirate had been entertained at Newport at the house of the Deputy Collector, " Writing home this year he charged that Deputy Governor Greene had granted several commissions in the late war and that all the vessels went to Madagascar and the Sea of India and were employed to commit piracy, moreover that Governor Greene harboured pirates here who have openly brought in and disposed of their effects whereby the place Newport is greatly enriched. " And at the same time Mayor Sanford the Recorder says that suspected persons coming from India are countenanced entertained and concealed. "

Mr Bartlett commenting on the curious documents in the John Carter Brown collection copied from the State papers office in London considers that they corroborate Bellemonts charges, Rhode Island but do not sustain that of complicity with piracy by the authorities. The fact remains however ~~the same~~ that privateering was at its time a favorite ^{pursuit} profession. An English journal of a Friend on Block Island, on a religious errand, in 1702 says that " most of the able bodied men on the Island had gone off in privateers. " This was for the war of the Spanish Succession which began in that year and lasted eleven years. Queen Annes war-as it was called in the colonies .

In July 1702 Captain William Wanton of the wellknown Newport family of that name sailed in the brigatine Greyhound of one

hundred tons with twelve guns and one hundred men and boys and cruised for four months on the banks of Newfoundland ^{where} the French and Spanish privateers were looked for. On his return he brought into port three French ships, one a privateer of 260 tons and twenty guns, another a vessel of 160 tons and eight guns. The cargoes were of dried fish. There was a contest between the Kings court of Admiralty and the colony over the sale of these prizes. In 1705 Captain John Halsey brought in a valuable Spanish prize from the West Indies. In 1706 Captain Wanton took several French privateers which ^{hoored} along the coast. Judge Sheffield tells us that Fort Anne was built from the Queens tenths of the prizes during the war.

In 1723 occurred the first flagrant case of open piracy. Two vessels the Ranger and Fortune after sundry minor exploits captured the ship Amsterdam Merchant, plundered and sunk her. She ~~was~~ later fell into a decoy laid by her H.M.S Greyhound off the east end of Long Island was taken, brought into Newport, and twenty six of her crew hanged at Gravelly Point in July of the same year, justice being speedy in those days.

Privateering had assumed a new phase and confined to coast defence or legitimate operations against the enemies commerce was no longer tainted with complicity with the slave trade or amicable relations with the red handed freebooters of the Indian ocean. The next legitimate opportunity for this style of adventure was the war with Spain in 1739. On the arrival of the Kings warrants

which on this occasion preceeded the declaration of war, the Rhode Island Assembly at once ordered that Godfrey Malbone, John Brown and George ^{Wanton} should be loaned all the Colonies arms and amunition. ^{-the} A sloop, Tartar 115 tons was built and put under command of Colonel John Granston. She carried twelve guns. In 1741 Newport sent out five vessels, the St Andrew the Revenge Wentworth Victory and Triton, manned together by four hundred men. In 1742 five vessels went out of which four were new. In 1743 seven of which six were new.

In 1744 France declaring war in the cause of the Pretender Charles Edward, the Tartar was again commissioned under command of Captain Daniel Fones and acted as convey to the transports to Cape Breton in consort with the Connecticut sloop. The Tartar dispersed a French transport fleet. This same year two large privateers ships built and fitted out for a cruise on the Spanish Main by Colonel Godfrey Malbone went down in a heavy snow storm with four hundred men and neither men or ships were ever again heard from.

In 1748 the Tartar did good service, but ^{upon} at the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle she was taken out of commission and sold at auction. Two of her guns adorn today the Newport Parade.

This the only Colony sloop had been built chiefly by moneys advanced by Newport merchants, Richard Partridge the agent ^{at} ^{Justices} London of the Rhode Island colonies, writing to the Lords said " that in the war of the late ⁹ queen in the expedition against

that 18

Annapolis Royal and against Canada and in the sea war at time
the New Englanders must confess that the privateers from the
colony of Rhode Island did more execution against the enemies of
privateers than all the ships of Massachusetts and indeed of
all the colonies put together.

