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Volume 2

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VOLUME 2: THE EXPEDITION OF CAPTAIN
JENS MUNK TO HUDSON'S BAY IN SEARCH
OF A NORTH-WEST PASSAGE IN 1619-20

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BOOK II.—EXPEDITION OF CAPTAIN JENS MUNK,
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THE
EXPEDITION OF JENS MUNK
TO HUDSON'S BAY,

IN SEARCH OF

A NORTH-WEST PASSAGE,

IN

1619-20.

[Translated from Munk's *Navigatio Septentrionalis*

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INTRODUCTION.

I.—*The Life of Jens Munk.*



THE perilous nature, tragic development, and heroic termination of the voyage of Jens Munk to Hudson's Bay cannot fail to enlist the sympathy of all who read of it, quite apart from the interest attaching to it as a voyage of discovery. All through the events of that expedition, the personality of the leader is conspicuous, and the history of Munk's life altogether is well worthy of notice. He was essentially a self-made man, like so many of those whose names are the best remembered; and his varying fortunes in fighting the battle of life, which began for him when he was a mere boy, present a picture of unusual interest, whether we fix our attention on his personal history or on his public achievements. Nobility of character, unflinching devotion to duty, indomitable courage, and the modesty which charms us most in those who need it

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least, always claim admiration, and Munk appears to have been a bright example of each of these qualities. There are few names on the roll of the Danish Navy of which it has better reason to be proud, than that of Munk, the Navigator. Not only amongst the Danish explorers, but amongst those of all the world, he occupies an honourable place. We think ourselves justified, therefore, in submitting to our readers a somewhat fuller account of Munk's life than the object of this volume would in strictness require.¹

The information now available is not sufficient to clear up all uncertainty concerning Jens Munk's descent and family connections. Still, much more is known of him in these respects than can now be ascertained concerning any of the commanders of the English voyages of the same series, owing to the fact that Munk was the son of a man who in his day was well known in Denmark, though, unfortunately, not altogether favourably. Of Munk's grandfather, it was known that his name was Niels Munk, and that he owned an estate called Hjörne, in

¹ The following account, like all other biographies of Munk, is based mainly on one which appeared anonymously in 1723 (see *post*, *Bibliography*, *etc.*). The author of this states that it is extracted chiefly from Munk's own journals, but partly from other trustworthy sources; and its general agreement with the statements of accredited historians and official documents, in so far as it can be tested by such means, bears witness of its truthfulness. Not a few facts have afterwards come to light in various publications, to which reference will be made in the proper places.

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Halland, a province which is now a part of Sweden, but which at that time belonged to Denmark. As he is mentioned in contemporary documents amongst the nobles of Halland, it seems probable that he belonged, though perhaps distantly, to a noble family of the name of Munk, which is now extinct, but which at that time was still flourishing in Denmark. About this, however, nothing further is known. Certain it is that his son, Erik Nielsen Munk—father of our hero, Jens Eriksen Munk¹—was not considered as of noble birth. This, however, may be reconciled with the foregoing statements concerning Niels Munk by assuming that the wife of the latter, whose descent is not known, was a commoner; for the law of Denmark then required, as a condition of inherited nobility, that both parents should be noble. Erik Munk appears to have been a man of considerable ability, who so distinguished himself, both as a naval commander and in other ways, that in reward for his services he received a patent of nobility in 1580. Unfortunately for his children, his wife was simply the daughter of a surgeon. Jens Munk could not, therefore, claim the status of a nobleman, a circumstance which probably was unfavourable to his advancement later in life.

In other and not less serious respects, Munk's

¹ It was customary in Denmark to insert between the Christian name and the family name that of the father, with the addition of *sen* (son) or *datter* (daughter), as the case might be.

