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Sir William Semple and Bristol's Andalucian Trade, 1597-98

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Sir William Semple and Bristol's Andalucian trade, 1597-1598

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IT has long been known that the closing of Spanish ports to English merchandize and shipping, ordered by Philip II in the summer of 1586, was at first a severe blow to many southwestern merchants, especially in Bristol.¹ Yet six years later, even while all hope of a peace was absent, the hidden weaknesses of Spain's economic policy were apparent. King Philip's 'Iberian system' was plagued with disorderly contraband trading even more acutely than Napoleon's more famous 'continental system' over two centuries later. In 1591 alone, ninety-eight English merchants freighted ships for southern Andalusia.² The embargo's demands were also far too heavy for the troubled economy of the Low Countries. In November 1594 the merchants of Antwerp pointed out that the restrictions had not damaged either England or the Dutch rebels. They noted that in the past only a fraction of English cloth had remained in Antwerp and the remainder had been shipped elsewhere. Whereas now they were without the cloth, the customs dues and the fees for handling it.³

At times, however, Spain's need to import grain could force a grudging exemption for Dutch shipping to enter Iberian ports. For example, in the autumn of 1598 the crown permitted fourteen shiploads of grain to be brought from Sicily in Dutch vessels.⁴ The idea of economic warfare encountered clear resentment in the major trading centres of Spain. The Venetian envoy at Madrid reported, in

¹ *Cal. S.P. Dom. 1587*, p. 402.

² *Cal. S.P. Dom. 1591-94*, p. 63. See also F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), pp. 492 ff. The extensive arguments in the Council of State on the value of the embargo are available in H. Lonchay and J. Cuvelier, *Correspondence de la cour d'Espagne sur les affaires des Pays-bas au XVII^e siècle*, I, pp. 90-95, also Mariano Alcocer y Martínez, *Consultas del Consejo de Estado 1600-1603* (*Archivo Histórico Español*), III, pp. 19-23.

³ Archives Générales du Royaume (Brussels), Papiers d'États et Audience, liasse 1400 f.1. 'Touchant la défense des drapes d'Angleterre. . . .'

⁴ Archivo General de Simancas, Sección de Estado (Hereafter cited as E) legajo 182, unnumbered document (Hereafter cited as n.f.) cédula of 26 November 1598.

the spring of 1591, that 'the people of Seville' were insisting upon 'full liberty' to import goods 'from any country whatsoever, especially from England'.¹ There can be no question that this 'free trade' attitude among the Spanish spurred the local connivance at English contraband which developed during the war.

At first the blow to Bristol's trade with Spain offered very few opportunities for evasion. It is apparent that some merchants, who were in favour with the local authorities, stayed in Spain to share in whatever traffic was available. Robert Tindal, for instance, who came from a family of Bristol merchants, was known to be staying in San Sebastian in 1592. He was able to buy at auction a ship of 90 tons captured from the French for two hundred and eighty double ducats.² Clearly he had been protecting his profitable links with the merchant community of the town to be able to make such a large new investment.

The similar career of a merchant named Nicholas Oursley can be traced in more detail. Born in Bristol about the year 1557 he was brought by his parents to Spain in 1565 and lived at various times in Galicia, Seville and Lisbon before settling in Malaga.³ However in October 1587 he was arrested under orders of the Spanish Council of State and accused of having 'much dealing with England and particularly for to give advertisement to that realm of what passed in Spain'.⁴ Apparently he was not convicted, because he blithely despatched to England a report on the Spanish naval strength at San Lucar in the following spring, the year of the armada.⁵ For a time after this his activities are unknown, but within eight years he emerged as a close associate in Portugal of a powerful grandee, the Count of Portealegre. According to one complaint in the files of the Spanish Council of State, Oursley was carrying three different passports countersigned by Portealegre. The Count justified this prodigal attitude by explaining that Oursley was in fact a valuable informant on England. While the complete honesty of this excuse may be questioned, it is certain that the Count was using Oursley's talents to handle a trading venture in the Azores involving the high sum of 30,000 ducats.⁶

In addition to such business transactions, Oursley also earned commissions by assisting in the exchanges of English and Spanish prisoners of war. This had the undeniable advantage of offering an

¹ *Cal. S.P. Venetian 1581-91*, p. 528.