< The coast swarmed with French privateers at this period, no
doubt the hardy Breton sailors and the Spaniards from Biscay
whose favorite grounds for cod were the banks of Newfoundland.

The New Port privateers were again busy.
9 In 1746 ~~at Newport~~ ~~privateers~~ ~~commissioned~~ ~~in~~ ~~1745~~ ~~by~~ ~~ten~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~148~~ ~~sea~~ ~~three~~
this year
some had eventful histories. In 1746 the Defiance and Duke of
Marlborough captured a vessel and sold her crew of twenty-two

Spaniards to the northern colony, but in turn the nineteen of the
crews ~~were taken~~ of the Defiance were taken by the Spaniards and
held at Havana for the release of the enslaved men, The Rhode Island
Assembly looked up the men and returned *them* by flag of truce.

In 1747 the French at Martinique sent out a vessel of fourteen
guns and 140 men to capture Captain Dennis. After a four hours
fight the Frenchman struck *his colors* and was taken as a prize into St Kitts
Mr Sheffield gives a list of sixty-five privateers commissioned
and recommissioned at Newport in this war 1747 to 1748 and of
77 prizes brought in—a partial list.

The slave trade with the colonies began with the Dutch who
took the first negroes to the Virginia colony and was continued
by the New Amsterdam government, *II* was greatly restricted by *legislation* until
1688 when it was thrown open. This trade was at its height in 1754

when the inevitable conflict between France and England for the dominion of America broke out, The French held the interior by a line of posts from Quebec to New Orleans but the English held the high seas and as Mahan puts it, the sea power controls the destinies of nations. The trade of Rhode Island was almost exclusively with the West Indies, Horses for which Narragansett was famous and rum (Jamaica) made from the products of the Islands being the outward cargo, a run to the coast ~~of the~~ Africa where ^{rum} the was bartered for slaves was the second leg of the voyage, and the return was made with the human ^{freight} to the islands thence home with the likely negroes and the sugar and molasses ^{for the Newport distilleries.}

So busy were the Rhode Islanders with this lucrative traffic that it was some time ^{before} ~~when~~ they resumed privateering. They do not seem to have ^{had} any hand in the depredations ^{upon} of the Spaniards in the West Indies in 1757 which forced Pitt to complain that the case of contraband goods could not exist in ~~cases~~ of vessels from one port of Spain to another. Slaves were not permitted to go on board of privateers by Rhode Island but on the other hand were not as yet contraband of war.

In 1759 however it is stated that nearly one fifth of the entire ^{of Rhode Island} population was engaged on private war ships. The census of 1755 gave a population of forty ^{-thousand} souls of which thirty six ^{-thousand} whites. That the fifth was of the males only is probable though not so stated. The fortune of war was not always with these bold skippers however, fast runners ~~as~~ ^{that} were their craft, for in the four years

from 1758 to 1762 more than fifty of these vessels came to grief on the high seas, Captain Joseph Wanton in the King of Prussia was captured on the west coast of Africa ^{where} ~~for~~ he surely was not looking for Frenchmen. Captain Bennis ~~with~~ the fox never returned from his last venture on the spaniash ~~Main~~, Mr Sheffield gives a list of seventy privateers which sailed from Newport between 1753 and 1762 and of fifty-two prizes brought in. The most respectable merchants were engaged in this traffic, The Malbones, Browns, Bannisters, Mumfords Ayrault, Wantons, Townsands and Harts. Among the captains we find the well known names of Hopkins, Dyer, Bennis Potter and Cranston. One of these Abraham Whipple is said to have taken twenty-three prizes in one cruise 1759 to 1760. Nor were the gentlemen of New York averse to this business. The newspapers of that city are full of invitations to share in these ventures, and the names of Bayard, ~~Keteltas~~ ^{Keteltas} and Kemble are evidence of the class ^{from} ~~of~~ which these American rovers were recruited.