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start in life was unpropitious. His father had obtained from King Frederick II, not only a patent of nobility, but the grant of certain so-called Crown-fiefs in Norway, the administration of which would legitimately leave him a handsome income. He resided for some years at Barbo, an estate which he acquired near the modern town of Arendal, a part of which—still called Barbo—is built on land once belonging to him. Here his second son, Jens, was born on June 3rd, 1579. But Erik Munk grossly abused the favours bestowed upon him. In the course of a comparatively short time, he accumulated considerable property, but not by lawful means. Loud and many were the complaints of his oppressive exactions and unjust dealings, which involved him in numerous lawsuits. He was accused of maladministration in cutting down Crown forests for his own use, and of otherwise sacrificing the interests of the Crown to his own private ends. In consequence of these charges, he was in 1585 deprived of his fiefs, and commissioners were appointed to investigate his conduct, with the result that in 1586 he was imprisoned in the Castle of Dragsholm, in Seeland (the same where James Bothwell had died in confinement in 1578), and there he remained for the rest of his life. His wife, who had to leave Barbo, went with her children to reside at Frederiksstad, a small town in the province of Smaalenene, where she died in 1623. In 1588, she sent her younger son, Jens—then nine years old—to his father's sister, who had married a wealthy citizen

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of Aalborg, in Jutland, Frederik Christensen by name, who was burgomaster of the town, and also otherwise a notable man. The boy, however, did not remain here long, but returned to Norway in 1591. Whether he did so on account of being by necessity thrown upon his own resources, or on account of his being naturally of a restless and adventurous disposition, does not appear; but, at any rate, from this time, he had to rely upon himself alone for his maintenance and advancement in the world. His anonymous biographer tells us that in that same year he sailed with a Friesland skipper, named Jacob Gerbrantzson, to England, and thence to Oporto, where he remained for a year with a merchant whom he calls Duart Duez, his object being to learn the Portuguese language. Why he wished to do so is not stated, but it seems probable enough that, having heard of the golden chances offered by the New World, of which the Portuguese then possessed so large a portion, he wished to qualify himself to try his fortune there. Very likely it was with that very object that he had left Aalborg, where he may probably not have seen much prospect of advancement for himself, the penniless son of a disgraced man. At any rate, after spending a year at Oporto, Munk sailed for Bahia, in order, by the advice of his host or employer, to join a brother of the latter who resided there. He was then only thirteen years of age, and worked his passage as a cabin boy. He arrived safely, but only to find that Miguel Duez, with whom he was

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to live, had just left Bahia on a visit to Europe. Munk then elected to remain with the skipper, Albert Jansen of Eynkhusen, with whom he had come across from Europe; and, accordingly, he left Bahia again, in order to accompany the latter on his further voyage. But this was not to be.

In those days, trading vessels on long voyages mostly sailed in fleets for mutual protection against freebooters (who then abounded on the high seas), one of the skippers being chosen admiral. In this case, the fleet numbered thirteen sail, four being Dutch and nine Portuguese. The Admiral chosen was Jan van Bossen, of Embden; the Vice-Admiral was Roland of Flushing; and the Rear-Admiral was Albert Jansen, of the *Schoubynacht* (literally, the *Watch-by-night*), with whom Munk was. As ill-luck would have it, they were attacked (apparently not far from Bahia) by a French fleet, commanded by a Count whose name seems to have been accidentally omitted from the biography, the Vice-Admiral being one Ribold of Rochelle. The Frenchmen are described as freebooters, but this does not seem altogether to have been their real character, for it is stated that their intention was to make themselves masters of Baya de todos los Santos (which is the real name of Bahia) an undertaking which would seem to be rather beyond the scope of mere freebooters. The circumstances of the time (to which, however, there does not seem to have been any allusion in Munk's journal) may sufficiently explain the apparent contradiction. In France, civil war was then raging

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between King Henry III and the so-called *Ligue*, which was supported by King Philip II of Spain, whilst the King of France was especially supported by his Protestant subjects, amongst whose cities Rochelle stood foremost. Remembering, at the same time, that Philip had, eleven years before, obtained possession of Portugal and her dependencies, it appears not improbable that the fleet in question was sent out from Rochelle in order, if possible, to capture Bahia, the principal port of Brazil, even though a certain element of freebooting may have been combined with it.¹

