Guardian of the East India Company

The Life of Laurence Sulivan

George McGilvary

GUARDIAN OF THE
EAST INDIA COMPANY

‘There are roads in solitude and rivers in the
desert, but there are no roads and no rivers in
a man who is always mixed up with other men.’

[Paurvels & Bergier]

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By

George K. McGilvary

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To
Margaret
Ever constant

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Preface

This is the life of a man whose career was centred in London's eighteenth century business world. He worked from India House in Leadenhall Street, headquarters of the East India Company, but with a place reserved for him at the highest levels of national government.

The book concentrates upon what went on in London and from the perspective of the Company's leader. It is not a recitation of what happened in the Indian sub-continent – although Sulivan's policies with regard to India and reaction to events and other particulars originating there do come into play.

As well as management of all manner of domestic business, he and his fellow Directors had to deal with the impact made by events taking place abroad. The cataclysmic eruptions overseas, beginning with war in 1756, invariably affected the Company as well as the 'City' and Parliament.

This life at the heart of business in London, and at the centre of power in the Company (as often as not its chief spokesman) led Sulivan into deep involvement in the nation's affairs. Consistently, he was caught up in many of the major developments and controversies of the time. Some of these crises and events in which he was involved have already been subjected to analysis by others, but lack the 'Sulivan' dimension.

The most arresting feature about Sulivan was the extent to which he lived just for the East India Company. It dominated his waking and sleeping hours. He was a living encyclopaedia upon its affairs, forever up-to-date regarding business, home and abroad. He was the Company's guardian angel, continually striving to ensure that it would suffer no wrong.

Assumption of such an all-knowing role sprang from natural ability and length of service, but he also wanted to don such a mantle. Whether in or out of the Company's executive at India House he found himself resolving things or having to make decisions. Invariably he did so almost single-handed, although working within the bounds of committee structures and factions.

For great swathes of time Sulivan controlled India patronage, so much so that within public and private circles he was known as a 'king maker'. He was also an arch politician, a negotiator and manipulator. If the Company was involved in any way, he was the man who just had to be consulted. In or out of executive office he served as a human interface, enabling Company servants, Directors and Proprietors to come together; with whom Parliamentary interests and commercial entrepreneurs found common ground; and where developments in India, attendant problems, upheavals, and all else, found an understanding mind.

During a century of change, he was energetically involved at the centre of power. He is to be found planning and executing naval and military strategies; commanding and supplying adequate manpower, equipment and supplies for war and other emergencies; while running everyday concerns and liaising with Governments. His aims and achievements were to impact upon countless individuals, and affected British society then and in future years.
The ramifications of much that he was engaged in reached outwith British shores. His exploits also shed additional light on the lives of many of those he was involved with, such as Chatham, Clive, Hastings, Burke and Pitt the Younger. The qualities and abilities he displays are breathtaking.

Sulivan regarded himself as a public man (and was looked upon as such) although strictly speaking he was a London business man, a director and proprietor of a private monopolistic Company. The fact of the matter, however, is that he was part of the governing nexus, shaping the future direction of events in the Indies and in Britain; and his role was crucial at a time when the Company's new relationship with the state was being re-defined.

He is certainly important enough to justify the in-depth treatment given here. Moreover, in analysing why he sought such power over the East India Company in the first place, and why he fought so stubbornly for the Honourable Company's interest and survival against individuals and governments alike, a very human story emerges. Not least, in this respect, are the implications of his financial tragedy, for himself and his family and the others it touched, such as the Burkes.

A striking fact to emerge is how very well known Sulivan was during his years of complete control of the East India Company, a feature that is more marked when contrasted with today's woeful ignorance. He was regarded as something of a phenomenon then. In London, from 1757 to 1786, he was the subject of gossip, newspaper comment and pamphlet war. His name was as well known to contemporaries as that of other public figures from all walks of life. He was always to be found showing the way at India House, whose Courts and committee rooms he graced for 31 years.

His achievements were many and the following list signifies some of the specific and striking claims that he can lay claim to:-

- He was the accepted leader of the largest and most powerful private Company on earth at that time.

- In all probability he was the most able individual ever to be involved with East India Company business and its most astute servant. No one else approaches him in stature.
- He ranks beside Clive and Hastings in East India Company history; and figures large in the story of Britain's imperial ventures.
- Sulivan was mainly responsible for eventual success in the East Indies against the French and their allies. He (not Chatham) orchestrated Company forces operating in the east; and he was responsible, in particular, for success in the Indian theatre of the Seven Years War.
- Clause 11 in the final treaty of peace was every word his own.
- He was on hand again from 1778 to 1784, helping the Company through the chaotic war situation in the Carnatic.
- While in Bombay he fearlessly exposed fraud and corruption, at every level; and initiated reforms in Customs, and the collection of revenues. These improvements and alterations he later implemented in every Presidency.
- Following his struggle to gain control of the Company, beginning in 1757, he initiated and carried through the financial rescue of 1758/59, saving the organisation from bankruptcy.
- By increasing exports of materials and goods to India, while cutting back in specie, he commenced a revolution in commerce.
- He completely overhauled and reorganised the Company's secretarial structure at India House to meet the new demands put upon it.
- He resolutely resisted moves towards autonomy in India, particularly Bengal, maintaining control from India House.
- He was the creator, champion and guardian of Warren Hastings – who he deluged with proposals and detailed plans.
- In London he organised and led the defence of the Governor-General against ministerial attack, whether or not this was understood at the time by his friend in Bengal.
- He was largely responsible for the appointment of Lord George Macartney as Governor of Madras; and for the appointment of many others to high position.
- He was a more than adequate adversary of his one time friend and business colleague, Robert Clive, in the feud that developed from 1759 onwards.
- He and Edmund Burke conducted an increasingly serious quarrel after prior joint-business adventures left them both impoverished.
- Their enmity was conducive to Burke's alignment with Clive; so much so that despite his Lordship's death, his struggle with Sulivan transformed into one of Burke/Francis versus Sulivan/Hastings. All of this had a bearing on the subsequent impeachment of Warren Hastings.
- Much of Sulivan's thinking is reflected in the India Act of 1784. From as early as 1757 he began planning reform of the Company at home, and of its settlements abroad. Over the years ministerial bureaucrats such as

Atkinson and Jenkinson clandestinely sought his advice and expertise. Finally he was asked for and placed his suggestions and essential details for reform before Robinson and Dundas. Much of what he said contributed to Pitt's Act.

