

"A PRETENDED VOYAGE TO AMERICA."

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IN the year 1583 the Mayor and citizens of Chester received a letter "from one Mr. Xtofer Carlile." The original letter, unfortunately, is not preserved in the Great Letter Book in the Town Hall, Chester; but on two occasions Mr. Carleill's ¹ letter was considered by the Chester Assembly, from whose books the following extracts are taken:

"At an Assembly in the Inner Pentice within the Cittie of Chester the third day of Marche Anno R^{nae} Elizabeth XXVI before Mr. Breewood Maior.

At w^{ch} Assembly motion was made upon the readinge of a let^r sente to the saide Maior and Citizens from one Mr. Xtofer Carlile touching his redynesse to have the Citizens to be Contributories to his proceedinge or the adventuringe to America a voyadge pretended what answer is thereunto convenyent to be made but not determynd."²

The matter was "determynd" on the tenth of April following, when "at an Assembly houlden in the Comon Hall"

"a letter from Mr. Xtofer Carlill to the Maior and Aldermen of this Cittie to move the Cittizens to be Contributories to the adventuringe unto America is read and considered of and every man demaunded what they will adventure when there were none of this Assembly that of them selves wolde adventure enythinge to that enterprise savinge that Mr. Will^m Massey saide he wolde be one of the XXⁱⁱ for V li. and Mr. Thomas Lynyall offered he wolde adventure V li. if others wolde do the like. One other saide he wolde adventure Xs. but none of them selves woulde

¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, ix, 85-6, says that Carleill always spelled his name thus; others wrote it Carlile, Carlisle, Carlill, and in other ways.

² Chester Assembly Order, 3 March, 1582/3.

adventure enything excepte others wolde joyne with them. And therefore ordered that answer of that lett^r shoulde be made in denyall to be Contributories in respect of the decayed state of this Cittie." ¹

A month was not too long to consider denying the wishes of Mr. Christopher Carleill, for he was a personage of some importance. Born in 1551,² he was the son of Alexander Carleill, citizen and vintner of London, and his wife Anne, daughter of Sir George Barnes, Knight, Lord Mayor of London in 1552. After his father's death, his mother was married again, this time to Sir Francis Walsingham, who in 1573 became Principal Secretary to Queen Elizabeth and a member of the Privy Council. Anne Carleill survived her second marriage only two years, and in 1564 her will bequeathed Christopher, then thirteen years of age, to the care of his stepfather.³ Walsingham faithfully discharged the trust, and Christopher, after being educated at Cambridge, in 1572 entered upon a soldier's career in which he attained great fame. Sometimes in the service of the Prince of Orange, sometimes in that of the Prince of Condé, from 1572 to 1580 he was engaged in arms against the King of Spain, winning a recognised position as adviser to the Dutch Admiral, Boisot, as to the execution of orders from the Council of the Prince of Orange, and finally being placed in command of all the foreigners in that Prince's army.⁴

Carleill added to his fame by exploits at sea. While the King of Denmark was at war with Russia, he conveyed English merchants to Russia, successfully evading the Danish fleet, and bringing safely back to England a Russian envoy from St. Nicholas. The connexion between the Carleill family and Russia was of some standing. Sir George Barnes, Christopher's grandfather, was one of

¹ *Ibid.*, 10 April, 26 Elizabeth, 1583.

² *D.N.B.*, *loc. cit.*

³ Conyers Read, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols., Clarendon Press, 1925, i, 26.

⁴ *D.N.B.*, ix, 85-6.

the two Consuls of the Russia Company as it was incorporated in 1552, and Christopher's father was one of the original charter members of the company.¹

It was, therefore, not surprising that when the support of the Russia merchants was desired for a new project, Christopher Carleill should be appointed to put the case before them, and such was probably the mainspring of his connexion with "the pretended voyage to America" that was the subject of his letter to the Mayor of Chester in 1583.

Sir Francis Walsingham in his busy career found time for a keen personal interest in the maritime explorations of his day, and Carleill's concern with this particular voyage almost certainly originated in his stepfather's patronage of the project. In 1578, Sir Humphrey Gilbert obtained from Queen Elizabeth Letters Patent "for the inhabiting and planting of our people in America."² A first enterprise under this grant proving fruitless and his own funds being exhausted, Gilbert determined to make assignments of his grant to others, as the grant was forfeit should no attempt succeed in planting a colony within seven years of the date of the Letters Patent. After various assignments had failed to raise the necessary funds, Gilbert managed to interest Sir Francis Walsingham in a scheme to form a chartered trading company to achieve his object. To this end, in March 1582/3, Walsingham sent a letter to the Bristol merchants by the hands of Richard Hakluyt, who printed both the letter and the reply, wherein the Bristol merchants promised 1,000 marks (later raised to £1,000) and, if necessary, "a ship of threescore and a bark of 40 tunne to bee left in the cuntrye under the direction and government of your sonne-in law Mr. Carleill."³

¹ Conyers Read, *op. cit.*, iii, 370-1.

