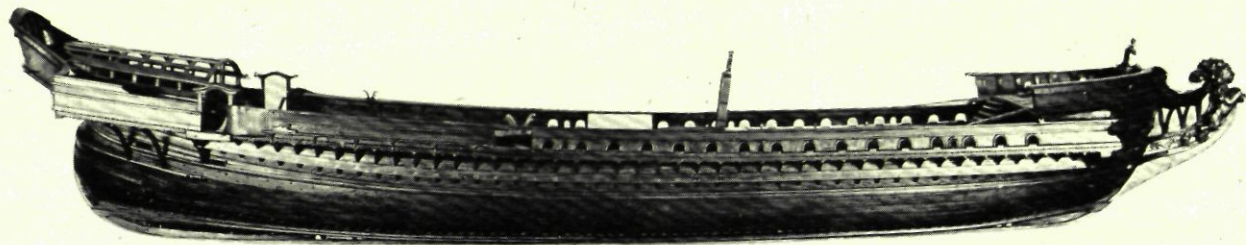


THE MERCHANTS OF VENICE AND THEIR SHIPPING IN SOUTHAMPTON IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES.

By ALWYN A. RUDDOCK, PH.D.

THROUGHOUT the Middle Ages Southampton was one of England's most flourishing centres of foreign trade, and ranked as one of the greatest ports of the realm. The double tides which the town enjoyed, combined with its sheltered position on one of the best harbours on the south coast, drew an ever-increasing number of foreigners each year to the shelter of its grey stone walls. Dark-skinned Spaniards and voluble Gascons mingled with the stolid Flemish merchants in the narrow cobbled streets. Occasionally fair-haired seamen from Scandinavia came ashore, or German merchants from the Hanseatic League. But conspicuous above all others were the representatives of the wealthy merchant princes of Italy, the mainstay of the town's overseas trade, whose galleys and carracks reappeared each year to unload their precious cargoes of merchandise from the exotic East on the grey stone quay beside the Water Gate. Four main groups of merchants can be distinguished among these opulent foreigners. The Genoese seem to have been the first Italians to visit Southampton, their galleys and tarits arriving regularly each year throughout most of the fourteenth century. Unloading their cargoes, they filled their holds again with finest English wool, unrivalled in Europe for its strength and quality, destined for the busy looms of the rising industrial cities of northern Italy. In the following century appeared the splendidly equipped galleys of Florence, while an occasional galley bearing the Neapolitan flag rode at anchor in the estuary. But it was not until 1456, when the Venetians made Southampton the chief port of call in England for their famous Flanders Galley fleet, that the town reached the zenith of its prosperity. For some fifty years after this it was the headquarters of England's lucrative trade in Mediterranean and Eastern luxuries. Long after the disappearance of their Genoese and Florentine rivals, the Venetians continued to frequent the port, and the State archives at Venice provide us with some striking glimpses of the splendours of Hampton in the reigns of the earliest Tudor monarchs. Their final disappearance in the reign of Henry VIII rang the death knell of the town's commercial prosperity. From that moment the town speedily declined into that moribund state in which it remained until the foibles of George III transformed it into a fashionable watering place nearly three centuries later.



To face p. 273]

MODEL OF A VENETIAN MERCHANT GALLEY.
(Musée de la Marine, Paris.)

The first occasion recorded when Venetian ships appeared in Southampton Water was hardly an auspicious beginning for their future trade with the town. At some uncertain time at the end of 1318 or in the early months of 1319 five Venetian galleys called at Southampton on their way to Bruges, the great centre of trade in the Low Countries.¹ A brawl arose between the galley crews and the townsfolk, who were joined by the retainers of a certain Sir John of the Isle of Wight then in the town. Men were slain on both sides, much property destroyed, and the Venetians carried off a considerable amount of booty. The affair caused a great stir, and was the subject of many letters between the King of England and the Venetian senate. At last the latter paid full compensation to the citizens of Southampton who had suffered in the fray, and in return the English king granted a full pardon to the Venetians for their part in the affair.² But for many years the Venetian fleets were afraid to visit any ports in England, in spite of repeated attempts by Edward II and Edward III to entice such wealthy customers back to their kingdom.³

The Flanders Galleys did not consider visiting Southampton again until 1384. In that year they were unable to complete their homeward cargoes in Flanders because the Genoese, their greatest rivals, had bought up all the best merchandise at the Flemish fairs. When this was known in Venice, the Senate grudgingly gave permission to the captain of the galleys to call at Southampton on his way home. But evidently the 1319 incident was not yet forgotten, in spite of the lapse of years, for he was earnestly warned not to allow his crews ashore "for fear of frays and mischief."⁴ However, it seems that the visit passed off peacefully, for this permission was repeated in several of the following years. But for some reason Southampton did not at this period prove a satisfactory centre of trade for the Venetians. Perhaps they found their great southern rivals, the Genoese, too deeply entrenched there, and the market too small for both groups of Italians to trade there profitably. Whatever the cause, the Venetian galleys were diverted to London in 1394, and Southampton remained outside their usual route for the next forty years.⁵

A mixed reception awaited the Venetians in London. The King and his courtiers, eager to purchase the luxuries they brought,

1. English historians have hitherto dated this incident 1322 or 1323 (*Cal. S. P. Venice*, ed. Rawdon Brown, vol. 1, p. lxix; Cunningham, W., *Growth of Eng. Industry and Commerce*, 1, p. 425; Davies, J. S., *Hist. of Southampton*, p. 250), but Roberto Cessi, probably the best Italian authority on the subject, attributes it to the early months of 1319 (*Le Relazioni commerciali tra Venezia e le Fiandre nel secolo XIV* published in *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, n.s. xxvii, p. 28 note 4) and an entry in the English archives bears out this statement, for it proves conclusively that the incident must have taken place before October 1319 (*Cal. Close Rolls 1318-23*, p. 696).

2. *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1321-24, p. 276; *ibid.*, 1324-7, p. 195; Rymer, *Foedera*, ii, pp. 515-6.