In the years since his death he has been all but forgotten. Today there is an almost general ignorance of what he accomplished. Although somewhat puzzling, this is perhaps not altogether surprising, because the world of the Honourable Company remained quite impenetrable for a long time. Not much of its inner workings were known about by ordinary citizens during his lifetime; and until fairly recently the East India records remained a rather daunting area of study. The workings of the Company were tortuous, and its relationship with the state particularly so. However, modern scholars, like Professor Marshall, have added to the work of Namier, Sutherland and Philips, to name but a few, in clarifying much of this. More recently, a flurry of articles and Ph.D.s dealing with problems that involved the Company, have cleared away some mystery and confusion.

All of this might go some way to explain why until now there has been no major analysis of Sulivan's career. He has only figured within the context of other studies; or is mentioned in passing and in part, elsewhere. A limited biography of him exists in the *History of Parliament* (two pages); he appears in the *Dictionary of National Biography, Missing Persons,* published in 1993; and in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* of 2004. The other published in-depth treatment is to be found within the structure of the late Dame Lucy Sutherland's, *East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*. There are some mentions in specialised histories – especially those eulogising Clive – and in a few academic treatises, such as my own examination of the early part of Sulivan's life.[1]

His particular significance was remarked upon by at least four eminent historians: L.S. Sutherland, K. Feiling, C.H Philips and A.M. Davies.[2] They all agreed that his life must be understood in order to determine many of the developments at the heart of British political, economic and imperial affairs between 1757 and 1786; and to bring into focus several questions that remain unanswered. So much began with him, passed through his hands or was affected by his thoughts and personal objectives that understanding him is pivotal to much else. Hopefully, this work makes the pattern clearer.

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As the bibliography will make clear, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the staff of libraries, record offices and private collections the length and breadth of Britain and Ireland. These are too numerous to name individually, but I thank them, each and every one.

Of course, any new work owes much to the labours of scholars who have gone before, and to that of contemporaries; little of significance could be produced otherwise. In this respect I have benefited enormously and pay my due respects.

Lastly, I thank my wife Margaret for her patience and encouragement, together with her determination to see that I brought this work to a conclusion.

The form and spelling of Indian words used are based on the *Handbook of Oriental History,* edited by C.H. Philips, 2nd edition, London, 1963. Round brackets encompass words I have introduced that were omitted in the originals, or they have been inserted to make the meaning clear.

1

Bombay and Origins 1713-52

1

Portraits of Laurence Sulivan in mid-life suggest that when Elizabeth Owen first set eyes on him she beheld a lively young man, bursting with energy. Of small-to-middling height, around five feet six or seven, he must have bewitched her with his expressive blue eyes, arching eyebrows and fair hair. He possessed a strong, well-proportioned build. From later accounts, it seems his voice was of an even modulation. His attire and whole manner said he was a gentleman. He had a stamp of quality, of authority and awareness. He must have appeared different, interesting, exciting.

By her portraits, she was of a similar height and build to her husband-to-be. Her slightly long, well-proportioned face and general air of languor balanced one another; while her eyes were large and calm. Auburn hair framed the whole countenance. It was an appearance that bespoke natural repose.

They were married on 20 August 1739 in the Anglican Church, Bombay. He was twenty-six years old, she twenty-five. The wedding was a formal affair, the ceremony according to the rites of the Church of England, to which his wife belonged. From his many negative words on the subject, Sulivan went along with the church ritual since it was expected of him. Later in life he constantly described himself as 'an infidel'. Elizabeth Owen, on the other hand, remained a devout Christian all her days.

Despite the heat, flies and general discomfort of an Indian midsummer, the ceremony was subject to the formal protocol and strictures that governed everything in the English East India Company's Presidencies. Even during this most personal of occasions, pride of place went to the Governor, Stephen Law, and his spouse Martha; then to ex-Governor John Horne followed by Members of Council and their wives. The marriage was solemnised by the Reverend James Chapman. It must have been a severe trial, and it can only be hoped that the subsequent banquet was more relaxed than the actual ceremony.

The notification in the Bombay records of his wedding to Elizabeth Owen is the first indication anywhere that Laurence Sulivan existed. That he was born on 24 April 1713 is only known from a letter written by him in January 1782. The date he arrived in Bombay is a mystery, but he was there no earlier than 25 November 1738. Governor Stephen Law authorised a census of European inhabitants in Bombay reaching that far back and he does not appear. Nor is he present among Company servants in the factories; or in the lists of European inhabitants, free merchants and itinerant travellers in Bombay, Surat, Tellicherry, Madras or Calcutta.

The facts regarding his future wife are a little more copious. She appears from January 1738 onwards, among the European inhabitants in Bombay as a single woman. She had applied to join her brother Edward Owen, a covenanted servant, formally employed in the Bombay treasury where he 'weighed off the treasure that came from England – counted and packed the money to the Factories and signed the notes for the land marine paymasters.'[1]

It seems likely that Sulivan worked alongside Edward Owen, and that this led to an introduction then romance with his sister Elizabeth. Their father was possibly Richard Owen, Master of the *Bombay Merchant*. He was a free merchant* at Bombay and Surat in 1720. An Edward Owen, a Director* of the Company (and one of its accountants) was probably an uncle. He died in London in 1729.

Elizabeth Owen's family did not welcome Sulivan as a suitor. His own words to his son on the matter are clear enough, 'Your mother's relations all loved me as a friend and intimate, but dreaded and strongly opposed the union. And it was pronounced that your mother would be unhappy.'[2]

He would appear to have been the sort of rake young ladies travelling to India were entreated to beware of. They were to be 'Careful of their conduct...to guard against the ruin of their reputation...and in all things, to show prudence.'[3] He admitted as much later, saying that prior to his marriage he was 'wild, dissipated and a favourite with both sexes'.[4] Certainly, his conversation seems to have been very entertaining; and he was doubtless then an amusing, perhaps slightly disorientated, young man.