² Hakluyt, Edition by MacLehose. Glasgow, 1904, viii, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, viii, 132-3. *D.N.B.*, ix, 85-6, says that Carleill married Mary, daughter of Sir Thomas Walsingham, and sister of Sir Philip Sydney's wife.

"A Briefe and summary discourse upon the intended voyage to the hithermost parts of America written by Captaine Carleile in April 1583" ¹ was addressed in the first instance to the "Merchants of the Muscovian Companie." The merchants appointed a "Committee to conferre with M. Carleile" and set down articles to be treated of with him. ² It is from these articles and the "Briefe and summary discourse" that some idea of the "voyage pretended" can be obtained. It was proposed to transport to America, somewhere to the south-west of Cape Breton, 100 men "to remaine there one whole yeere" in order to make friends with the natives, who were believed to be "of a mild and tractable disposition," and to learn what commodities of trade might be looked for, though of these Carleill, in his summary discourse, gave a list optimistically lengthy which he hoped to exchange for a "a liberall utterance of our Englishe clothes" and the products of English "Artificers and labouring people." ³ £4,000 was the sum estimated as necessary to transport the 100 men, "to victuall them and to furnish them of munition and other needeful things." The Russia merchants proposed that subscribers to this £4,000 should be named Adventurers, who should receive one-half of the lands, territories, townes, mines of gold and silver and other metals whatsoever "as shall be found," less one-fifth of the gold and silver from the mines which was to go to the Crown. The other half of the gains, on the same terms, was to become the property of the "Enterprisers," "those parties which doe employ themselves personally in the discoverie," i.e. the 100 settlers. ⁴ The Bristol

Frances, wife of Sir Philip Sydney, was the daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, whose second daughter, Mary, died in 1580 when only seven years old, unmarried (*D.N.B.*, lix, 239). I can find no record of Carleill's marriage save in the *D.N.B.*, ix. It was not, I think, unusual to use the term "son-in-law" for stepson in Tudor documents.

¹ Hakluyt, viii, 134.

³ *Ibid.*, viii, 138-40.

² Hakluyt, viii, 147.

⁴ *Ibid.*, viii, 148.

merchants supplied £1,000 of the necessary funds, as has been shown. Christopher Carleill's letter to the Mayor of Chester was evidently an appeal for Chester to invest in the scheme, and judging from the debate on it, seems to have been couched in similar terms to like appeals sent by Walsingham to merchants in other towns.¹

"The particular disbursements are required but in very slender summes," says Carleill in the "Briefe and summary discourse," "the highest being 25 li., the second at 12 li. 10s., and the lowest at 6 pound five shillings."² Yet after a month in which to debate the matter, of all the Chester Assembly only Mr. William Massy and Mr. Thomas Lyniall would adventure anything. Neither of them would go beyond £5, which fell short of the lowest subscription indicated by Carleill, and even this they would advance only if others would do the same.

Mr. William Massy was a merchant of experience, who had taken part in many movements to extend the trade of the port of Chester. He was one of the "Meere Merchants" whose charter, granted by Mary in 1553 and renewed by Elizabeth in 1559, it was claimed, gave them a monopoly in trade from Chester to foreign parts. When, this charter was challenged by the retailers of Chester, the cause of the retailers was made "a Town's cause," and an appeal was entered before the Privy Council. An order from the Privy Council dated 9 July, 26 Eliz. is prefaced "in the matter of the Controversye between the Maior and Citizens of Chester and William Massy and others tearmed Meare Merchants," indicating that William Massy was the leader of his company.³ Three years earlier he had also been under the notice of the Privy

¹ Conyers Read, *op. cit.*, iii, 404, *fn.*, mentions Totnes and Dartmouth.

² Hakluyt, viii, 134.

³ Morris, *Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Periods*, 464 and 467. The date of this order in Morris reads 9 July, 26 Eliz., 1589. Obviously it should be 1583. Several similarly miscalculated dates, most probably printer's errors, occur on the adjacent pages.