3. Rymer, *op. cit.*, p. 546; *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1324-7, p. 100; *ibid.*, 1354-8, p. 517; *ibid.*, 1358-61, pp. 62, 174.

4. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, No. 96.

5. *Ibid.*, Nos. 114, 119, 120, 125, 130, 139, 142, 146-8.

gave them a hearty welcome, but their treatment at the hands of the ordinary London citizen was often far from cordial. Their great wealth and ostentatious display, coupled with their monopoly of one of the richest branches of England's foreign trade, soon aroused the bitter jealousy of the Londoners. Strong rulers held this insular jealousy of foreigners firmly in check, but once the weak Henry VI ascended the throne, it grew in intensity, finally developing into open demonstrations and riots against the Italians. Again the Venetian galleys began to call at Southampton. The local records show they arrived here in 1435, and again in 1437, 1438, 1439, 1447 and 1455, but gaps in the accounts make it impossible to say whether their visits were at all regular during this period.⁶ A note of apprehension and distrust runs throughout the contemporary Venetian archives relating to these voyages. The conduct of the oarsmen in the taverns when they came ashore gave cause for anxiety lest brawls should arise with the townsfolk. The captain of the fleet was confined to his galley, and urged at all times to be on the alert in case of trouble. One of them even had to petition the Senate for special permission before he could go ashore to hear Mass in Southampton each day.⁷

It was soon shown that, in London at least, this mistrust and suspicion had not been groundless. In 1456 a riot directed primarily against the Italians began there, and for two days the entire city was in chaos while a mob of citizens and apprentices sacked the houses and attacked the persons of the Lombards then living in London. Moreover, the mayor was very dilatory in his attempts to suppress the riot, which seems to have been led by the mercers, and at least one alderman was punished afterwards for gross neglect of duty. Eventually the rising was quelled, but in 1457 it broke out again with increased ferocity.⁸ As a result, the Venetian galleys avoided the capital for some years, and Southampton reaped the benefit of this change. Yet even here they did not feel safe. News of the renewal of civil war following the return of the Earl of Warwick, the subsequent flight of Henry VI and the seizure of the throne by Edward IV, caused fresh alarm in the Venetian Senate for the safety of their galleys. The captain was ordered to cut down to a minimum the number of days spent at Southampton, was expressly forbidden to go ashore himself, and was ordered to give landing permits to as few merchants as possible.⁹ But no riots comparable to those in London took place in Southampton. It is true that a certain John Payne, mayor of the town in 1462, took

6. Southampton Municipal Archives, MSS. port books for the years 1434-5, 1439-40, 1454-5; P.R.O., K.R. Customs, 209/1 and 141/23, 29.

7. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, Nos. 158, 257.

8. R. Flenley, *London and Foreign Merchants in the Reign of Henry VI* (*English Historical Review*, xxv, pp. 650-4).

9. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, No. 366.

advantage of national disorders to use his powers illegally in the town court, oppressing several merchants of Venice in company with other aliens and his personal enemies among his fellow townsfolk, but the re-establishment of law and order by Edward IV put an end to this.¹⁰ During his reign the Venetian galleys came fairly regularly to the town. By the accession of Henry VII in 1485 Southampton had replaced the capital as their chief port of call in England, and representatives of the greatest mercantile firms of Venice, including the Priuli and the Pisani, were residing permanently in the town.¹¹

The Venetian merchant galley was a long, graceful ship fashioned on the same lines as the light war galley which had been in use in the Mediterranean since the classical age. It was wider and deeper than the war galley, however, having an average tonnage below deck of about 250 tons. It carried a mainmast and two smaller ones, the *trinchetto* and the *mezzane*, fore and aft, and depended almost entirely on its sails for speed. The oars were only brought out when nearing port to manoeuvre the galley, or in dead calms at sea.¹² Each ship carried a hundred and seventy oarsmen, and these, when reinforced by thirty crossbowmen chosen by public contest from among the best shots in Venice, made a fighting force capable of defending the vessel from all but the most formidable of pirate fleets. The entire fleet was in the command of a captain (*Capitaneus*), a nobleman chosen from one of the best Venetian families. He was aided in all nautical affairs by an admiral (*armeraye*), and attended by personal servants, pages, musicians, physicians and notaries as befitted his rank. Each individual galley was commanded by a patron, also of noble birth, who was aided by a navigating officer (*nochero*), a purser and his assistant (*scrivano* and *scrivanello*), a number of pilots picked up *en route*, and many minor officials (*compagno*, *comito*, *scalco*, etc.) who were in charge of the rowers, the cargo and feeding the crew. The oarsmen, usually Slavonians from the Venetian provinces in Dalmatia, were organized into a *scuola*, or society for common worship and mutual aid, having a communal burial place in Southampton.¹³ They combined their duties as rowers with other trades, which they plied in the various ports at which the galleys cast anchor. Some were barbers or tailors, others carpenters, oarmakers, caulkers, cooks and shoemakers.¹⁴

10. *Black Book of Southampton*, ed. A. B. Wallis Chapman, i, p. xvii (Southampton Record Society publication, 1912).

11. P.R.O., Alien subsidy returns, E 179/173/132, 133.

12. F. C. Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, pp. 15-16, 22-5.

13. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, No. 492; *ibid.*, ii, No. 841; Rev. G. Minns, *The Slavonian Tomb (Papers and Proceedings of the Hants Field Club*, ii, pp. 357-63).

14. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, No. 492; Southampton Municipal Records, MSS. Book of Fines, 1499-1500; *ibid.*, 1504-5; Stewards' Book, 1489-90.