However this may be, a fight ensued between the trading fleet and the Frenchmen, with the result that the leading Dutch ships were taken or destroyed, Albert Jansen's being burnt, and only seven persons saved, of whom Munk was one. The survivors floated on some wreckage until the battle was over, when they were picked up by the French and landed on a part of the coast where they were in great danger of falling victims to the savage natives. Jens Munk, however, after great hardships, succeeded in reaching Bahia, where he maintained himself for eleven months as a shoemaker's apprentice, after which he lived for six months with a portrait painter. At length, Miguel Duez returned from Europe and at once took Munk

¹ An attempt on Bahia had been made by the English in 1588, and another, which was more successful, was made in 1623 by the Dutch, who held possession until 1625.

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into his house. With him, he remained between three and four years, until another stirring adventure caused him—unintentionally, as it seems—to return to Europe.

In 1598, two Dutch vessels arrived at Bahia in order to trade; but, as they had not chosen to furnish themselves with a licence for this purpose from the King of Spain, the Spanish authorities decided to seize and confiscate them, according to the usage of those times. In order to effect this, seven vessels, large and small, lying in the harbour, were manned with soldiers at the dead of night, others being posted along the shore to prevent information being given to the Dutchmen on board, and as many of the latter as were on shore were arrested. Nevertheless, Miguel Duez determined to give the Dutchmen warning. Munk's biographer says that, in so doing, he was moved by an honest care for the Dutchmen, which, perhaps, implies that he had business relations with them; but he was probably moved quite as much by the hatred of the patriotic Portuguese against their new Spanish masters. Howbeit, at the request of Duez, Munk swam out to the Dutch vessels in the roadstead and informed them of their danger—in the very nick of time, as it turned out; for no sooner had they cut their cables and set sail, than the Spaniards were upon them. The Dutch, however, succeeded in beating them off and getting away; and Jens Munk (who, under the circumstances, could not have returned to Bahia if

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he had wished to do so) sailed with them to Amsterdam.

The owners of the Dutch ships showed their gratitude to Munk by liberal presents and offers of employment; and, when he declined the latter, they enabled him to return to Copenhagen, where he is believed to have arrived in the same year (1598), after an absence from Denmark of seven years. Meanwhile his father had died in prison. It does not appear that his cause was ever formally adjudicated upon, presumably because he died before the conclusion of the intricate inquiry and of the complicated lawsuits which arose out of his various transactions. He appears to have tried, but in vain, to appeal to the King's former gracious disposition towards him, and at last, in the year 1594, to have ended his existence by suicide. Owing to this circumstance, all his property, as has been observed,¹ was liable to be forfeited. As a matter of fact, the Crown did retain possession of all his landed property, a very small part of his personal effects being, as a matter of grace, returned to his family in 1598, whilst another portion is believed to have been applied to a public purpose.²

Although only nineteen years of age at the time of his arrival at Copenhagen, Jens Munk at once obtained employment as clerk or accountant on

¹ According to H. D. Lind, *Kong Christian den Fjerde og hans Mænd paa Bremerholm* (Copenhagen, 1889), p. 193.

² Oluf Nielsen, *Kjöbenhavns Historie, etc.* (Copenhagen, 1877), vol. iv, p. 216.

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board a vessel in which he made four voyages to Spain. At that period, Danish noblemen engaged not a little in commercial undertakings, for which they enjoyed special privileges; and, in 1601, Munk entered the service of one of these enterprising *seigneurs*, Henrik Ramel by name, a member of the *Rigsraad* (or Council of the Realm), and a great man—the same after whom Hall, in 1605, named a fjord in Greenland “Ramel’s Fjord”. In his service, Munk made, during four years, fifteen voyages as merchant, mostly to Baltic ports, one to Holland, and one to Spain.