His inheritance must have been small for him to be in India at all: a few contacts, certainly a good education and a bright intelligence. However, he would not have been considered a good match and in all likelihood was known or presumed to have few possessions and even less prospects. On the other hand, he was looked upon as a gentleman and accepted as such. His speech, good manners, dress and deportment had to convince his superiors – not to mention his wife-to-be, of a certain status.

The speed of their courtship was remarkable by English standards, although perhaps not by those of Bombay, where the unhealthy climate and peculiarities of such a closed world bore down heavily. Nevertheless, the Governor's permission had to be sought. Weddings within the European community in Bombay were not too plentiful in the years 1738 and 1739. Apart from her own and that of her brother Edward to Ann Tolson in 1738,

which had occasioned her visit to Bombay in the first place, there were only three others. Theirs was to be a match that lasted until death separated them.

For Laurence Sulivan everything changed with marriage. The vagaries of his previous existence ended. He set about forging a completely different approach to life. It might have been triggered by his new responsibilities; or perhaps the fact that his Owen relations did not consider him good enough stirred him to do something.

He admired what he later termed his wife's 'prudence, discreetness and sagacity...in some few instances...perhaps carried too far, yet 9 times in 10 she will be found on the right side'.[5] She was to be his main support throughout his life; and he nearly always asked her opinion of his ideas and decisions. The immense trust and affection she was held in is identifiable in all his correspondence.

Elizabeth Sulivan certainly worked a profound change in her new husband. She reached into the depths of his being to such an extent that he could not bear the thought she might think him unworthy. With his wife's total trust and support, he saw the path he must tread. That being said, his new awakening and kindling ambition were kept well hidden: 'My line was marked, unknown to all, and its success depended upon resolution and perseverance.'[6]

Marriage was hugely important to the development of Sulivan's career because of the determination it bred in him. He also had the respectability and security personified in Elizabeth Owen. Although a picture of the young Sulivan remains a little hazy, a clearer image begins to emerge by 1740, shown most distinctly in the way he approached his work. He now spent every morning at his official employment and every afternoon on his own affairs. He 'shut out every other temptation', broke all former habits, and severed all connection with those comrades of his former life.[7]

2

In the absence of irrefutable evidence of Sulivan's life before he arrived in Bombay, the conclusions reached must rest on inference. It is only possible to detect some echoes of an early life from later interests, by taking account of his skills, the travels he made, suggestions culled from later correspondence, and assorted gleanings. These, the attitudes he struck, duties performed in Bombay, and what he seemed comfortable with, tell quite a lot. Everything hints at a general legal and accountancy background, such as would be familiar to a notary public. He was almost certainly connected in some way with shipping and cargoes.

This practical acquaintance with activities peculiar to shipping and trade included particular skills like ship insurance, and the lading of cargoes. He knew about the transfer of mercantile goods and money; and was thus aware of the intricate relationships involving ships' captains, entrepreneurs and merchants. He was expert in measuring profit margins from freight transfer, of assessing shipping costs and other associated distribution dues. This training and knowledge is reflected in his own private records; and is signified

by his intimate knowledge and understanding of the problems faced by the Company's marine service. A close connection with its shipping interest* was maintained throughout his life.

That he received this early training in Cork is suggested by some exceptional coincidences during his years in Bombay, concerning people who hailed from there and must be thought of as relations. The first of these was a Commander John Sullivan (or O'Sullivan) from Cork, who was involved in the country (coastal) trade,* especially at Bombay and along the Malabar Coast during the years Laurence Sulivan was there.[8] Also, a Commander James Irwin, again a probable relation, and also from Cork, appears on these shores at this time.[9]

Later in life he helped members of their families to a quite extraordinary degree. Contemporaries regarded their various offspring as his kinsmen, often referring to them as such. Help and opportunity in the first instance, therefore, possibly came to young Sulivan through these men. Captain Irwin was probably the prime mover. Dating from the early 1730s, he had been a free trader in India. Earlier he was at St. Helena before becoming involved with the East India Company. Irwin sailed on a brig called the *Mary* during these early years.[10]

This ship, or at least a ship called the *Mary,* appears significant. It is perhaps too coincidental that on 27 July 1708, by an 'Instrument of Attestation', a Captain Robert Irwin was Commander of the ship *Mary*, of Dublin, 'burthen about 64 tons'.[11] This vessel could have sailed from Ireland to the Indies in order to participate in the country trade.

From 1736, and earlier, Captain James Irwin (perhaps a relation of Commander Robert Irwin) traded along the coasts of India, being in Madras that year, acting as a Supercargo,* not in the Company. In 1737 he was working the Madras coast, still on board the *Mary*, but now in the Bengal service. By 1739 he had become part-owner and Master of the *Mary*. The other title holder was an Anthony Upton. It is perhaps no coincidence that in 1739 this same man was President of the Mayor's Court Bombay, when Laurence Sulivan served as an Alderman. Sulivan also remitted money for him.

Sometime between 1743 and 1751 Captain Irwin married a Sarah Beale in St. Helena.[12] He was to die in Bengal on 20 June 1752. Before his demise he had bought the estate of Hazeleigh in Essex, a clear sign that he had managed to accumulate a sizeable fortune. A great intimacy existed later between Sulivan and all members of his family, but especially with his eldest son, Eyles Irwin.[13] All Irwins of the next generation, who were the offspring of Captain James Irwin, were patronised by Sulivan and given good positions in the Company's various services.

There were quite a number of private ships from Britain involved in the country trade; interlopers who were there in defiance of the monopoly. They swelled the so-called 'separate stock' of Company ships licensed at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and let out for private trade. It might be the case, therefore, that sometime during 1737 or early 1738,

Sulivan sailed east on board the *Mary*, perhaps then owned by Anthony Upton, accompanying his kinsman, Captain James Irwin, at that time a Supercargo.