The merchandise unloaded from the Venetian galleys and displayed in the Customs House at the bottom of English Street,¹⁵ where it paid toll before being taken into the town, was a bewildering assortment of Mediterranean and Eastern wares. Spices formed the most important part of these cargoes, for owing to the difficulty of getting fresh meat throughout the winter months they were in great demand in the cooking of meat and fish, as well as the preparation of sweetmeats and spiced wines. By long and tedious caravan routes they were brought from India and the Far East to the ports of the Levant, from whence the Venetians distributed them throughout Europe in their fleets of State galleys. The Southampton custom accounts for this period give us vivid glimpses of these cargoes. Cloves, cinnamon, pepper, ginger and nutmegs mingle with the Eastern drugs beloved of the mediaeval apothecaries, such as wormseed, galangal, cassia fistula and myrobalans. Sometimes we have glimpses of more rare and wonderful remedies—mumma, the powdered bodies of mummies, or dragon's blood, the blood-red resin of the dragon tree (*Dracæna Draco*), once a popular cure for certain ailments, now relegated to the more prosaic manufacture of varnish.¹⁶ With spices came splendid carpets of curious design from the bazaars of Damascus and Bagdad, soon to adorn the ladies' quarters in the cold grey stone castles of England, and perfumes and costly silks from Persia and cloth of gold, damask, velvets and figured satin from the Italian cities to deck the noble lords and ladies of the Court. Sapphires, rubies and other precious stones were displayed before the honest citizens in the customer's house, with delicate filagree work from the shops of the gold and silversmiths at Venice. There were books for the scholar, all written by hand in the Middle Ages, incense, frankincense and church furnishings for the Churchman, and armour and weapons for the warrior. With these came a miscellaneous assortment of novelties to tempt the purses of the rich courtiers, such as mirrors, crystal goblets, ivory combs and coral beads, parrots, marmosets, and sometimes even a lion or a "great catt" from Barbary on its way to some nobleman's private zoo. But not all the imports were mere luxuries, however. Alum was brought in great quantities for England's rapidly developing cloth industry, with dyes such as Toulouse woad, Brazil wood, orpiment and scarlet grain. With these came the famous sweet wines of the Levant—romeney, malmsey and muscadell—and a great assortment of oranges, lemons, dates, almonds, pomegranates and other Mediterranean fruits.

Often the galleys went to Bruges before returning to Southampton on their homeward voyage. Then their cargoes were

15. The present High Street was called English Street until the sixteenth century to distinguish it from French Street, the centre of the French merchants in the town from the Norman Conquest onward.

16. O. E. D.

supplemented by a host of manufactured articles from the Low Countries. Finest linen and cambric, Arras hangings and bench covers, cushions, cloaks, girdles, gloves and other similar wares were brought in from the galleys. A large assortment of household goods came with these, including needles and thimbles, padlocks, lanterns, bellows, chafing dishes, razors and toothpicks. Doubtless the priests of the Southampton churches, and perhaps the friars from the little Franciscan house near the God's House Gate, sometimes paused at the Customs House to see the paintings of the Virgin and the saints or the embroidered altar cloths, the censers, mass bells and rosaries, sometimes made of amber or coral, but more often of wood. The growing market for novelties and luxuries among the upper classes brought an increasing number of trifles into the realm each year—clocks, playing cards, furs, tennis balls, spectacles, children's dolls and similar merchandise whose catalogue could be continued almost indefinitely from the local custom accounts for the fifteenth century.¹⁷ In return for their costly goods the Italians took back to the Mediterranean finest English wool, white and scarlet cloth, tin, lead, pewter vessels, hides and calf-skins—very valuable cargoes, yet far more prosaic than the southern merchandise they brought ashore on their arrival in the harbour.

It is not surprising that the Flanders Galleys, one of the richest of mediaeval trading fleets, should have proved the magnet which attracted some of the boldest of mediaeval pirates. In all ordinary circumstances a fleet of three or four galleys was a formidable fighting force able to take care of itself, but towards the end of the fifteenth century political conditions making the galleys of Venice a tempting prey to France combined with the audacity of one of the greatest of French corsairs to disorganise their voyages, and the merchants who had gathered at Southampton in anticipation of their arrival waited in vain for their coming. The most daring of all the corsairs sailing under the French flag at this time was a certain Guillaume de Casanova, generally called Coullon. This name his contemporaries rendered in Latin as Columbus, which in Italian became Colombo.¹⁸ The Venetian galleys and their costly cargoes seem to have had for him the same attraction as the galleons of Spain possessed a century later for Sir Francis Drake and other Elizabethan privateers. His position, also, seems to have been somewhat similar to that held by Drake. Venetian documents invariably call him a pirate, but M. de la Roncière, the great maritime historian of France, calls him "*le vice-amiral Coullon*" and in the Milanese archives he appears as "*homo de guerra del*

17. All the above commodities are found in entries in the MSS. port books of Southampton for the period 1428 - 1509 and the particular customs accounts for Southampton in the P.R.O. during the same period.

18. H. Harisse, *Christophe Colomb, son origine, sa vie, ses voyages, sa famille et ses descendants*, p. 261.

signor re di Franza per mare," so that it seems that he was far more than a mere pirate, and held high official position in France.¹⁹ On several occasions the presence of his squadron in the Channel forced the Venetian Senate to arrange convoys for the safety of their shipping in those waters.²⁰ But in spite of these precautions Coullon surprised two of the galleys in 1469 near the coast of Flanders and pillaged them. Recompense was demanded in vain from the French king.²¹ The next year, when the galleys were at Southampton preparing for their homeward voyage, news was brought to the town that Coullon was preparing another attack, and they were forced to remain in Southampton harbour until two Venetian carracks, the *Malipiera* and the *Squarcia*, arrived off the Isle of Wight to escort them out of danger.²² In 1477 the Venetian fleet left Southampton safely, but on reaching Cadiz was penned up in the harbour there by the same privateer, and did not dare to venture out until an escort had arrived from Venice to convoy them home in safety.²³

The most effective attack ever planned by French corsairs, however, did not take place until 1485, when they fell like a thunderbolt on the Flanders Galleys, and completely paralysed their trade with England that year. The leader of the French on this occasion, Colombo the Younger, seems to have been either the son or the nephew of the famous Coullon.²⁴ The Venetian fleet, under the command of Bartolomeo Minio, was making for Southampton when they were sighted off Cape St. Vincent on August 20th by a squadron of seven ships under the French flag. Colombo the

19. C. de la Roncière, *Histoire de la Marine Française*; ii, p. 333; A. Salvagnini, *Cristoforo Colombo e i corsari Colombo suoi contemporanei* (published in *Raccolta Colombiana*, p. 183, doc. V).

20. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, Nos. 419, 427; Salvagnini, *op. cit.*, p. 198, doc. xxxvii.

21. C. de la Roncière, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 337.

22. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, No. 427.

23. C. de la Roncière, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 374.

24. The identity of the leader of the French fleet which attacked the galleys in 1485 has given rise to much controversy. Malipiero, the contemporary Venetian chronicler, says he was the son of Colombo the corsair (Malipiero, *Annali Veneti*, published in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, tome vii, p. 620). C. de la Roncière (*op. cit.*, ii, p. 413) and H. Harisse (*Les Colombo de France et d'Italie*, p. 50) believe he was the nephew of the famous Coullon, while H. Vignaud (*Etudes Critiques sur la Vie de Colomb*, p. 173), basing his evidence on statements of Marin Sanudo, the contemporary Venetian diarist, identifies him with a certain Georges le Grec, another famous French pirate of this period. In connection with this event, however, it may be mentioned that the statement by an English writer (H. Rawlinson, *The Flanders Galleys*, in *The Mariner's Mirror*, xii, p. 157) that the discoverer of America, Christopher Columbus, was a member of the French pirate fleet on this occasion is quite unfounded. A. Salvagnini, from Genoese and Milanese archives, has shown that Christopher, far from being an associate of the French on this occasion, was, in fact, a victim of the famous Coullon in 1476. In that year Christopher Columbus, travelling to England in the employment of the Genoese firm of Di Negro and Spinula, was on board a fleet of four Genoese ships which were attacked by Coullon off Cape St. Vincent, a favourite lair of the corsair, and driven back into Cadiz (Salvagnini, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-3, docs. xlviii-l). It is interesting to note in passing that Christopher eventually continued his journey to England (H. Vignaud, *Le Vrai Christophe Colomb et la Légende*, pp. 47-9), and may even have landed at Southampton and walked through its streets, for we know that this Genoese firm had a small permanent establishment here at this time for some years with a number of resident factors (P. R. O., Alien subsidy returns, E 179/173/116, 131-137, 139, 142). But although the writer has made an extensive search through the custom accounts and subsidy rolls relating to Southampton, London and Sandwich, the three English towns frequented by the Italians, gaps in these records are many, and no record of his presence has been found.

Younger did not attack that day, for it was almost dark, but encircling the galleys, cut off their retreat and attacked at daybreak. The battle lasted some twenty hours—a decisive proof of the defensive powers of the merchant galleys. But at length the French were victorious, a hundred and thirty of the Venetians having been killed and a further three hundred disabled. The galleys were taken to Lisbon, pillaged, and left there, the captain and merchants on board being left with scarcely clothes to cover their backs, and would have fared badly if the King of Portugal had not befriended them, giving them clothing and money to return to Venice overland. But the merchants gathered at Southampton awaited their arrival in vain that year.²⁵

Not even when riding at anchor close to the town walls in the harbour of Southampton itself, protected as it was by the Isle of Wight and the long estuary of Southampton Water from a surprise attack, were the galleys always safe. In October 1495, while the captain of the galleys and the Venetian Consul were arranging a convoy to protect the fleet on its way back to Venice, a company of French or Breton sailors boldly sailed their bark right up Southampton Water, and boarding the flag galley, seized both captain and consul, with other noblemen and some of the crew then on board, and carried them off to France to hold them to ransom. Their ultimate fate is unknown, but three months later a new captain, Piero Contarini, was appointed at Southampton to take charge of the fleet and bring it back to Venice, two Venetian carracks, the *Malipiera* and the *Zorza*, being ordered to accompany him for greater safety.²⁶ Nor were the French the only hostile ships the Venetians encountered. Occasionally chance meetings with English fleets were followed by incidents such as that arising in 1488, when the galleys, on their way back to Southampton from Antwerp, fell in with three English ships off St. Helens. These hoisted the English flag and claimed the salute. In the skirmish which followed eighteen of the English and two Venetians were killed. The galleys were pursued right into Southampton harbour, the helmsman of the flag galley acquitting himself bravely throughout the action, remaining at the helm in spite of the many shots fired at him from the English ships. The captain, Piero Malipiero, sent post haste to Henry VII complaining of the incident, but the king treated it lightly, sending the Bishop of Winchester to settle the affair, and say it could easily be smoothed over with a pot of wine (*un poto di vino*). Presumably it was, for no further record of it is found.²⁷

25. C. de la Roncière, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 414.

26. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, Nos. 639, 646, 658-9, 670, 673.

27. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, Nos. 547, 555; Malipiero, *op. cit.*, p. 624. This is a very early example of the English claiming the salute in the Narrow Seas, Malipiero distinctly stating "i Englishi ghe disse che i dovesse calar per honorar el re: fo calà le vele fin a mezo arboro."

Yet in spite of the dangers that beset them, the Venetian galleys maintained their annual voyages to Southampton fairly regularly during the reigns of Edward IV and Henry VII. Southampton now rose to the height of her mediaeval prosperity, becoming the great centre of the Mediterranean and Eastern trade of England. But the factors which were to put an end to the voyages of the celebrated trading fleet from Venice were already in operation. Already the French king was casting a jealous eye towards Italy, anticipating the wars there which were to weaken Venice irreparably on the mainland and undermine her ability to continue these voyages. In 1494 the first French armies crossed the frontier; three years later the Portuguese discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the passage to India by sea cut the tap-root of Venice's monopoly of the lucrative spice trade in the Indian Ocean, and diverted this trade from the Venetians to the Portuguese at Lisbon. This was the main cause of the commercial collapse of Venice, but the full significance of the discovery was not at first apparent to everyone in Europe. The Venetians refused to believe the reports of the discovery were authentic, and then comforted themselves that the losses in ships and men on the long sea voyage round the Cape would make it impossible for the Portuguese to develop this route. Even when the spices brought home by the Portuguese were displayed for sale in Antwerp the Venetian Ambassador there, Vincenzo Quirini, reported them to be inferior in quality, unable to compete with those purchased by the Venetians in the ports of the Levant.²⁸ But Marin Sanudo, the contemporary Venetian diarist, recorded that the more far-seeing merchants in Venice found much to ponder over in this news, and were fearful that it might be their ruin. And so it ultimately proved to be.