By the end of this time, Munk seems to have acquired sufficient means to commence operations on his own account; and, from 1605, we find him making voyages to different countries in the combined characters of sea-captain and merchant, though at first only as part-owner of ship and cargo. One of these involved him in a lawsuit, of which some record is still extant. It must have been at this time, when he commenced more or less independent voyages, that he had himself enrolled as a citizen of Copenhagen, without which he would not have had a legal status in such undertakings.

At the period in question, the northern seas were attracting considerable attention as a field both of geographical discovery and commercial enterprise. It was then that the expeditions to Greenland treated of in the First Book of this volume were sent out, and both the Danish government and private individuals bestirred themselves

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in order to secure a share of any advantages that might be reaped in those northern latitudes. Munk, too, soon threw himself into this new line of adventure. It is recorded that in 1608 he sailed to Iceland to fetch home a cargo of sulphur from the rich deposits at Husavik. In the following year, he joined a prominent merchant of Copenhagen, Jens Hvid, in an expedition to Nova Zembla, each sailing in his own vessel. But they never reached their destination at all. Jens Hvid appears to have stopped at some port on the main-land, while Munk attempted to press further on; but he did not get much beyond the island of Kulguev, the coasts of which he explored. His biographer of 1723 states that he reached a latitude of $69^{\circ} 8'$, and that he there took care to observe the magnetic variation, which he found amounted to two points. On the coast of this island, Munk's vessel was caught in the ice and became a wreck, so that he and his crew were obliged to take to their boat, and only after a difficult voyage succeeded in rejoining Hvid. On the return journey, they visited Archangel, and the biographer just mentioned reproduces from Munk's notes some elaborate sailing instructions for the approach to that place. By this unlucky expedition, Munk suffered considerable pecuniary loss; nevertheless, we find him attempting Nova Zembla again in the following year, but it was not on his own account.

The young and active King Christian IV exerted himself in every way, in order to develop the

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commerce of his subjects, which, on account of the geographical position of Denmark, had to be carried on chiefly by sea. He was himself passionately fond of the sea. Twice he sailed to England to visit his brother-in-law, James I. Almost every year he sailed to Norway, sometimes twice in one year. Once he visited the whole coast of Norway, rounding the North Cape and proceeding as far as Vardöhuus, on which occasion he himself acted as Admiral of his fleet under the name of Captain Christian Frederiksen,¹ no one being allowed to address him otherwise. He afterwards showed himself an able and gallant naval commander, and was emphatically the Sailor King of Denmark. In order to encourage his subjects, he frequently assisted their seafaring ventures with money, ships, and men, and sent out expeditions to explore and open up new fields for enterprise. Acting in this spirit, he despatched two ships in 1610 to Nova Zembla, which had previously been the object of several English and Dutch expeditions (as, for instance, those commanded by Henry Hudson) undertaken partly with a view of trading in these regions, and partly with a view to the discovery of a North-east Passage to India. The ships in question were the *Angelibrand* (which had been to Greenland in 1606 and 1607, under the command of Carsten Richardson) and a pinnace called *Rytteren*. The former was now commanded by Jens Munk, who most likely

¹ His father was Frederick II.

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was engaged for this service because he had been in those parts before. His mates were Anders Nolk, who had commanded the smallest of the vessels that were sent to Greenland in 1606, and Hans Brock, who was also to act as interpreter, and of whom we shall hear again. The pinnace was commanded by Knud Madsen, he having as mates Anders Oluffsen and Johan Stenge, and as interpreter Niels Munk, Jens Munk's elder brother, who in the instruction is described as "our Russian interpreter".¹ The two vessels were to act independently, but were to keep together as far as possible for mutual assistance. They were instructed to land at Kildin, a trading-place not far from Kola, the goods with which they were to trade, and from thence to proceed to Nova Zembla and to examine the coast from lat. 69° or 70°, as far as lat. 74°, or even 76°, if the ice should permit. If anything in the shape of saleable goods could be obtained, they were to make a cargo. Finally, they were ordered, before returning, to proceed two days' sail into Waygatz Strait, in order to ascertain what conditions it offered for navigation—no doubt with a view to the possibility of finding a North-east Passage to China. Munk, however, was not successful. He brought his vessel home again safe and sound, but with no better cargo than fish, which he had taken on board at Kildin, having been quite unable to reach Nova Zembla on account of the

¹ *Norske Register*, 3, fol. 362.