² J. A. Frazer, *Spain and the West Country* (London, 1935), pp. 94-6.

³ In the Archivo General de Simancas, Sección de Guerra, legajo 88 there is a file of his business correspondence for 1577-79 covering his transactions in Seville and Malaga.

⁴ Public Record Office S.P. 94/2/86.

⁵ British Museum, Harleian Mss 295 f. 182.

⁶ E. 177 n.f. letter of L. Arminteros, 12 December 1596.

official cover for his voyages to England. On one occasion a Spanish officer, who came to London to negotiate a prisoner exchange, stayed in Oursley's house in London.¹ It is clear, however, that Oursley still remained under a cloud because of his clandestine activities during the war. In the spring of 1599 Don Juan de Velasquez, the governor of Fuentarabia, who was under special orders to watch the northern frontiers, mentioned Oursley by name as a likely English spy.² Yet apparently he still escaped any indictment for, after the peace treaty of 1604, he returned at once to his trading ventures in Andalucia. He was reported by the English ambassador to be assisting his compatriots in their litigation over embargoed cargoes, and in defending the special rights of the merchant community.³

This enterprising career in the midst of all the uncertainties of the great naval war between Spain and England had been one of the most successful recorded for the merchants of Bristol. He seems to have been unscathed by the special investigation in contraband trade which began late in 1597 and was ultimately to inflict heavy losses on nearly a score of English merchants, principally from the west country.

As a prelude to understanding why this disaster occurred at that time it will be useful to outline the impact of the war on Scotland's trade with Spain. The kingdom of James VI had profited from England's official exclusion from Iberian ports. James had been careful to maintain neutrality during the war, so that his merchantmen could sail between the two warring kingdoms and augment their carrying trade. Early in 1593 King James sent an envoy to Philip II to secure official recognition for this favoured position. Anthony Rolston, who was observing events in northern Spain for the benefit of the English court, reported on 29 June 1593 from Fuentarabia that a 'William Ourde, servant to the King of Scots', had passed through on a return journey with a significant document. 'He hath attained of the King of Spain, license, that all Scots merchants may come and go with all sorts of merchandize for Lisbon, St. Sebastian and Seville, so they bring passport from the Scots king. If otherwise they are not without peril to lose all'.⁴

¹ *H. M. C. Salisbury Mss*, VIII, p. 62; E 183 f. 174, report of Alférez Azpitia.

² E 183 f. 148.

³ E. Sawyer, ed. *Sir Ralph Winwood, Memorials of Affairs of State in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I*, II (London, 1725), p. 488. In E 844 f. 101 is Oursley's petition to Don Antonio de Ayala, Custodian of documents at Simancas, for a copy of Charles V's confirmation of the privileges of the English merchants.

⁴ T. Birch, *Memoirs of the Reign of Elizabeth*, I (London, 1754), pp. 107-8. An English observer of Spanish mercantilist politics offered the following theory: 'The Spaniard likes to be in league with some nation that may bring what his country yields to be spent in England; as he forbids English commodities, those that carry his into England must bring back money; so he does a double wrong: barring the outlet of the fruits of the country and carrying away its treasure'. (*Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1595-97, p. 567).

There had been an obvious need for such a safeguard. As far back as November 1586, shortly after the first news of the embargo, the judges of the tribunal of the Inquisition in Seville reported that a Scottish ship had been seized at San Lucar de Barrameda, and that the services of an interpreter of 'the English and Scottish tongues' were needed to prepare the dossiers of twenty English and twenty-four Scots prisoners.¹ This incident, involving Scotsmen in Spain, was not unique. In January 1588 an English Catholic refugee from London named Ralph Hassal petitioned the Inquisition for a residence permit since he had been already involved as interpreter 'in the English and Scottish tongues on several occasions'.² The records of the Seville tribunal for this period are quite incomplete, but there is sufficient indication from these chance surviving instances that Scottish merchants would be anxious to disassociate their trading business from any English connections. The 'license' carried by Ourde was a prudent diplomatic manoeuvre by King James, which was clearly appreciated by his subjects.