Nevertheless, the fabulous wealth and prosperity of Venice still blinded contemporary monarchs and statesmen to her approaching decline. Henry VII showed his eagerness to encourage their visits on several occasions. When the galleys were at London in 1506 he invited the captain, Vincenzo Capello, and the patrons and noblemen of the fleet to dine with him at Richmond, offered to knight the captain, and presented him to the Princess Mary and the young Princess Catherine of Aragon as they were playing music after dinner. In 1499, when two galley-men who had been travelling through Hampshire selling their wares were attacked and robbed by highwaymen, Henry executed summary justice on the culprits at Southampton instead of waiting until the assizes.²⁹ Foreign rulers likewise showed the importance they placed on Venetian commerce. Duke Philip of Burgundy and his wife, Joanna of Castile, paid them a visit at Southampton in 1506, and the citizens

28. A. Priuli, *Diarii*. (Extracts published in *Archivio Veneto*, xxii, pp. 155, 161); *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, 844.

29. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, Nos. 887, 782.

of Bruges enlisted the duke's aid in their efforts to persuade the captain to bring his galleys to Bruges again each year when the fleet showed signs of forsaking it for Antwerp, the new rising commercial centre in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century.³⁰ So it would seem that Venice still held an important place commercially in the eyes of the rulers and merchants of the Low Countries.

Yet appearances were misleading. With the accession of Henry VIII we find an abrupt cessation in the annual galley voyages to England. The League of Cambrai had already been formed in Italy to partition Venice's possessions on the mainland, and for nine years Venice struggled desperately to save herself from dismemberment. One after another her mainland possessions were lost, and during this critical period the Signory found it impossible to keep up the State galley voyages each year. The threat of the approaching storm was already felt when the last fleet sailed down Southampton Water in April 1509. Agostin da Mulla, the captain, was anxious to hasten his return on account of the "troublesome times." After days of inactivity, chafing at the foul weather which had imprisoned him in the port, he at last set out, having hired a bark to convoy the fleet on its way.³¹ Nine years were to pass before the people of Southampton saw the Venetian fleet sail up Southampton Water again.

During these years Henry VIII and Wolsey did not cease to urge the Venetian Ambassador in London to press for the return of the fleet which had been such a great source of wealth to the kingdom in previous reigns. The English Ambassador in Rome tackled the Signory's representative there on the same subject, and Henry obtained safe conducts from the rulers of both France and Spain for the galleys, should they renew their voyages.³² The Venetian Senate proved itself equally eager to keep up their former trade with England. Again and again members rose to urge that galleys should be sent, but the merchants refused to risk their remaining goods, making pointed allusions to the danger from the French, "whose nature it is to break faith," they said, and refusing to trust the safe conducts. Not until October 1517 did the galleys finally leave Venice.³³

In England news of their coming was hailed with joy, tempered with anxiety on account of the violent storms which arose in December and made sailing hazardous in the Bay. Henry VIII announced his intention of coming to Southampton himself to make purchases, but the voyage was protracted by calls at many ports

30. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, Nos. 859, 870, 874.

31. *Ibid.*, ii, No. 1; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (2nd ed.), i, No. 5.

32. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, ii, Nos. 61, 66, 132, 422, 602, 744, 755, 905; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, ii, Nos. 2139, 2250.

33. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, ii, Nos. 8, 71, 80-1, 88, 146, 841, 898, 976, 986.

en route, and the galleys did not arrive as soon as he expected. In April 1518 the Venetian Ambassador wrote home that everyone in Southampton was expecting the fleet soon, on account of the recent fine weather, and that the King was at no little distance from the town, intending to go there as soon as they arrived. But delays continued, and it was not until May 19th that they finally sailed up Southampton Water and news of their coming flashed round the town.³⁴ A vivid account of events there during the next few days is given in the despatches which Sebastian Giustiniani, the Venetian Ambassador in England, wrote home to the Signory at this time. On hearing of the arrival of the galleys, Giustiniani hurried at once to Southampton to inform their captain, Andrea Priuli, of the King's proposed visit. Priuli, a member of one of the noblest families of merchant princes in Venice, prepared hastily for his arrival, anxious to receive him as honourably as possible, although the time was short. Day by day they awaited his coming, until on June 10th news of his approach flew through the town. The captain and Ambassador attired themselves sumptuously, procured horses, and accompanied by the patrons of the galleys and the merchant passengers, rode out under the Bargate to meet the King on the road. We are not told where the meeting took place, but it was probably somewhere on the Winchester road, for Henry was coming from Woodstock, where he had just spent some days. The King was in high spirits, for the whole Court believed Queen Catherine to be pregnant, and it was an event, said the Ambassador, "most earnestly desired by the whole kingdom." Giustiniani gives us a long account of the interview, and expresses in warmest terms the universal approval of Priuli's eloquence and linguistic gifts. He writes :—

"The most noble Captain, having halted, delivered a brief Latin oration on horseback, so well suited to the time and place that more could not have been desired, surpassing the expectation of his entire auditory, which had no idea that a professor of navigation and commerce could prove himself so able a rhetorician."

The reply, by Henry's orders, was made by a councillor who was one of the finest scholars of his court. Then they all accompanied the King into the town and took their leave at his lodgings.