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great quantity of drifting ice, and because the crew had neglected to supply themselves with sufficient warm clothing to withstand the cold; nor had his companion been more fortunate.

On the first of March in the following year (1611), on the outbreak of a war with Sweden, Munk obtained a commission as a Captain in the Danish Navy, with a pay of 200 Rixdollars annually, and he soon found opportunity of distinguishing himself. He was at once sent to that division of the fleet which was stationed in the mouth of the Götha Elf, watching the entrance to Gothenburg and the small, but strong, fortress of Elfsborg, which was situated on a rocky island. He was at first to serve as a lieutenant to Admiral Jörgen Daa, who commanded the *Heringsnes*; but, later on, he took command of one of the smaller vessels called *Den Sorte Hund* (*The Black Dog*). Amongst the Danish ships here was also *Den Röde Löve*, which had been to Greenland in 1605 and 1606, commanded this time by the before-mentioned Anders Nolk. On the 23rd May, Munk took part in a naval action; and, a few days after, he captured a Dutch vessel laden with supplies for the fortress, an event which must have been considered of importance, as it is related in Niels Slange's work on the history of Christian IV, though without mention of Munk's name.¹ The Danish Admiral was ordered to capture or destroy

¹ *Den storm. Konges Christian den Fierdes . . . Historie* (Copenhagen, 1747, fol.), p. 207.

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seven Swedish vessels which were lying under the cannons of the fortress, and this was accordingly attempted on the night of the 27th of November. On this occasion, Jens Munk commanded the leading boat, but the attack did not succeed, because the Danes were discovered too early and compelled by the guns of the fortress to retire, after having set fire to the largest of the Swedish ships, called *Hector*. The Swedes, sallying out from Elfsborg, extinguished the flames, and the Danes had to content themselves with no greater booty than three of the ships' flags, which were afterwards suspended with other trophies in the Church of Our Lady (*Vor Frue Kirke*) at Copenhagen. This account (which is found in the oft-mentioned biography of Munk of 1723) differs from that given in the work of Slange,¹ who refers the attempt to the 27th of December, and says that the Swedes set fire to the *Hector*, that the Danes extinguished it, and that they succeeded in bringing out the Swedish vessels, which they carried with their own fleet to Copenhagen. Some writers even speak of two attacks. But there is no doubt that Slange has made a mistake, and that the ships were not captured in 1611, a fact which testifies to the truthfulness of the biography and of Munk's notes on which it is founded. We learn from this that Munk remained with the fleet before Elfsborg until the severity of the winter compelled them to leave about Christmas. Adverse winds drove them

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 299-300.

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to seek winter-quarters at Kallundborg, instead of at Copenhagen; and, in the month of March, in the following year (1612), Munk was sent to that place in order to refit the vessels that had wintered there, and to repair to Elfsborg with them, taking himself the command of the *Heringsnes*. This he accordingly did, and placed himself under the command of Admiral Daa, who arrived from Copenhagen with other ships, but Munk retained the command of the *Heringsnes*. Soon after, the King arrived in order to reduce the fortress, having with him considerable land forces, amongst which were two regiments of English and Scotch mercenaries. In the operations which followed, Munk played a considerable part. First, he was ordered to cover with his guns the landing of the troops. In the next place, it was Munk who, with his sailors, cut the trenches. After this, he succeeded, under cover of night, in bringing a couple of smaller vessels past the fortress, thereby cutting off the supplies which had been nightly brought to it by water. Niels Slange¹ gives Munk the whole credit of this difficult operation, but the biographer from whom we gather these details modestly says that Munk assisted the Admiral in getting the vessels round. Munk next pushed the trenches close to the walls of the fortress, and assisted in the landing of the siege-guns and the mounting of them in the batteries prepared for them. Finally, he conducted mining operations

