

MEN OF KENT. 3. MINET AND FECTOR OF DOVER

By the late COLIN MATSON

IN the early years of the sixteenth century the religious movement, which came to be known as the Reformation, started to spread throughout Europe. In c. 1517 Martin Luther was busy preaching its doctrines in Germany; and John Calvin was soon to continue the good work in Geneva. In France the Protestants acquired the name of Huguenots, probably by way of a nickname. They were severely persecuted and made to suffer by way of imprisonment, confiscation, and drastic restrictions affecting life and liberty. The terrible massacre of Huguenots occurred in Paris on the eve of the feast day of St. Bartholomew, the 24th August, 1572; and other massacres followed throughout the country of France. Many religious refugees fled from their native land to find shelter and livelihood in such Protestant countries as England, Switzerland and Holland. In 1598 King Henry IV of France issued the Edict of Nantes, under which he allowed the Huguenots, not merely religious toleration, but also a measure of political and military independence. The Revocation of this Edict by King Louis XIV, shamefully approved by our King James II, occurred in 1685, and was followed by renewed and vicious persecution, and the flight of many Huguenots to other countries. Two of such Huguenot families are the subjects of this short article.

Isaac Minet (1660-1745) was the fourth surviving son of Ambroise Minet of Calais, owner of a general stores shop for the supply of groceries, drugs, liquors and tobacco, etc. Ambroise and his wife Susanna had nine surviving children, of whom eight escaped to England and one to Holland, 'having all fled out of France for ye sake of their Protestant religion'. Isaac himself, together with 140 others, was threatened, persecuted and cast into prison. 'After having tryed severall times before our imprisonment and since to gitt away, we did at last embarque at night ye 1 August 1686 and gott to Dover at 8 in ye morning, for which I shall ever praise the goodness of God.' Some time after his settlement in England Isaac started to keep his 'Receipt Booke' as he termed it; and this account became steadily a memorandum book of exceptional interest, in which the writer noted public and private events and included items of autobiography and biography relating to himself, his family, his friends and other fellow-citizens. This book covered the years 1705-44, and also reverted to the years of his persecution and escape, with a comprehensive account of those trials and adventures. This Diary, as we may term it, lay hidden from human eye for more than a century before it was discovered and examined by a direct line descendant of the diarist.

MEN OF KENT. 3. MINET AND FECTOR OF DOVER

In 1674 Isaac Minet was sent to Dover for two years in order to learn the language and to gain some experience in business at the Custom House of that port. Then he returned to Calais where he assisted his father who died in 1679, after which Isaac soon developed as the main prop of the Minet family consisting of his mother, brothers and sisters. The escape of them all to England and Holland followed in 1686. At first Isaac and his brother Ambroise set up a small shop of liquors and perfumes in Newport Street, London, while Stephen, the youngest brother, established a business in Dover as a general merchant. Stephen died in 1690; and Isaac then decided to settle in Dover and continue there the business of his brother, which was to develop steadily into the reputable and prosperous merchant-banker firm of Minet & Fector. At first Isaac was in possession of nothing more expansive than a 'permit to keep shop'. This did not entitle him to vote; but two years later he was appointed a Freeman of Dover; and in 1705 he became a naturalized Englishman by virtue of his character and the process of law. In the following year he was elected a Common Counsellman; and in 1751—after some years of frustration on account of insular prejudice against 'a foreigner'—he had become a Jurat. Isaac Minet had by this time reached his position as an important and influential citizen of his adopted town.

The Bank of England was founded in 1694; and some time before that year the banking side of Isaac's business had started with his arrangements for the transfer of money and valuables from France on behalf of Protestant refugees. The firm—as we shall presently consider the status of this business—became responsible Shipping Agents, and was the owner of Packet Boats plying between Dover and Calais. This business was carried on at Pier House, Strond Street, which comprised a residence, an office and a warehouse. These buildings were demolished in 1749; and the site now forms part of the Railway premises adjoining the Dover Marine Station. At a later stage three sons of Isaac entered their father's business. Isaac, junr., assisted his father at Dover—Daniel founded the London house which was conducted in association with that of Dover—and William, after gaining experience in Rotterdam and Dieppe, returned to Dover to assist his father, prior to taking over the London house on the death of Daniel in 1730. And so these two associated businesses developed and thrived, and continued to do so, as we shall presently outline in this short account.