Five years later the interests of Scotland would have an unusually effective advocate in Sir William Semple who was to argue convincingly at the Spanish court for a strict enforcement of the 1593 agreement. A glance at his earlier links with the Spanish court will go far towards explaining his conduct at this time.³

Semple had entered Spanish service in 1582, at the age of 36, after surrendering the Dutch outpost of Lier to the troops of the Duke of Parma. His precise motives can only be conjectured. Aside from the Catholic traditions of his family, it was clear that he, with scores of other Scottish soldiers, was discontented with his pay and treatment under the banner of the Prince of Orange. Years later, in 1601, he prepared a personal record of his services under Philip II for the use of the Council of State when petitioning for the arrears of his pensions.⁴ He recalled that he had at first been assigned pensions totalling 3200 ducats a year, but he added the familiar complaint about the failure to secure prompt payments. He noted that in 1588 he had been sent to

¹ Archivo Historico Nacional (Madrid) Inquisición, legajo 2948, n.f. letter of 11 November 1586. The case arose when 'Lutheran (*sic*) books, which they had brought along to follow the service and prayers of that sect' were discovered on the vessel. The tribunal recommended a grant for services in interpreting to be given to a James White of Seville 'who supports his family from his small shop'. He was given 50 escudos (Ibid. legajo 2950 n.f. letter of 28 January 1587).

² Ibid. legajo 2949, n.f. letter of 14 January 1588. The tribunal supported his request since there were cases pending involving 'more than forty English and Scots'.

³ W. Forbes-Leith, *Narratives of Scottish Catholics under Mary Stuart and James VI* (Edinburgh, 1885) reprints a 17th-century life of Semple; some additional details are available in 'Colonel William Sempill, the Hero of Lierre' T. G. Law, *Collected Essays and Reviews* (Edinburgh, 1904), pp. 320-6.

⁴ E 2764 n.f. consulta, endorsed 'el Colonel Semple', 19 May 1601.

Scotland 'with a commission from the late king' to negotiate with James 'very weighty matters concerning the plans for the enterprise of England'. He had been imprisoned there by King James VI, but escaped 'through a window with much labour and risk of his life'.¹ Later he had travelled from Flanders to the Spanish court with urgent letters from Parma to Philip II.

Subsequently, he continued, he had served 'under divers commissions . . . concerning the embargoes of rebel shipping. As a man well experienced in those matters, he knew the greater part of the shipping, although he was forced to spend his own fortune on his travels. It is well known that his Majesty has profited from this, particularly in the Andalucian embargo, which is at present in the care of the Adelantado, for many enemy ships have been discovered'.² Aside from his constant need of money, there is another facet of Semple's attitude which is relevant to the understanding of his behaviour at this time. In at least three letters in the files of the Council of State, Semple is revealed to be antipathetic to James of Scotland.

As early as June 1601 he was warning King Philip III of the need to rally the Catholics of Scotland to stand firm against James VI.³ He made his purpose more explicit in a new memorandum which he submitted to the Council later in the same year. At that time he was suggesting that an envoy should be sent from Spain in response to James' recent offer of friendship, who would insist upon freedom for Catholics there. He also warned of the dangers of 'encouraging' King James in his claims to the throne of England.⁴ He would justify his hostility in another subsequent letter to the Council, wherein he insisted that Pope Clement VIII and many Scottish nobles were being deceived over James's attitude to religion. He felt that they must be persuaded to support Spain more fully.⁵

It may be recalled that Semple's review of his past services of 1601 had stressed his energy in the enforcement of the embargo. There is documentary evidence that he initiated probably the most thorough investigation of the war.