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

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against the walls. Then he returned to his ordinary duties, and, with his ship, the *Heringsnes*, escorted a Danish fleet of transports laden with necessaries for the army. On the 23rd of May, the fortress surrendered, one of the articles of the capitulation being to the effect that the six vessels which still remained under the walls of the fortress should be handed over to the Danes. The Swedes had scuttled the vessels just before the surrender; but both Slange and Munk's biographer say that the Danes at once raised them, and, after repairing them, sent them to reinforce their own fleet. This event has a special interest in connection with Munk's subsequent expedition to Hudson's Bay, because one of them was called *Lampreten* or *Lamprenen*; and, as there was no other vessel in the Danish Navy of that name, it was doubtless the same which Munk had with him on that voyage. Later in the summer, Jens Munk was placed in command of the transports and victualling ships, and he meditated an important expedition into the interior of Sweden by way of the lakes, when his activity was arrested by the outbreak of a very malignant disease amongst the English soldiers. It proved fatal so quickly that Munk had the greatest difficulty in getting the sick transported to the hospitals at Marstrand, which had to be done by sea. At last, having fallen ill himself, he was compelled to go home on sick-leave, and it was only after the lapse of eighteen weeks that he was restored to health.

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After the conclusion of peace, in the early part of 1613, Munk was sent with a fleet to the East Coast of Sweden, in order to fetch home troops, etc. ; and, immediately on his return in the month of April, he was entrusted with a charge of quite a different nature, for which his business habits and his knowledge of languages qualified him. A special Embassy was being sent to Spain, and Munk was ordered to accompany it as interpreter and purser. On the 16th of April, the Embassy sailed from Copenhagen in the *Victor* and the *Swedish Hector* (the largest of the vessels taken at Elfsborg, and so-called to distinguish it from an older Danish ship of that name). On the 6th of May, they arrived at Corunna. The Danish Ambassadors, Jacob Ulfeldt and Jonas Carisius, were accompanied by a suite of not less than ten noblemen, amongst whom were several bearers of names which afterwards became historical in Denmark, such as Palle Rosenkrantz and Christen Thomæsen. They were hospitably entertained at Corunna—the ambassadors at the Governor's Palace, the others by the principal inhabitants—until the 24th of May, when orders were received from Madrid, after which they were conducted at the Governor's expense as far as Villafranca, where they arrived on the 31st. From thence to Madrid they travelled at their own expense, and at Villafranca they had to pay custom duties on their luggage, amounting to not less than 8,000 reals. At Madrid they were well received and entertained

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until the 3rd of July, when the Ambassadors had their Audience of Leave at the Escorial. The party then divided, Jacob Ulfeldt, with two of the suite, returning through France, while the others returned in the ships and arrived at Copenhagen on the 30th of July.

Next year (1614), Munk was again employed in conducting Ambassadors, but this time in a different capacity. Some Russian Ambassadors, who had been in Denmark for many months, desired to return to their home by way of Archangel (Russia possessing at that time no ports on the Baltic); and Munk, who had been there before, as we have told, was commanded to convey them there in his old ship the *Heringsnes*. A number of other persons went by the ship, amongst them Munk's eldest brother, Niels Munk, who, it is stated, was sent to Archangel on the King's service. It was at that time that Christian IV sailed to England on his second visit, so that Munk cannot have accompanied him there.

In 1615, Munk was again afloat on board the *Victor*, this time as lieutenant to his former chief, Admiral Jørgen Daa, who was sent with this ship and another to the North Sea to look after pirates and foreign vessels fishing off the coast of Norway without proper licence. Of the latter, they confiscated several with valuable cargoes: of the former, they captured two, one an Englishman named Thomas Tucker, and the other a certain Mendoses, whose nationality is not mentioned. The pirates were