On board, Sulivan would have acted as his assistant. It is probable that around 1738 Commander John Sullivan (O'Sullivan) of Cork City, whose mother was Elizabeth Irwin (Mrs. Philip O'Sullivan), also captained the *Mary*. He and Captain James Irwin were probably brothers-in-law. Laurence Sulivan can be envisaged learning the duties of a Supercargo under the supervision of these men, en route to India.[14] But no matter how he arrived in eastern waters, he was certainly employed in a private capacity. Working on board such a coastal vessel, he would rapidly learn the avenues open to exploitation. Another discovery would be that in the layered society of the European settlements free traders held an inferior rank. Company servants were regarded as superior, and had more rights and privileges.

Some deductions regarding his Irish origins are possible. Evidence, including that relating to Commanders John Sullivan (O'Sullivan) and James Irwin, points to his being very closely related to Benjamin Sulivan of Cork, son of Philip O'Sullivan and his wife Elizabeth Irwin.[15] Benjamin and Commander John Sullivan (O'Sullivan) were brothers. Laurence and Benjamin were the only ones, however, to spell their surname with one 'l', and dropped the 'O'. This might signify their choice of Benjamin's mother's Protestant religion. Benjamin was a lawyer and conversion was required to practice in Ireland. Laurence Sulivan had some legal training.

What is more, the O'Sullivan More coat of arms (with a few minor differences from the traditional) formed the right half of Laurence Sulivan's seal. On the left was a rampant lion crowned with a coronet.[16] He and his son continued throughout life to use these heraldic arms, which were eventually granted on 13 July 1801 to Sir Benjamin Sulivan, Knight, eldest son of the above Benjamin Sulivan of Cork.

The interest shown by Laurence Sulivan in the family of Benjamin Sulivan of Cork was striking. He helped them all, and particularly the three older sons: Benjamin, John and Richard Joseph Sulivan. He launched them into life via the East India Company and set them on their way to riches and firm establishment in English society. He also helped the youngest son Henry Boyle Sulivan until his early death, and the sisters too.[17]

In the eyes of contemporaries Laurence and Benjamin Sulivan were very closely associated, though Laurence would only admit they were 'relations', and 'a family connection'. In London in the early 1760s, the two of them spent hours in social chat. The mystery arises from Laurence stating many times that Benjamin's family was connected to him, but saying no more; and in his non-appearance in all pedigrees traced.[18] Benjamin senior arrived in London in 1761 or just after, and in all probability it was Laurence Sulivan's dazzling leap to prominence that attracted him to the city. He died and was buried there in 1767.

The contact between the families is best illustrated by Laurence Sulivan's patronage of Benjamin's sons, though in the early 1760s he also lent

Benjamin between £200 and £300. In a letter, written some time later to John Sulivan (the second son), he said: 'Having in a former letter desired you to pay what your father owed me to Col. Wood, the death of that gentleman obliges me to request this money may be paid to Mr. Roger Darvall.'[19]

Laurence Sulivan also helped Philip, the only son of Commander John Sullivan (O'Sullivan), Benjamin Sulivan's brother. The youth was provided with a post in the Company's military branch, reaching the rank of Captain. Sulivan said to his son Stephen in 1778: 'Be kind to Philip O'Sullivan if he merits your attention.'[20] His other connection was with the family of Captain James Irwin, whose son Eyles Irwin was helped enormously. It is very likely that Captain James Irwin, of the ship *Mary*, was related to Elizabeth Irwin, wife of Philip O'Sullivan (mother and father of Benjamin Sulivan), and that in some way both were related to Laurence Sulivan. Like Captain James Irwin, Elizabeth Irwin stemmed from Counties Cork and Roscommon.

Sulivan never seems to have said who his parents were, where he was born or made any mention of his childhood and upbringing.[21] The reason why can only be guessed at; but he stemmed from an older, Anglo-Norman, Catholic and perhaps even Jacobite background. Prejudice against the Irish was rife, and he would not want contemporaries to dwell on his name, although many might have entertained suspicions of him.[22]

Despite declared adherence to the King, Constitution and religion of England, a prerequisite for his position, his enemies would have attacked without mercy. Perhaps he concluded that it was best to blank out his origins. He never mentioned ancestry or lineage, certainly not in writing. No family connection ever stated just what the relationship was, either by salutation or by inference. Naturally, such a course of action would require great care and a kind of grim determination by him and by others in the know. However, it is certainly plausible; secrecy was a central plank with Sulivan, allowing his career to go ahead, unhindered.

Logic, which (apart from the occasional but deadly mad gamble) seems to have always predominated with him, would have dictated that he must close and utterly forget the early chapter of his life, and merge with the English code. This might have influenced his marriage and entry to the Company. He wanted to become a high-ranking member of the established order, and in effect this is what he did become.

3

When he first appeared in Bombay, the English Company was competing successfully against the entrenched Portuguese, Dutch and French, though these were only fringe struggles in a subcontinent dissolving into chaos. The Mughal Empire, weakened and corrupt, was falling apart. Real power was being wrested from the emperor by his feudal vassals, primarily the Nawabs of the various regions. Warring tribes like the Marathas wreaked havoc. Skirmishes at sea against the Dutch and Portuguese were common.

Although its commerce continued to increase, Bombay remained the third ranking Presidency in terms of size and popularity. This might suggest that it

was reliance on his relations that determined Sulivan would go to there; although the country trade along the Malabar Coast was good at that particular time. This freight (mostly Asian) was carried in British vessels; partly explained by superior British seamanship and navigation skills. A boom occurred in the period 1700 to 1742; and English shipping involved in the country trade doubled from 3,000 to 7,000 tons. With it came a demand for more mariners.

Bombay was always the unhealthiest Presidency; few children survived (as Sulivan would know all too personally). Society, for the most part, retained an English character, superimposed upon that of the native Indian. There was an easy understanding and tolerance. However, all understood that there was only one sovereign power, the English one. A stiffness and hauteur attended every public function; position and seniority governed social standing. This labelling was even reflected at worship in Bombay cathedral.