Isaac Minet was married to Marie Sauchelle of Flushing; and these two had five surviving sons. We have noted the three of them who entered the businesses of their father; and a fourth, James, went to Berlin where he became established in a firm of bankers. John the eldest was sent to Catherine Hall (since styled St. Catherine's College)



Peter Fector, Esq.

MEN OF KENT. 3. MINET AND FECTOR OF DOVER

at Cambridge, where he obtained his M.A. degree in 1721. After holding two curacies he was presented to the living at Eythorne and also appointed Chaplain of Dover Castle. John Minet married Alice Hughes; and their son Hughes and daughter Mary will be mentioned again in our family story. John Matson (1620-86) had been a prosperous merchant and shipowner of Dover, and had been twice Mayor of the town. Four of his sons entered the business of their father; and it is clearly shown by the entries in Isaac's diary that there was association and friendship between the families of Minet and Matson. Henry Matson, the youngest of the ten sons and a benefactor of Dover Harbour in a big way, was the subject of an article in the *Dover Express* on 17th August 1956. Isaac died on the 8th April 1745, and was buried in the centre aisle of St. Mary's Church in Dover, with the Mayor and Councillors acting as pall-bearers. The tombstone disappeared during the restoration of the church in 1844; but a record of the inscription on it has been preserved. 'In whatever relation of life we consider him—whether as the centre and support of the family in England, or as a man of business, whether as a citizen or as a mainstay of the French congregation in Dover—we are struck by his thoroughness, his clear-headed business capacity, and his overflowing gentleness and kindness of character.' So wrote a descendant who had made a deep study of the career and character of his ancestor. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1745 we can read that 'Isaac Minet truly deserved the character of an honest and good man. Very few men have gone through the world more usefully.'

Thomas was the eldest son of the Calais family. From 1683, until his death fifteen years later, he lived in Canterbury as a grocer and distiller. His daughter Mary married Jeremy Fector of Rotterdam, and their son Peter will now play an important part in our story. At the age of sixteen he came to Dover on a visit to his grand-uncle Isaac, who then offered to his nephew a clerkship in his business. This offer was accepted eagerly by the parents of Peter; and he himself at once proved his readiness and his ability to take full advantage of it. By this time Isaac was advanced in years; and William, his youngest son, was in sole charge of the London business and also assisted his father at Dover. Peter Fector (1723-1814) soon made himself indispensable to them both, so that, with but six months' experience in the counting-house, he was able to write to his uncle (first-cousin-once-removed) William as follows: 'Worthy Sir, I received your most agreeable letter of the 1st inst., and have read the contents with due attention. I make myself more and more capable of the Dover business and take notice of whatever occurs; and hope to make myself entire master of it in time, which you may depend upon. I do not abuse the goodness of your Father: on the contrary I use all possible means to

make myself capable of becoming a good Servant. I have, as you observe, the finest opportunity of making myself acceptable amongst Gentlemen by reason of a great many coming to ye Compting House, of which I take notice in order to fulfil your good Directions.' The young clerk was as good as his word; and he was to steadily assume and maintain a major control of the Dover business.

Soon after the death of Isaac in 1745 Peter Fector was admitted as a partner in the business; and he was then credited with one-third of the stock in trade. Before long he improved his position with the family still more by marriage with Mary, the eldest daughter of the Rev. John Minet of Eythorne. Hughes Minet, the Rector's eldest son, had become a partner in the firm; and, on the occasion of his approaching marriage, legal articles of partnership were drawn up and duly signed. The business of 'William Minet & Co.' was then divided with one-half to William, one-third to Peter and one-sixth to Hughes. In 1761 the share of Peter was increased; and, when William died in 1767, a new deed was signed, under which Peter and Hughes each received one-half, and the business was then carried on under the title of Minet & Fector. It is clear that Peter Fector placed a high value upon his services to the partnership; and it is equally clear that he justified it by his abilities and his industry.