After dinner the King and the entire Court went on board the flag galley, the crew having been first removed, since a rumour of plague had alarmed some of the English. The galley had been royally prepared, and a spacious platform erected, hung with tapestry and silks. On either side four rows of tables were laden with a great variety of confections, for over three hundred people

34. *Ibid.*, ii, Nos. 994, 1024, 1034; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, ii, No. 3827.

were present. The King passed down the centre of the galley, and when he got upon the poop a variety of dishes containing sponge cakes and other dainties were produced. After the King had tasted a selection of these, they were distributed among the lords and barons of the Court. The rest of the people present sat down at the tables and cleared them of the confectionery, the glass goblets holding the wine being distributed amongst them as souvenirs at the end of the feast. The King appeared greatly pleased, praising the arrangements and expressing his thanks repeatedly. The officials of the galleys then performed feats on slack ropes suspended from the masts, to the immense admiration of the spectators who, the Ambassador reported, were unaccustomed to such feats, and after this the King departed. The next day he returned, and the guns were fired again and again at his request to mark their range, for, the Ambassador wrote, "he is very curious about matters of this kind." In the evening fireworks were let off, and Giustiniani concluded his report on a highly satisfied note—"He praises everything."³⁵

A few days after Henry left Southampton, however, Cardinal Wolsey complained to the Ambassador that the galley cargoes were of poor quality and small value compared with the merchandise they had brought to the town in former years. Giustiniani replied that this was due to the disturbed state of Italy, and affirmed that the next fleet would have normal cargoes.³⁶ Yet it is evident from the customs accounts at Southampton for the year 1519-20 that when the next fleet, under the command of Giovanni Moro, arrived in the port on December 26th, 1519, its cargoes were again disappointing.³⁷ The next fleet sailed from Venice in August, 1521, under Vincenzio Priuli, but from the beginning this voyage was dogged by ill luck. Off the coast of Spain a violent storm forced them into San Sebastian, where the Governor proved to be ill-disposed toward them, placing the patron and crew of the foremost galley under arrest when it entered the harbour. The other galleys fled in haste out to sea again and made for Corunna, in great fear of a squadron commanded by a certain Don Pedro Bobadilla, who set off in pursuit. Eventually they reached Plymouth, and after a short halt proceeded to Southampton. A long series of

35. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, ii, Nos. 1035, 1038, 1041; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, ii, Nos. 4213, 4232.

36. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, ii, No. 1042. The Flanders galleys were one of the richest of mediaeval trading fleets. The total value of their cargoes was estimated at 200,000 ducats in 1485 and again in 1509 (*Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, No. 499; Sanudo, *Diarii*, viii, 474). This, when the ducat was approximately 50d. (*Cal. S. P. Venice*, ii, Nos. 1327, 1329) would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of £40,000, an enormous sum to be staked in one mediaeval trading fleet.

37. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, i, p. cxxxiv: *ibid.*, iii, No. 1. The only spices unloaded in Southampton were ginger and mace valued at £96 by the customer, whereas in 1491 the galleys had brought in a great variety valued at £5971. 8s. 2d. Only satin valued at £92. 3s. 4d. was brought in 1519 compared with satin, velvet, cloth of gold, damask and sarcenet valued at £1787. 15s. 8d. in 1491. In 1519 a great quantity of camlet, a much cheaper cloth from the Eastern Mediterranean, made up the cargoes. (Port books of Southampton 1491-2 and 1519-20. The account of the cargo of the 1518 fleet has unfortunately disappeared.)

negotiations between Wolsey, the Emperor Charles V and the Doge of Venice dragged on for almost six months before the galley was eventually released. These detailed negotiations reveal a gradual change of attitude on the part of Henry VIII towards the Venetians. At first he took up their cause warmly, writing several letters to the Emperor on their behalf. But by the middle of March his attitude had changed so much that the astonished Ambassador was told by the Cardinal that the King would do nothing more about the galleys, and, moreover, that the Signory need send no more fleets, since they came so poorly laden that no profit was made in England now.³⁸ Henry had once more been disappointed in the quality of the cargoes landed at Southampton by the other two galleys, and had finally realized that Venice was losing her commercial monopoly in Southern Europe which had previously made princes and statesmen seek her friendship.

From this moment Henry became extremely brusque in his relations with the Venetians. The galley in Spain was at last freed in May, but it had scarcely joined the others at Southampton when all three were detained there to await the King's pleasure, following the outbreak of war between England and France. In spite of the protests of the Venetian merchants, they were forced to unload their cargoes and prepare the galleys to escort the Emperor Charles V, then on a visit to England, back to his Spanish dominions. Yet when all this had been done, the Emperor's minister assured the Venetian Ambassador that his master had no intention of using them, and hinted that Henry might intend to make use of them in his war with France. Soon Henry and his imperial guest arrived at Southampton and stayed there several days waiting a fair wind for the Emperor's departure. The Emperor appeared on the shore one evening, and walked along the waterside. The captain and patrons of the galleys hurried ashore to pay their respects, and the Emperor announced his intention of visiting the galleys the next day, but although hasty preparations were made to receive him, he never came. A fair wind arose in the night, and he embarked and sailed away early next morning without giving any sign that he expected the galleys to accompany his fleet.³⁹

Henry's real intentions were soon evident, however. For some time he had hoped to persuade Venice to join him in his war with France, and saw in the galleys at Southampton a valuable instrument to bring pressure to bear on the Signory. Rumours were soon flying round Southampton that they were to be used in the projected expedition to France under the command of the Earl of Surrey, and that Venetian nobles and seamen were to be compelled to fight on French soil under the banner of St. Mark side by side with the

38. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iii, Nos. 380, 384-5, 388, 391, 394, 397-9, 406-8, 410, 412, 419, 424, 431, 433-4, 447.

39. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iii, Nos. 457, 463, 465, 483, 486, 493, 498, 507.