¹ See also D. H. Willson, *King James VI and I* (London, 1956), pp. 81, 84; D. and A. Mathew printed his report on Scotland in the *English Historical Review*, xLI (1926), pp. 579-83.

² His campaign for back payments lasted, on this occasion, from 1601 to 1603. In E 2764 are found his petitions dated 16 June 1601; 26 January, 24 February, 7 April, 7 May, 10 October, and 29 October 1602; 17 May and 12 July 1603. Finally on 31 July 1603 the Duke of Lerma wrote the President of the Hazienda that Semple was to be given a special grant of 800 escudos for a mission to Flanders, but that he would leave half with his family who were living in Madrid. (E 191 n.f., draft copy).

³ H. Lonchay and J. Cuvelier, op. cit. vol. 1, pp. 72-3.

⁴ E 840 ff. 273, 274, letters of 11 December 1601.

⁵ E 2764 n.f. consulta of 25 June 1602.

In the late autumn of 1597 Sir William Semple made a long and wearisome journey from Seville to Madrid to present an informative report to the Council of State. He was sufficiently trusted, apparently, to have his papers given an immediate scrutiny. His memorandum opened with the provocative remark that he had come in person to the court because he was so dismayed that his previous warnings about the danger to the Spanish coastline from English shipping had been ignored.¹ They were coming and leaving in large numbers, he observed, while all previous efforts to solve the problem had failed since the commissioners in the ports could not recognize Englishmen in distinction to those protected by Spanish laws. He had seen, for example, in the past few weeks twenty-three English ships leaving Ayamonte and Huelva alone. He did not doubt that the pattern would be repeated in other harbours. He was also careful to point out this situation permitted the notorious English 'corsairs' to prey upon unsuspecting Spanish shipping.

He cited other examples as well. He had found that French 'Calvinists' were sailing between La Rochelle and Spain while pretending to be Catholics from Brittany.² He charged that many merchantmen from Ireland were equally suspect, for 'they act as agents for the English, who then use their money and resources against Catholics'.³ Semple urged that anyone who profited from the flourishing contraband trade with England should be strictly prosecuted, so that the 'welldisposed' could remain secure in their trade.

Semple observed that the English were now able to engage in their contraband trade through various stratagems. From the outset they were pretending to be Scotsmen, but whenever they were charged

¹ E 181 n.f. endorsed 'el papel que ha dado el coronel Semple'.

² See also Braudel op. cit. p. 493. Earlier, in February 1588, a Francisco de Valverde warned that some English ships, registered 'in favour of certain Flemings' were trading in Lisbon and Andalucia. (*Cal. S.P. Spanish 1587-1603*, p. 221).

³ It was difficult for Spanish officials to prevent Irish merchants from chartering English ships. In the summer of 1598 a ship called the *Amador*, owned by an Englishman named William Pitt, was investigated in a Spanish port. In it were found 'letters in parchment with pendant seals' chartering it for voyages between Waterford and Spain in the name of Patrick Strong and James Lombard. William Pitt was found to be in England, with a license from Don Diego Brochero, to secure an exchange of prisoners. Strong was a prosperous Irish merchant living in Jeréz de la Frontera, while his compatriot, Lombard traded in Cadiz. They were also in partnership with a James Fletcher, an English Catholic refugee in Jeréz described as a 'broker of wines', in the business of shipping salt to Ireland. (E 181 n.f. report endorsed 'Lo que se resultea de los papeles Ingleses presentados por parte de Bernardo de Vanegas. . . .') Although it was suspected that goods shipped to Ireland would end in English western ports, the case against the Irishmen was suspended by the Council of State, 'because of the absence of William Pitt' (E 181 n.f. order of 10 December 1598). It was not until the summer of 1600 that the Council of State required ships from Ireland to carry passports from Tyrone and the Archbishop of Dublin, Matthew de Oviedo, O.F.M. (E 185 n.f. Council to Don Esteban de Ybarra, Madrid, 23 August 1600).

with being Englishmen, they would reply to the harbour commissioners that such accusations were founded on spite. Their threat to bring their merchandize to other ports, Semple concluded, coupled with 'the greed of the officials'—a clear hint of bribery—sufficed to give many English merchants easy access to southern Spain. In fact Semple had heard certain Spanish officials publicly defend their conduct, 'yet they know not what they are doing when they set free individuals known to be Englishmen, and even some condemned by the king'.