In 1783 the partnership between Hughes Minet and Peter Fector was renewed with an arrangement to bring in the two sons of each partner, viz. John Lewis Minet and Isaac Minet, and John Minet Fector and James Peter Fector. Hughes Minet died in 1813, and Peter Fector in the following year, when the family business became the sole property of the Minets and the Dover firm remained entirely in the hands of the Fectors. John Minet Fector and his son of the same three names carried on the business at Dover until 1842, when the son disposed of it to the National Provincial Bank Limited, which, after three moves, is now to be found at 25 Market Square in the Cinque Port town. John Minet Fector, junr., was Member of Parliament for Dover in 1835-37, and later sat for Maidstone with Benjamin Disraeli (later Lord Beaconsfield) as his co-member. He married Isabella, daughter of General Augustus William Murray, and died without issue.

Peter Fector was buried in the family vault at Eythorne Church, where we can see an inscription for him, his wife, his father-in-law and other members of the family. They had become property owners in that parish, in Sibertswold, and other parts of Kent. The Fector family became extinct in the male line: but in the female line it is represented by the Laurie family. High up on a wall of the Maison Dieu at Dover we can see a half-length portrait painting by Zoffany of 'Peter Fector, Esq., Banker, obiit 1814, aet 90'. The subject is shown in a dark brown suit, with a white collar and ruffles at the cuffs, and a

grey wig with clusters of rolled curls at the sides. This portrait reveals a fresh complexion and a clean-shaven face; and the countenance is full of intelligence and character.

James Peter Fector, the second son of Peter Senior, died in 1804 at the age of 44 years. At first he seems to have lived and worked at the family business in Austin Friars, London: but afterwards he was described as of St. James Street, Dover. On a wall of Old St. James's Church—before it was ruined by the German shells of the Second World War—a memorial inscription testified to 'the remains in the Vault near this place of James Peter Fector'—his infant children Minet and Elizabeth—and Frances his wife—and included a reference to his daughter Mary Frances (wife of Lieut.-Colonel Edward Matson), who was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery.

This Edward Matson (1791-1873) was the second son of Robert and Elizabeth Matson of Borden Parsonage (since styled Borden Hall), near Sittingbourne. He was educated at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, prior to being gazetted to the Royal Engineers. After taking part in the Peninsular and Waterloo Campaigns, he was stationed at the Castle, Dover, for the second time in 1819, and to such good purpose that he improved upon his acquaintance with the Fector family and married the only surviving daughter and considerable heiress. Moreover, by virtue of his marriage to the daughter of an Ancient Freeman, the writer's great-grand-uncle was elected in that same year to be a Freeman of Dover. In 1856, after holding the appointment of Deputy Adjutant-General at the War Office, he retired with the rank of Major-General. His son was a bachelor: the elder daughter a spinster; and the younger daughter married Lieut.-General Sir Henry James, by whom she had two sons but no grand-children.

William Minet (b. 1851) was the fifth in a direct line of descent from Isaac himself; and it was his father who, in 1867, made the first examination of the special Diary. William was a barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple, an M.A., and F.S.A.; and he decided to write *Some account of the Huguenot Family of Minet*. This book was printed privately by Spottiswoode & Co. in 1892; and, in the opinion of this writer—who hereby expresses his gratitude to the author—it is of first-rate value and most readable. In the Preface he writes 'We Huguenots are proud of our descent, with a pride which need not be personal, but should rather be based upon the part our origin has enabled us to play in the country of our adoption.' This writer considers that such a pride was most proper and has been thoroughly justified, as he volunteers his opinion that the Huguenot immigrations into England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were to the moral and material benefit of our country. In character and in ability many of those men were of a high standard.