The settlement also had its wilder side; there was a great deal of intermarriage and concubinage. The Mayor's Court* records show ample evidence of this. Gambling was the pet vice. All kinds of card games were played. The taverns dealt with the huge demand for backgammon and billiards. Drinking, especially of heavy red wines, was widespread.

Slavery was practised, something the Company considered almost solely in economic terms. If Sulivan felt anything, he kept quiet. At the very least, he would have known of the profitable returns to be made from this vile commerce. He would have been aware too, of other dubious activities going on in this area, associated with piracy. Ships belonging to all the European trading nations were plundered. The most fearsome was the Maratha Admiral, Kohanji Angria. At the same time the brilliant horsemen of the Maratha confederation controlled inland routes; to such an extent that Governor Stephen Law had the main gates to the city strengthened and a constant watch kept. This accounted for Bombay expenditure rising to £26,338 in 1736, then to £37,500 by 1744. It also led to Law's recall in 1742 by a non-comprehending Court of Directors.

Sulivan could get to India only by sea – the overland route was not in operation until much later. Also, he had to do a job, fulfil some duty. He was not a seaman, nor a medical man; but very soon after his first appearance in Bombay, working in a private capacity, he was to become a successful businessman – as well as an excellent Company servant. This hints at prior knowledge and training. Yet he said little of this or of his travels. He made mention of only one occasion:

> I borrowed my ideas not only from reading but an instance which will never depart from my memory,…the Dutch deposit all their power with their Governor General…A certain habit with a truncheon proclaims his office. After the dreadful massacre of the Chinese at Batavia, Baron Imhoff held the truncheon until he had saved and secured that important settlement from destruction.[23]

This eyewitness account shows that he was on the island of Java during the initial part of Baron Gustav Wilhelm Von Imhoff's period of service as 'Raad' (Ruler) of the Dutch East Indies. The Baron reached Batavia in March 1740. By this time Sulivan was married to Elizabeth Owen, but it probably typifies the sort of commercial voyages he had already been involved in. This journey was almost certainly his last before entry to the East India Company's service.

4

Although it is only during Governor Stephen Law's tenure of office that Sulivan appears in the Bombay records in an official role, he had served his predecessor, Governor Horne, in a personal capacity for some time. There is no doubt, however, that Stephen Law becoming Governor in April 1739 was a fortunate and significant occurrence for him. As well as becoming his immediate master, Law assumed the position of patron; and then friend and confidant.

His place of work was Bombay Castle, in a room right next to that of the Governor. From him he learned much that had nothing to do with tiresome accounts. He became aware of the subtle undertones of Bombay society; and developed a thorough understanding of relationships with the local native powers and rival European trading nations. Most of all, he was given an insight into the usage of power. The art of exuding authority (if it can be taught at all) was learned from Governor Law. He and Sulivan were friends for life.

Ironically, in view of his later importance within the organisation, Sulivan's entry into the Company's service was extremely inconspicuous. On 17 March 1740, faced with a shortage of men, Law asked for three covenanted servants to help him. When they were not forthcoming, he called upon the Council to allow Sulivan to be his assistant, on a temporary basis. He was to be paid 80 rupees per month, the sum his predecessor, Governor Horne, had paid him out of his own pocket for also being his assistant.

The Governor did not have the authority to take Sulivan into the service, he could only advise such action to the Directors. His recommendation to this effect was included in the Bombay General Letter* that went to England on board the *Harrington*. After clearance from India House and a security of £1,000 paid in London by ex-Governor Horne and a Thomas Waters, he was formally entered in the records. As well as his duties for Law, Sulivan was employed clearing up the mess of Horne's personal affairs, abandoned on his return to England. Almost all of these were bound up with the country trade.[24]

The appointment was backdated to 1 January 1740, the date he had actually commenced the duties spoken of in March 1740. Also, although theoretically merely a personal secretary to Law, he obviously already had experience of the various branches of public business. He could not otherwise have been able to cope with what had been the work of three covenanted servants. It is almost certain that from April 1739, when the

Governorship changed hands, until January 1740, Sulivan worked in the morning on Company business in the new Governor's office. In the afternoon he would be busy with ex-Governor Home's private affairs. He would have received payment from both. During the course of the four years he worked there, from 1739 to 1742, he applied himself with great diligence.

His initial appointment on 13 February 1741 was as 'assistant to the President', with the rank of Factor. As a covenanted servant he received a good deal more than a salary. He was provided with free food, quarters and servants; and bought wine at special low rates. Remuneration was used more for pocket money than for maintenance. Wages were paid at six monthly intervals. The experience beside Governor Law provided him with telling insights; and enabled him later, when a Director of the Company, to deal with problems which were beyond the grasp of most Directors and Proprietors,* who had spent no time in India.[25]

Disaster struck, however, with Stephen Law's recall in November 1742 for over-spending. John Geekie, senior member of the Council, became acting Governor until William Wake arrived eleven days later. Geekie had no love for Sulivan, nor did Wake trust the disciple of the man he had replaced; although he continued to use him in a capacity similar to that established by his predecessors.

There is a hint of the unhappiness this change brought in a letter to his son, written many years and a lifetime of experience later: 'Take a little pains to be well... show an affected openness...but be close…watch...narrowly...it was not my practice and I suffered for it. I knew myself honest and thought caution unnecessary, which made me the dupe of many a fool.'[26]

Wake neglected him, and there was nobody in England with sufficient influence to speed his promotion; Stephen Law was not yet established. Nevertheless, Sulivan was determined to build a career within the Company, and gain financial independence. He also wanted knowledge and experience of every aspect of business. As his life would show, he was not the sort of man to quit easily.

5

Sulivan became fully immersed in the life of the settlement. On 20 December 1739 he was elected an Alderman in the Bombay Mayor's Court, at a time when the President of the Court, Anthony Upton, was away from the island. He remained an Alderman until 1743, attending Court regularly. Here, at first hand, he was involved with Indians in their own arena, with all the noise and fractious behaviour associated with life at street level. It was a joyous kaleidoscope, a seething world of heat, smells and sounds.