To counteract this problem Semple suggested two things. First a search must be begun at once for individuals who were helping to conceal English merchants, so as to punish them 'with death, or at least, exile'. Aside from this Draconian penalty, he advised that the commissions to investigate English shipping be confined to a very few persons, for frequently there had been time-consuming disputes over precedence when there were too many officials concerned. He hinted that someone of adequate knowledge—undoubtedly Semple—should be employed in this specialized post.

The Council of State was impressed and urged the king to take action. The first new commission was issued to *Licenciado Aldaya, Regente* of the *Audiencia* of Seville on 26 November 1597. He was warned to search for all Englishmen using a foreign identity, especially those who pretended 'to be loyal Flemings, a thing against the service of God and mine'.¹ It is uncertain how soon after this Semple received his commission, but later in the spring of 1598 there was an order placing his salary at 60 escudos a month to cover his past services.² From other evidence it appears that the Count of Puñonrostro and a deputy of Aldaya, Doctor Castañeda, also began to work under similar orders.

There were plenty of suspects to occupy their attention at the beginning. An early summary report was particularly valuable for the details and first impressions it contained. An Englishman from Bristol named Edward Lewis³ was discovered in the port of Huelva with part of his cargo—400 *arrobas* of lead and some cloths—still unsold. He admitted that he had been in the port since November 1597, and thus had been living with friends for over ten weeks. He had already purchased seventy pipes of wine which were destined for England. Having been previously warned of the activities of the commissioners, he had been on the point of travelling overland to Lisbon to look for a vessel to reach England.⁴

¹ E 178 n.f. copy.

² E 178 n.f. letter to Aldaya, 4 May 1598.

³ The family name occurs in Spanish trade in earlier decades. See G. Connell Smith, *Forerunners of Drake* (London, 1954), pp. 14, 25.

⁴ E 181 n.f. letter of Count Puñonrostro, 16 February 1598.

There were other Bristolians who would soon figure in the investigations of that spring. A Richard Lawrence had been discovered in Seville and sent to prison, where he reported that, when he had been trading in Ayamonte, a ship had arrived 'under cover of being Scots'; although he had known that all the crew and merchandize had come from Bristol.¹ Tracing this promising lead back to Ayamonte, Walter Thomas, Ronald Bainsley and John Barrett, each pretending to be Scottish though born in Bristol, were discovered and sent to the Seville prison. There was also an Edward Firman, who actually was a Scot living in Ayamonte, though he was accused of maintaining his home and business in Bristol. A Londoner, 'pretending to be a Fleming', named Francis Humber was also discovered to be living in the same town.

In nearby Moguer there was virtually an identical pattern. Walter Deninck and Richard Powell, both from Bristol were found to be pretending to be Scotsmen. They were apparently well established, since Powell was described as owning the property of other English merchants who had once lived in the port. In Huelva there were discovered two more with the same bogus credentials. William Mellen of Bristol and George Holt, a Scot with many trading connections in Bristol, were also arrested and sent to Seville. Meanwhile the commissioners were looking for, but had not as yet arrested, William Martin of Bristol, and Vincent Peterson, a Fleming with trading partners in the west country, who had been conducting a profitable business in the little Andalucian port of Lepe.