Newport was at the height of its prosperity in 1769 and no small part of its wealth had come from privateering the slave ^{trade} and the smuggling of west India produce. There was a regular packet service with London and some trade with other English ports but this was of secondary importance.

~~The~~ ^{The} strange story of the sale ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~captives in~~ of Spanish captives ~~as~~ slaves in New England shows the contempt of the English ~~English~~ man for all not of his race; and it is not surprising to find that when once at sea and a rich prize came into sight it mattered little

whether it was a Spanish galleon with plate from the Main a
Holland merchantman with spices from Java and Mocha ^{and} or the
Arabian Gulf or the more rare ship from Bordeaux or Nantes
the only legitimate prize .

Pitt

This indiscriminate plunder became so notorious that in 1757
warned the Rhode Island government at the determination of the
King to put an end to the scandalous disorders which if not
stopped would involve him in odious disputes with all the neutral
powers in Europe . The declaration of war with Spain in 1761
however again legitimized the business and the Southern American
waters once more swarmed with New York and Rhode Island sea rovers .

So thoroughly had long success and comparative immunity
imbued the merchant of the colonies with the spirit of adventure
and so wide spread was the reputation of their daring, that at the
very outbreak of the American war no English trader dared sail
without a convoy .

The limits of this sketch confine us to the strictly
colonial period. The number of privateers of that period alone
run high up in the hundreds . Those of the American Revolution in
the thousands . Nor have we paused to dwell on the importance of the
Naval militia for defence, an importance today recognized by our
own Naval Brigade .

In reviewing the subject the salient points observed are the
natural tendency of irresponsible privateering to degenerate into

piracy as shown in our early history. From the time that the colonial Governors assumed the right to Commission this Naval militia and brought its officers under bonds the practise took the hue of legitimate warfare. Then also the mingling of the errant search for plunder with the regular slave trading voyage naturally tended to brutalise the participants, and it was not to be expected that men hardened by the horrors of the ^{Passage} ~~Middle~~ should be tender about the atrocities even of the Madagascar pirates.

Nor have our limits permitted to more than touch on the long struggles for Admiralty jurisdiction between the colonies and the Home Government nor ~~get~~ the troubles which the almost universal habit of smuggling gave the London ~~B~~oard of trade in its attempts to regulate the commerce of the colonies. As that of Rhode Island was chiefly with the west Indies the temptation was great and the opportunities easy to an evasion of the customs. Nor can we stop to show that the result of the interference of the Home Government of the right or the ^{si} ~~disposition~~ of the individual to go his own way without let or hindrance was the loss of the colonies.

For Republics and Democracies have widely varied in their definitions and ⁱⁿ their practises of liberty. In America that of the individual has been proclaimed with the utmost freedom and exercised with the least restraint. The pioneer of the West with the limitless Prairie free and unconfined. The sea faring dwellers of the coast with the boundless ocean find the restricting hand of the law of easy evasion on the one or the other field of his

enterprises.

Judge as we may the practise or the methods of our forefathers one thing is certain that the privateer was the ^rnursery of that hardy race of seamen which from John Paul Jones to Admiral Dewey has brought glory to the American Navy. Moreover the constructors of these fleet vessels were the forerunners and teachers of those men who built the American Clipper, the American frigate and the ^{Steamship} American which is the pride of our fathers, Perhaps now that we have developped our railroad system to a high perfection and that no grain or ^{title}produce now lacks a carrier to the coast some part of the vast floating capital which results from our industries, may be employed to the recovery of our carrying trade on the high seas. Better thus than in investments in foreign loans. Then the old spirit which burned in the breasts of the Naval Militia of the colonies may revive once more and bring to us new conquests, for Peace has her Victories as well as War.

John Austin Stevens

Hist Soc Col Wars.

Newport December 30 1903