He handled wills, administrations and cases involving legal wrangles over commerce, on behalf of Asian and European alike. As suggested, his involvement in such work – from his very first appearance in Bombay – points to him being already skilled in legal and notary public techniques. He also acted for others in business and legal affairs, carrying their warrant of attorney. He was honest, thorough and had a sound knowledge of

procedures, of the intricacies of the coastal trade and of local commerce. Unsurprisingly, many lawsuits were against ex-Governor Horne. Sulivan's four years of attendance suggests that real ability and knowledge were brought to bear.

Those of the Owen family still alive in Bombay could hardly be expected to have foreseen this complete change of character and lifestyle that Sulivan achieved so soon after marriage. He was happy with domestic life, and showed blinding devotion to his wife and son Stephen, born on 22 October 1742. The child was the second born, named after Governor Stephen Law. Two other children died: Martha, born 18 October 1740, died 12 November 1740; and Laurence, born 6 June 1745, died April 1748. The death of this little boy, when almost three years old, was particularly heartbreaking. In addition, he and his wife were to care for the widow and two surviving daughters of his wife's brother, Edward Owen, who died around 1745. These nieces, Elizabeth ('Betsy') and Anne ('Nancy') Owen were born on 24 October 1741 and 14 September 1743, respectively.

So many deaths prompted him to send Stephen to Britain around 1748. His nieces appear to have accompanied the boy. Later, in 1752, Adriana, the wife of his friend and follower, John Spencer, hoped that on arrival in England the Sulivans would be 'blessed with finding in Master Stephen the satisfaction you have so long wished for'.[27] It is very likely that the children joined Stephen Law, who occupied a house on the west side of Queen Square. Later, Sulivan too would have a long association with this particular neighbourhood.

The desire to get rich carried most Europeans to the Indies; but it took a long time if no patronage was available, to propel a young man into one of the more lucrative positions. Even though there were many perks, the Company paid a miserable salary. Servants were expected to barter and trade to better their lot and spent a great deal of their time so employed.

Money was made through recognised channels: private trade, money-lending and also accepting presents and perquisites from wealthy and important Indians, although this was something Sulivan always frowned upon. Nevertheless, he was adept at all other means of accumulating wealth. During the years in Bombay he was active in pursuit of riches, though not to the detriment of public duties.

His sharp business acumen was put to great use; and his skill helped amass a moderate fortune, which was all that he desired. His personal business ventures were launched while in Governor Horne's employ. He was markedly busy in the country trade, both on his own and on the Governor's behalf. His employment along the same lines in private work for Governors Law and Wake is witnessed by his name appearing on many and various papers; such as that on a bond of November 1739 concerning the goldsmith, Servaji Dharmseth.

These activities as a private trader were important then and for the future. Here he made his connections, and many became close business colleagues. That his maritime connections were numerous is confirmed by the many

references to deals with ships' commanders. He dealt with sets of certificates, such as those 'on account of a Captain Thomas Brown'; and others 'on account of Captain Charles Foulis'. He handled President Wake's freight charges for goods going on the *Salisbury* to Gombroon.

It was during these years that he developed a close partnership with Captain Samuel Hough, Captain Thomas Lane and John Spencer, which was referred to later as 'The Marine Society'. The activities of this group, after his arrival in England, assumed even more importance. These men became special business friends. Spencer was to uphold the India end of the triple business enterprise. Captain Hough was an important figure in the Bombay navy.[28] Captain Thomas Lane developed into Sulivan's closest confidant and his man of business. Sulivan would later use him as a cover for his own hidden machinations at Leadenhall.* He arrived in England a year ahead of him, sailing from Bombay in December 1751.[29]

They were only three of a legion of friends and business acquaintances he was assembling, who would be central to his future success in London. The most important, apart from those mentioned, were Commander (later Sir) William James and Commander James Barton. The list of his friends among Company servants, 'Country' Captains and free traders is just as impressive. To these can be added many who later gave their support in England.[30] Of course, he made enemies too: Governor Wake, Charles Crommelin, William Price and perhaps Henry Savage, fall into this category.

There were other activities by which Sulivan acquired wealth, in doing so securing even more friends and business acquaintances. For nearly all of his time in Bombay he acted as an attorney and administrator, executor and trustee, for his colleagues – distinct from his duties in the Mayor's Court. He was involved to such a degree that he either displayed a new, exceptional skill, or (as indicated in his Mayor's Court duties) came to Bombay already qualified for such work.

In 1741 he was involved (together with Edward Owen and a John Lambton) as an attorney on behalf of ex-Governor Horne. Sulivan was required to make the goldsmith-cum-financier, Servaji Dharmseth, pay to the Company money that Horne had stood security for. He had to be as shrewd in understanding the minds and business habits of native Indian merchants as he was in his handling of Europeans.

Dealing with the estates of others gave him further room for manoeuvre. In December 1751 he and Hough bought bills in Bombay for the estate of Benjamin Lowe, deceased. On 8 December 1752 they did the same again, this time for the estate of an Alexander Fogue also dead. The money involved totalled £5,241-4-6, which was to be paid through the 'current account' in London. Nobody was specified, but as attorneys for the estates Sulivan or Hough picked up this money. This type of activity continued almost until the day of his departure. On 12 December 1752 he and a John Sewell were defendants in the Mayors Court for a Wifran set Savajee, against an action brought by William Sedgwicke. Then on the same day, together

with Thomas Byfield, he and Sewell represented Savajee against a similar action brought by Brabazon Ellis and Francis Pym.[31]

6

In January 1747 he was promoted Junior Merchant; but no Company duties of significance came his way until October 1748, when he was created Provisional Collector of Rents and Revenues. It was an important and profitable post; confirmation came in July 1749, and was combined with the position of Mint Master. It was as Collector that Sulivan made his mark on Bombay; and developed models and methods that he carried to London. He was also to portray fraud on a large scale. What he created (and uncovered) was of great significance then and later.

Two months later, he was promoted Senior Merchant and made Deputy Accountant and assistant to a George Scott. He and Sulivan commenced chasing one another in and out of Company posts over the next four years. This office automatically meant a place as Deputy Accountant, the functions were so linked.