Satisfied with the scope of the inquiry, and it is difficult not to believe that Sir William Semple was not responsible for the consistent references to bogus Scottish identities, the Council of State issued new orders to extend the compass of the investigation.² Unfortunately for our purposes there is no indication in this file of the Council of State that they requested a summary report of the merchants arrested, or the nature of the cargoes confiscated, or the monetary value of their contraband, or even the correct number of English ships involved. It is known that the Council was disturbed about one special accusation. It ordered an inquiry into the charges that the Count of Priego, a noble in Seville, had freed some of these same English merchants when they had given suspected false testimony after their arrest in 1596.³

¹ E 181 n.f. Summary of despatches 2 March 1598.

² E 181 n.f. copy of cédula of 1 March 1598.

³ Semple referred to this incident in his first memorandum.

Philip II was preoccupied almost entirely with enforcement. He advised Aldaya and his fellow commissioners to attack 'by every means possible' the ruses used to conceal English commerce in Spain. The crown's prohibition was intended to be tightly enforced against 'ships, gear and any type of property of Englishmen, or merchandize from England, which did not enter with express license, even if it is now in the hands of Spaniards'.¹ Aldaya was cautioned, however, that he must release any Englishmen against whom the charges were unproven, and that he should leave untouched any ship that was approved by Semple. In addition the Scotsman was told to continue his investigation 'of the entire shore of Andalucia towards Cape St. Vincent'.²

The subsequent reports from Aldaya and the Count of Puñonrostro, which were prepared for the Council of State, show that only a few additional names of English merchants, including one more from Bristol, had come to light. George Hall, who had reached Andalucia in the spring of 1598 with two shiploads of wheat, was apparently unaware of the new Spanish vigilance. He was arrested at once and the vessels impounded. At the same time the Council of State ordered the sale at auction of four English ships in the harbour at Ayamonte; it explained that funds were needed to support the prisoners as well as to pay the salaries of the commissioners. However it warned that the court must clearly decide the guilt of the ships' masters before any auction.³

Undoubtedly other arrests were made in the normal investigations conducted by the regular port authorities. For instance, one official at Puerto Santa Maria mentioned that he had seen in 'the bay at Cadiz' five Scottish, two Irish and two French ships being held under restraint.⁴ Since these nations were usually considered immune from the embargo, possibly the ships were suspected of having English crews or merchandize.

Once the arrest and charges had been made, it was necessary for the accused to establish his case through expensive and time-consuming litigation. Early in 1601 the Adelantado of Castile prepared an estimate for Andalucia in which he suggested that the embargoed ships of all nations 'will be 150, more or less'.⁵ By mid-summer of the same year he remarked that the justices at San Lucar, Seville and Cadiz had established the guilt of forty-three persons for contraband transactions in

¹ E 181 n.f. consulta March 1598, copy.

² E 181 n.f. cédula of 16 March 1598.

³ E 181 n.f. letter of 4 May 1598.

⁴ E 181 n.f. despatch of 3 May 1598.

⁵ E 186 n.f. letter of 7 January 1601.

merchandise and specie, while thirty-five ships had been seized for carrying specie and goods to England and the Dutch rebels.¹ He did not indicate how many were acquitted, nor how long these cases had been pending.

Yet while the activities of Aldaya, or Semple, appear impressive—especially in the unmasking of over a dozen Bristol merchants in the smaller ports of Andalucia—the effectiveness of the embargo can still be seriously questioned. In Bristol the customs dues for 1598–9 reached over £2111 from trade with Ireland, France and Spain. In fact there was even an unfavourable balance of trade, especially through the luxury items such as currants, fruits and wines, which traditionally had originated in Spain.² Recent studies have shown that a decline in Bristol's shipping was to come soon, not so much from this Spanish embargo, but from later heavy losses to Turkish marauders in the Mediterranean. This deterioration was to reach such serious proportions, that in 1619 the merchants of Bristol complained that their trade had fallen under the control of 'Dutch and Scots shipping'.³