Council in a quarrel between the Mayor and citizens of Chester and the merchants trading to Spain and Portugal. The latter body, correctly styled "The President, Assistants, and Fellowship of the Merchants of Spain and Portugal," was a company of London merchants incorporated in 1577.¹ A letter and order from the Privy Council dated 6 Oct., 23 Eliz., is directed "to our loveinge friends the maior and his brethren of the Cytie of Chester, and to William Massey, William Aldersey and Thomas Tetloe, deputie and assistants of the merchants tradinge Spayne and Portingall." Assistants were what we should call directors of the company, and the deputy was some kind of local administrator or manager for the London company, as is shown by a postscript to the same letter which orders "Mr. William Massey to redeliver such bonds as you have taken from any of Chester or Lirpole as deputie of the company tradinge Spayne and Portingall."²

Mr. Thomas Lyniall played a less spectacular part in Chester's affairs. His signature is appended to many Assembly Orders, where he describes himself as a Hatter. A man of substance he must have been, for in 1586/7 he took a lease of the Roodee on condition of embanking it against floods and of making a quay there,³ and in 1594 he received a grant of the Tower on Dee Bridge provided that he should erect "comlye faire and bewtifull" houses and buildings there.⁴

Both William Massey and Thomas Lyniall were Mayors of Chester, following each other in this order in 1590 and 1591.⁵ When such men were wary, it was not surprising that others would take no risk, and so Mr. Carleill's letter was answered "in denyall to be Contributories in respect of the decayed state of this Cittie." There is no doubt

¹ Conyers Read, *op. cit.*, iii, 371-2.

² Morris, *op. cit.*, 465. The order in Morris is dated 6 Oct., 23 Eliz., 1586. It should be 1581. See note 3, p. 58.

³ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵ Hemingway, *History of Chester*, i, 233.

that this answer was founded in truth. Twenty years had not yet elapsed since the heavy shipping had been moved from Chester itself to the New Haven at Neston, and the decayed state of the trade of the port had rendered necessary twenty-seven years of begging from the Royal Purse and of forced levies on the citizens between the first proposing of that Haven and its coming into effective use in 1568.¹ Probably, with shipping still, as the letter of the Bristol merchants shows,² commonly below 100 tons burthen, Chester was already out of the running as an Atlantic port owing to the silting of her river.

But whatever its basis, the Chester merchants' caution was justified by events. No evidence has been found to show that the proposed trading company was ever set up. Funds having been raised from other sources, Sir Humphrey Gilbert sailed westwards on Tuesday, 11 June 1583, with five ships, of which only one was to return to England, bearing the tidings of the sinking of *The Squirrel* with Sir Humphrey Gilbert on board.³

Conyers Read positively identifies the activities of Christopher Carleill with the preparations for this ill-fated voyage.⁴ A petition to Queen Elizabeth made in 1574 "by divers gentlemen . . . to allow of an enterprise by them conceived" is endorsed with the names of the supplicants. Here Carleill's name appears with those of Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir George Peckham, one of those to whom Gilbert later made assignments of his grant.⁵ But Richard Hakluyt, writing to Sir Francis Walsingham from Paris in April 1584, says that he has imparted to Mr. Carlile such things as he has carefully sought out in France concerning the furtherance of the Western dis-

¹ Edna Rideout, "The Chester Companies and the Old Quay," *Trans. Hist. Soc. Lancs. and Ches.*, 79, 141.

² *Supra*, p. 56.

³ Hakluyt, viii, 34 *et seq.*

⁴ Conyers Read, *op. cit.*, iii, 404.

⁵ *Cal. Colonial Papers*, Addenda 1574-1674, No. 1.

coveries, and adds "if Mr. Carlile be gone, yet it might come in time to serve Mr. Frobisher's turn."¹ This phrase leaves open the possibility that Christopher Carleill, like Martin Frobisher and Sir Richard Grenville who were also named as petitioners in 1574, contemplated an expedition on his own account.

If this were the case, his plans must have miscarried. In the very year when Hakluyt wrote as above, he was appointed commander of a garrison in Ireland, and, except for a period in command of the land forces in Drake's voyage to the West Indies in 1585, he held similar posts until his death in 1593. His later life was passed in difficulties. His powerful stepfather died in April 1590, and in the same year Carleill wrote to Lord Burghley, "I have been longe tyme a fruitless suitor even well nigh the most part of fower years tyme, as also I have spent my patrimoneye and all other meanes in the service of my countrye which hath been no less than five thousand pounds whereof I do owe at this presente the beste part of £3,000."²

This communication is a somewhat lengthy annotation of two short entries in the Chester Assembly Books. The *Dictionary of National Biography*³ mentions not only the Bristol merchants' support of Carleill in the matter but also records a mere allusion to the scheme in a letter from the Earl of Shrewsbury to Thomas Bawdewyn, 20 May 1583. Neither in the *D.N.B.* nor elsewhere in print, so far as I can discover, is recorded Chester's connection with Christopher Carleill, whose letter of March 1582/3 links up for a brief moment, if only in negative fashion, the merchants of Chester with that maritime adventure that was the glory of the age of Queen Elizabeth.

My thanks are due to the Town Clerk, Chester, for permission to examine the Assembly Books, and to Mr. Davies, of the Town Clerk's Office, for much kind assistance.

¹ *Ibid.*, No. 35.

² *D.N.B.* ix, 85-6.

³ *Ibid.*