The duties that he had to perform as Collector were endless. The island of Bombay was five miles across at its widest and, according to Sulivan, nourished 20,000 people. It required to be surveyed minutely as to both value and extent. Everything produced in Bombay was farmed, that is, let out in return for a payment or rent to the Company. A detailed register was to be kept of all farms. He was to ensure that the soil and vegetation were not spoiled; and appointed and advised inspectors who made a weekly round, reporting to him.

In addition, it was his duty to adjust and settle all accounts, receive all moneys and make the necessary disbursements. He was to deliver his financial statement and the money every three months to the Governor and Council. Regular books were to be kept; and he was required to explain reasons for any increases or decreases in the sums received. The information was eventually relayed to India House.

Yet Sulivan had no power to lessen the amount of money expected by the Company, even in the event of famine or any other calamity. He could only represent the situation to his superiors and plead the hardship of the renters. Nor could he judge who should receive the farms; they were auctioned, and completely under the control of the President aided by his Council. For cases of glaring criminality, he had no jurisdiction. The Collector had to gather a variety of dues: rent from the growing of coconut, cultivation of tobacco and the production of arrack; rent from Bombay pensions; and money that stemmed from various privileges. He also collected money from salt sales, quit rents and batta[*] grounds. Similar collections were also made at Mahim, the Company settlement in the north of the island.

Coconut growing gave the biggest return. A few opulent merchants dominated this. They were given the whole crop for a number of years to work or sublet as they wished. These few merchants had combined to create

a monopoly situation that could not be broken. As a result, the Company never received a fair price for the crop since this was always rigged.

Sulivan changed things. He created ten distinct divisions of the coconut grant with sixteen plots within each division. Each lot was leased by the Company, which now had direct ties and records dealing with every lot. The results were astonishing. A twenty-five per cent increase in revenue took place following the first of these new leases; fifty per cent following the second issue, with a continually rising yield thereafter. He increased the amount gathered from 8,177 rupees in December 1748, to 13,510 rupees in April 1749. This success encouraged him to enforce the system over the whole range of farms rented out by the Company.

From these fiscal reforms Sulivan was able to relieve some of the social distress inherent in the existing structure. The system of farming out operated by the Company had led to the under-tenants and labouring people becoming very dependent and open to persecution and oppression. The Company Collector, before Sulivan's time, was generally someone of Council standing. Part of his remit was to guard his charges from all threats; and he was duty bound to correct misbehaviour, enforce payment of dues and receive and judge petitions of complaint from renters or dependants. All these petitions and judgements would be registered in the Company books that they might be produced in the event of further appeals to the President and Council.

The Collector was, therefore, in a powerful position and could command the use of force (a body of sepoys*) to secure rents due. Theoretically, his role in this respect was only to assist the farmer, and he ought to have taken such action only when appealed to by him. Instead, the Collector took the initiative and the 'cruel, impolitic and oppressive practice of demanding money with menaces' was the order of the day. Sulivan stopped all this.

His efficiency in the Collector's office reflected upon the need for improvements in the Company's commercial administration in India; and showed how well equipped he was to make the necessary changes. He demonstrated that awareness of financial and administrative detail that later was to give unrivalled comprehension of the intricacies of the Company's financial system.

Evidence of the zeal and honesty that he brought to his new office of Collector was not long in finding its way into the Company records, doubtless just as he planned. His incorruptibility is so startling when compared to what went on among his colleagues that the question of a completely different morality seems to enter the equation.

In a letter to the President on 4 March 1749, a mere six months after assuming his post, he gave a comprehensive survey of one particular farm, the Mazagon estate. What he had uncovered constituted a first-class outrage. His aim was to justify the Company's right to all salt, fishing and other revenues from the estate; and he desired the authority of the President and Council to collect these. He quoted from the Company's own records to

justify his arguments, going back to 1674 to do so; and he was quite truthful in his assertion that he had 'spared no pains to obtain a true knowledge'.[32]

The Governor and Council agreed with his findings but did nothing. On 16 May 1749 he again brought the affair before them, because the inhabitants of the Mazagon estate were not only still paying taxes to those who claimed possession of the farm on the estate, but had been taxed double. Governor Wake then formed a committee to enquire further. On 20 May it was adjudged that the Company owned the land, as Sulivan had said, but that the various so-called 'owners' of the farm also had good claims. The committee, therefore, turned down Sulivan's plea that no more taxes should be paid by the tenants, and argued that custom and usage had established the principle of payment at a 'fixed and fair rate'. A similar compromise, one that corrected nothing, was reached over fishing rights and disputes, such as those over the collection of brushwood and weeds.

Although unsuccessful up to this point in his efforts to remedy things, these details depict an awareness in Sulivan (unusual among those who occupied the office of Collector) of the predicament of the poorest Indian workers in Bombay. He seemed to be trying to combine humanity with efficiency. His work reflects this, as well as the delicate handling required.

From December 1749 onwards his thoroughness and unwillingness to waive his scruples over this affair earned him the displeasure of Governor Wake. His revenue books for the year ending July 1749, together with abstracts of the rents and revenues collected by himself and his predecessors from August 1747 to July 1749, were ordered to lie on the Council table, and remained there following their first scrutiny.

On 8 December 1749 they were finally remarked upon. The Governor began by praising Sulivan and noted that before his advent to the office the Collector's books had been kept in a very irregular manner. He was commended for creating order out of chaos. The Governor also noted that recently there had been an increase in salt sales compared to former years. Sulivan was able to answer that more salt had been sold by the Company because he had not disposed of it privately, so the whole profit had gone to the Company. Wake's response was that Sulivan, like his predecessors, had received five per cent on the sale of private salt.[33]

Further comments were passed on the nature of the private sale of salt, noting Sulivan's particular criticism of the profits made by his predecessors, Byfield and, to a lesser extent, Dorrill. Sulivan had shown in his abstracts of the collections made by these two that they made unjustifiable private profits. The Governor had no alternative but to agree, but hinted that his hands were perhaps too clean. Sulivan also took pains to point out where the unjustifiable increase in charges had occurred. Wake maintained that the sum involved was not unusual; that increases in costs had been unavoidable because of the exceptionally bad circumstances operating in 1748. He was not very convincing.