It may be profitable, perhaps, to place this hitherto unknown incident involving the detection of English contraband activities on the Iberian peninsula in a somewhat larger perspective. Why for instance did Sir William Semple urge in 1597 the enforcement of the immunities of Scots shipping? It may be doubted that his attitude came from any particular admiration for James VI. His rueful recollection of his imprisonment by King James in 1588 and his mistrust of James's attitudes on religion would disprove any partisanship for the Stuarts. He expressed his views despite the fact that his first cousin, Lord Semple, visited Spain as an envoy of Scotland to offer friendship to Philip III and secure approval of the Stuart claims to the throne of England.⁴ It is more likely that Semple acted in 1597 simply from patriotic sympathy for Scotland's commercial privileges. He also knew that Spanish confusion over the characteristic differences between the two nationalities had damaged several Scots merchants' affairs during the embargo. Thus he became a self-appointed pursuivant on behalf

¹ There were eighteen ships with French masters, ten with German, three with Scots and two with Dutch. (E 186 n.f. letter of 22 August 1601).

² See T. S. Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan Foreign Trade* (Manchester, 1959), pp. 85 ff. In this year from imports of wine the tax was £993 10s.

³ G. D. Ramsay, *English Overseas Trade during the Centuries of Emergence* (London, 1957), p. 137. See also P. V. McGrath, 'The Merchant Venturers and Bristol Shipping in the Early 17th Century', *Mariner's Mirror*, xxxvi (1950), pp. 69–80.

⁴ H. Stafford, *James VI and the Succession to England* (New York, 1940), p. 242 ff. Lord Semple, in a letter to the Council complaining of the loss of goods shipped to him from Scotland, called himself 'embaxador del Rey de Escocia' (E 1743 n.f. letter of 29 December 1599).

of Scottish immunities. There is no reason to believe that Semple had any particular animus against Bristol; the economic relations between that west country port and Scotland were minimal.¹

What is revealed with more certainty is a pattern wherein several Bristol merchants were shown to be concealed in Andalusia for extended periods during the war. They wisely preferred small strategic ports, such as Ayamonte, and they avoided frequenting the larger entrepôts such as Seville. It is doubtful whether they would have had success without local connivance. Their success was a measure of the unpopularity of the embargo in provincial ports,² as well as a plausible explanation of the presence of Spanish products in Bristol's port books. Furthermore a popular subterfuge for escaping detection has been documented. The pretence of being Scots enabled the Bristolians to share in the privileges granted to neutrals.

It was, of course, a temporary and abnormal situation. As soon as James of Scotland came to the English throne late in March 1603 a cease fire with Spain was proclaimed. There soon followed the orders of Philip III to cancel all restrictions on trade with England. In fact by the summer of 1604 an English identity had become a favourite cover for other foreigners in Spain. Thomas Wilson, an English spy in Spain, described this quick reversal in attitudes as follows: 'The frenchman that goe into Spayne they will geve themselves out for Englishmen, especially fynding themselves such as ther usage and complection will comport therewith, as it will in normans, picards and bretons. A strange alteracion that our nation, that was gladd everywher to maske themselves under the name of another but the last yeare, is so sodaynly able to lend what they borrowed'.³ The wheel had come full turn.⁴

¹ In the early 1600's, 'the normal trade between Bristol and Scotland never required more than an occasional ship each year'. S. G. E. Lythe, *The Economy of Scotland, 1550-1625* (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 228.

² Andalusia was not unique in its resistance. The Viceroy of Catalonia, the 2nd Duke of Feria, reported to Philip III early in 1599 that a recent order requiring pledges from the ships of the Hansa, of France, of Scotland and Ireland, not to carry Spanish goods to the enemy were against the province's 'many privileges that commerce be free'. The most that he could promise was to close the ports to enemy shipping. (E 183, f. 177).

³ Public Record Office S.P. 94/10/83, letter of 21/31 July 1604.

⁴ An analysis of other activities of the English residents at the court of the Spanish Hapsburgs at this time is presented in A. J. Loomie, *The Spanish Elizabethans: Studies in the English Exiles at the Court of Philip II* (Fordham University Press, 1963).