English troops. Thus Henry intended to provoke France into declaring war on Venice, driving the Republic into alliance with him. The captain anxiously reported these rumours to the Venetian Ambassador in London, and soon it was evident that they were not unfounded. The Earl of Surrey arrived at Southampton and ordered the captain to put his ships in readiness to sail. Priuli politely but firmly refused, whereupon Surrey lost his temper, addressed him in haughty and threatening language, and seeing he could do nothing without force, went away to report his failure to the King. But although he could not compel them to sail, he seized their sails and rudders to prevent them making any attempt to return to Venice, and in spite of Priuli's protests, carried off their guns for the defence of Portsmouth from an expected French invasion. During the long diplomatic negotiations which followed, Henry firmly refused to allow the galleys to depart, and suspended all trade between England and Venice. The patron of one of the galleys made fruitless attempts to negotiate their release by means of a bribe through Wolsey's physician, also a Venetian, but in vain. At last the Pope himself was persuaded to write to Henry on their behalf, but even His Holiness could not prevail.⁴⁰ A letter from the Venetian Ambassador to Wolsey, still preserved in the British Museum, vividly describes the plight of the galleys and their crews at Southampton during this time. The masters of the galleys have poured out all their money to buy food for the crews, he says, and this source being exhausted, the oarsmen are forced to return overland to Venice on foot, begging their bread, some perishing of hunger on the way. The galleys themselves are being gnawed away and irreparably damaged by worms, the merchandise is being spoiled by worms and moth, and "all those who see them, unless they have hearts of stone, pity them exceedingly."⁴¹

It was not until March 1523, after the galleys had been ten months at Southampton in this lamentable plight, that the embargo was at last lifted. Even then Henry sent word by the Ambassador to the rulers of Venice that he intended to retain six great pieces of artillery he had taken from the galleys for the use of his ships at Portsmouth, "trusting the said Duke and Senate will be contented." The Signory had little choice in the matter, and was forced to acquiesce. The galleys were hastily repaired for the homeward voyage, but not until July 4th were they in a fit state to leave Southampton. Less than a month later Venice publicly joined in the league Henry was organizing with the Emperor.⁴²

40. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iii, Nos. 467, 474, 486, 495, 502, 506, 513, 522, 537, 555, 574; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, iii, No. 2320.

41. *Brit. Mus.*, Nero B VII, 25; calendared in *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, iii, No. 2320.

42. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iii, Nos. 595, 608, 623, 637, 656, 687, 694, 701; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, iii, No. 2863.

After this disastrous voyage the Flanders galleys did not return to England for seven years, no doubt fearing a repetition of their treatment in 1523. But Venice could not afford to abandon without a struggle this trading fleet which had brought her so much wealth in former years. At length it was decided that the galleys should sail again, but the merchants refused to risk their goods until both Henry VIII and Francis I of France had sent safe conducts and guarantees of fair treatment, thus delaying the beginning of the voyage some six months longer.⁴³ At length the galleys arrived for the last time in Southampton harbour in September 1531, but from the beginning ill-luck dogged the enterprise. The Duke of Norfolk, President of the King's Council since Wolsey's fall, complained bitterly of the cheap glass, wines and other goods which made up the cargoes of the galleys. Finally Sir Thomas More, acting as spokesman for the King, told the Venetian Ambassador that he did not wish any more galleys to come to English ports, since they were robbing the English cloth industry of raw materials, and bringing only worthless trifles in exchange. The Ambassador with difficulty obtained an audience with Henry himself, now much pre-occupied with his divorce suit against Queen Catherine, in which the King made it quite clear that he had no further use for the traditional commercial links with Venice now.⁴⁴

Meanwhile at Southampton a critical situation was developing. A bitter quarrel having arisen between the captain, Filippo Basadona, and one of the patrons, the latter wrote at length to Venice abusing the captain, and complaining that seven officers on board his galley had withdrawn from his table and refused to obey any of his orders. Guilio Bragadin, another patron, deserted his ship and tried to leave the country, but was detained an account of heavy debts he had contracted here. At last, on January 27th, 1532, following a dispute over pay and their bread ration, the crews broke out into open mutiny in the streets of Southampton. The captain was ashore attending Mass, and as he emerged from the church the galley-men attacked him, in force, stoning one of his navigating officers who tried to protect him. With great difficulty his other officers escorted him to the house in which he was lodging, the mutineers shouting threats meanwhile, saying they would kill the noblemen on board the galleys and sack the houses where their patrons had taken refuge.⁴⁵ The unhappy captain in fear of his

43. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iv, Nos. 599, 607, 619, 622, 624.

44. *Ibid.*, Nos. 683, 703-4, 714, 718.

45. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iv, Nos. 719, 725, 727, 729, 733, 739. The exact place where this incident took place is uncertain, but it seems to have been behind St. Mary's Church, the mother church of Southampton. Sanudo says it happened "a Santa Maria, in regresso di la chiesa de Nostra Dona" (*Diarii*, Vol. 55, 638-9). It seems to me that he has perhaps made a slip here, for the only known religious foundation behind or near the mother church was a small chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas, patron of sailors, which Leland says stood "at the est ende of S. Marie Chirch in the great cemeterie" (*Itinerary*, i, 276). In an article in the *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club* (vol. ii, p. 363) the Rev. G. Minns suggested some years ago that this chapel,

life wrote post haste to the Ambassador in London, imploring him to approach the King and secure a band of armed men to put down the riot. The townsfolk, he complained, would give him no assistance, openly favouring the galleyemen, and demanding that they should be punished with the strappado, nothing more. The Duke of Norfolk, Henry's spokesman on this occasion, was of the same mind, and refused to permit capital punishment. However, he addressed letters to the mayor ordering him to help the Venetian captain to restore order among the galleyemen, calling on neighbouring villages for assistance if the force at his disposal in the town was insufficient. Presumably this had some effect, for two months later the ambassador was writing in a more cheerful vein to the Signory, saying the fleet expected to begin their homeward voyage in April. But on May 27th they were still in the vicinity, lying near a burnt village off a headland called "La Guelica" in Venetian records, when a fair wind arose and enabled them to leave England at last and limp home, their holds half empty and in great fear of Barbarossa, the Turkish pirate, sweeping the Mediterranean from his lair in Tunis. It was the last voyage of the Flanders galleys.⁴⁶

All the Venetian merchants did not entirely disappear from Southampton, however. A number of privately owned carracks still called at the port from time to time, bringing sweet wines, currants, and other Mediterranean goods to England. Throughout the previous century a small number of these Venetian carracks are recorded in the Southampton custom ledgers side by side with the State galley fleets. True, they were neither as swift nor as safe from piratical attack as the galley fleets, but their freight charges were so much lower than those of the galleys, owing to the much smaller number of men required to run these sailing ships, that many merchants had preferred to run the risk of shipping their less valuable goods on the carracks.⁴⁷ But the phenomenal growth of London during the Tudor period drew more and more of these remaining Venetian ships to the capital, and loud were the complaints of the men of Southampton as they saw the remains of their valuable trade with the Mediterranean dwindling away. In 1530 they were utterly unable to pay the fee farm of the town, which amounted to £226. 13s. 4d. each year. In their petition for relief they complained that since their trade with the merchant strangers from Italy had decayed so much, their chief source of income, the

now disappeared, may have been connected with the Venetian galleyemen and have been the original site of the communal grave of the Slavonian oarsmen who died at Southampton. Assuming that Sanudo is referring to this chapel, since no other religious chapel is known to have existed besides the mother church in the vicinity, this suggestion seems to have been justified.

46. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, iv, Nos. 733, 739, 744, 758, 769, 771, 773. I cannot identify this headland, but might venture to suggest that "La Guelica" might be an attempt to transcribe some form of "Gillicker" into Italian in the sixteenth century.

47. Lane, F. C., *Venetian Shipping During the Commercial Revolution* (*American Historical Review*, Vol. xxxviii, pp. 230-1).

petty customs paid by these aliens, had almost disappeared. This plaint was repeated in a petition to Thomas Cromwell in 1533, and a glimpse into the local customs ledgers for this period shows they did not exaggerate unduly. Owing to gaps in these records the figures are necessarily incomplete, but there is sufficient evidence to show that during the peak period of the town's Mediterranean trade the totals recorded in the *libri alienigenis* (the separate books recording customs paid by aliens' goods) had soared to unprecedented figures. The highest total surviving, for the year 1459-60, was £323. 3s. 9d. paid on goods of the Italians alone, a sum more than sufficient to pay the entire fee farm. But from the first years of Henry VIII's reign the customs receipts decline rapidly, and in the year 1534-5 only £119. 10s. 5d. was collected on all merchandise, English and foreign, entering or leaving the town by sea.⁴⁸ Clearly the decline of the Italian trade had had an enormous effect on the revenues of Southampton, and the plaints of the townsmen as they saw the remaining Venetian ships passing by to unload at London can well be understood.

Mary, pleased with the welcome the town had given to Philip of Spain when he landed there on his way to Winchester for their marriage, was more sympathetic than her father had been towards their complaints. In 1554 she decreed that all sweet wines coming to England from the Levant must be landed at Southampton, and at no other port in the kingdom.⁴⁹ This was bitterly resented by the Venetians. There was no longer a good market for Mediterranean luxuries in the town, and the dissolution of the monasteries had removed the great ecclesiastical establishments in the neighbourhood which had been some of their best customers in the previous century.⁵⁰ The Venetian Ambassador protested so strongly that three ships, the *Vianuola*, *Barbara* and *Tamisera*, received permission from the Lord Treasurer to unload at London in spite of the decree, and when another ship, having a certain "Marcopulo" as patron, began unloading at Margate, the mayor and people of Southampton protested in vain, being unable to get the Act enforced, or to get any compensation except "drink money" (*beverragio*) from the Venetian Ambassador.⁵¹ Elizabeth, however, was perturbed by the rapid decay of the town, and in 1563 renewed Mary's grant. An arrangement was now made whereby Venetian ships could still unload at London provided that they paid a fixed sum to the

48. *Statutes of the Realm*, 22 Hen. VIII, c. 20; P.R.O., SP 1/81, p. 144; Southampton Municipal Archives, port books for the years 1459-60 and 1534-5.

49. *Charters of Southampton*, ed. H. W. Gidden, ii, 36-9 (Southampton Record Society publication, 1910).

50. Southampton Municipal Archives, MSS. Brokeage Books for the fifteenth century show many instances of sweet wines and other Italian imports being taken by cart and pack-horse to Winchester, Beaulieu, Wimborne Minster, Titchfield, Salisbury and other religious houses in the vicinity.

51. *Cal. S. P. Venice*, vi, No. 554.

mayor of Southampton for licence to evade this law, an Italian merchant then residing in London, Benedict Spinelli, being appointed by the mayor to collect these sums. But he seems to have been far from reliable, for in 1569 the town had to find £20 to pay for the appointment of a commission, presided over by the Earl of Pembroke, "for the determination of the controversy and strife" between the men of Southampton and Spinelli.⁵² The outcome of this is uncertain, but after the departure of *La Formento of Venys* from Southampton in the same year, no further record has been found of any Venetian ship in the port, although as late as 1587 one was wrecked off the Isle of Wight in a gale and may have been coming to Southampton.⁵³ By this time, however, the town was in an advanced stage of decay, and in the following year was quite unable to find the two ships and pinnace which Elizabeth demanded should join her main fleet in the Channel on the approach of the Spanish Armada.⁵⁴ Almost three centuries were to pass before the town could again be classed among the leading ports of England, and then her renewed prosperity was founded upon entirely different trading routes. Little remains now to recall the days when merchants of Venice walked her streets, save yellowed parchments in the town archives and the remains of the wine cellars and houses they rented in the town, a number of the latter having been brought to light recently by the 1940 "blitz."

52. Southampton Municipal Archives, MSS. Book of Debts, 1567-8, and Book of Fines, 1568-9; H.M.C. *Rept.* XI, app. iii, p. 94.

53. MSS. Book of Debts, 1568-9; Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 251; Sir Wm. Monson, *Naval Tracts*, iv, 413.

54. Laughton, J. K., *Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, i, 155-9.