Now alarmed, the Governor took steps to cover all traces of his complicity. The details Sulivan had brought into the open would appear in a

bad light to the Directors. He wrote, therefore, of Byfield and Dorrill as servants of the Company who had appeared to him both honest and above board. Yet, reluctantly and with many evasions and justifications, he conceded that the figures brought to light by Sulivan proved their abuse of office. He naturally portrayed himself as innocent of any intention of reducing the amount of salt to be sold through the Company.

His major defence was that Sulivan himself had 'kindly' depicted in his researches that if (as Governor) he had helped Byfield towards such extensive profits it was unintentional. Wake also appealed to the fact that Sulivan had handled his personal affairs from the moment he set foot on the island, and could verify that there was no evidence in his private accounts of any intention to defraud the Company.

After causing so much trouble for him, Wake took the post of Collector away. From internal evidence, he was suspended from 8 December 1749. By 2 January 1750 George Scott had taken over. There is little doubt that Sulivan had uncovered a state of affairs that said little for the senior Company servants in Bombay and even less for Governor Wake. It is also very probable that his purpose was to depict to the Directors, his part in clearing out the corruption that infected the collection of salt revenues. Nor did he allow dismissal from office to deter him from bringing forward evidence of yet more corruption in salt revenue collections.

Sometime before October 1750 he informed the President and Council that he had uncovered further abuses in the Collector's office. Wake accordingly convened a committee of councillors to examine the state of the salt revenues. What happened next appears like deliberate deception by Wake. The figures that Sulivan had given to Sedgwicke and a committee in his letter of 27 October 1750, were used misleadingly by the Governor against him in two sets of despatches to England. Those by the *Boscawen* stated that the revenues (those Sulivan was complaining about) for 34 measures of salt had been illegally collected by Sulivan and not by Byfield. The despatches by the *Salisbury* repeated the error, saying that Sulivan and not Byfield had been responsible for the collection. This time the salt mentioned had risen to 38 measures.

On 13 November 1750, four days before the new Governor, Richard Bourchier, took office, Sulivan was transferred to be Chief at Mahim. Wake wanted him out of the way. He was aware of Sulivan's smouldering resentment, and disgust at the loss of his post of Collector and shabby treatment he had received. It appears too much of a coincidence that he should be absent from Bombay when the new Governor arrived, it allowed Wake to misrepresent the situation when he handed over all settlement affairs to Bourchier.

Aware that everything would change with the new Governor, Sulivan timed his next letter on corruption in the salt revenues for delivery on 16 November 1750, the day before Bourchier took over. Again, as per Company law, a committee was forced to convene to enquire into this. Naturally, the

new Governor wanted to start his term of office on a sound note and intimated how necessary it was to get to the heart of the matter.

Despite this, it was December before the issue was taken up once more; and again only due to Sulivan's insistence, even though he was still at Mahim. When asked to give exact details of the offences committed in the Collector's office, he took the opportunity not only of doing this, but of recounting the whole sorry history of events. He produced a copy of his letter of 27 October 1750, showing the misrepresentation by Governor Wake in the despatches to India House. He also asked that this letter be allowed to appear in the Public Consultations to vindicate his character. This was done.

Sulivan was to remain at Mahim until 10 May 1751. Re-arriving in Bombay, he once more took over the Collector's office from George Scott. This was Governor Bourchier's decision. Not only was he convinced of Sulivan's honesty, but wanted him to clear up suspicions he now entertained of further fraud, again in the salt revenues. By 28 May Sulivan had made a preliminary examination of the matter, enough to satisfy the President and Council that their worst fears were correct. Joseph D'Souza, the suspected ringleader, was taken into custody. Sulivan found subsequently that he was solely responsible for the fraud.

Meantime, he had also completed an inventory of the Customs House at Mahim and handed over control to Alexander Douglas. Now he could concentrate on the Collector's office at Bombay. The position afforded many opportunities for private trade, so he made a speedy return to the main settlement and lost no time in picking up the threads where he had left off.

7

He spent only a few months in the Collector's office, however, because on 24 October, as part of a committee, he was despatched upon an important mission, to settle a crisis at Surat involving Company officials and native powers. Surat was ruled jointly by representatives of the Mughal dynasty and the Marathas. A struggle had developed involving the forces of the Maratha leader, Naik 'Allam Khan, and his ally Atchund, against Safdar Khan, in alliance with Sidi Ma'sud, the Governor of Surat. This was a follow-up to troubles of earlier years, especially those of 1748.

The essence of the problem was that Naik Allam Khan was determined to subdue the surrounding province as well as the city of Surat. He did not propose to keep the city, but intended 'that it should remain in the hands of the Moors...(led by Atchund) that he will not place any person in the government of Surat without our concurrence and therefore desires that some person may be sent up'.[34]

There was some dithering whether to call the party 'Envoys' or send a committee representing the President and Board. The latter was decided upon. It comprised a Major Mackenzie, Henry Savage and Sulivan; who immediately begged the Board's permission for a few days to consider it all. It is possible that he did not relish the thought of the company he would keep, the dangers he would face or the neglect of his private interests. He had

also become Warehouse Keeper. Bourchier was repaying him for uncovering the frauds. However, this also made it impossible to refuse the mission. Again he provisionally transferred the office of Collector to George Scott, while John Hope took over as Warehouse Keeper.

On 21 December 1751, armed with their instructions, the committee sailed for the Surat bar on board the *Bombay Grab*. Their principal objective was to secure peace. They were given ample powers for: 'Transacting all affairs in settling the government of Surat as if we were present ourselves.'[35] In the end Major Mackenzie failed to accompany the committee all the way. The Board then appointed Lt. Daniel Draper.

The commission was also charged with recovering large sums of money lost or spent by the Company at Surat; with recovering the full enjoyment of its privileges there; and with re-establishing the Company factory. It was to ensure the safety of Company personnel, particularly that of Mr. Lambe, the factory Chief, and of the military force. Two members of staff, Messrs. Pym and Hunt, were prisoners in the Dutch factory. They were to be freed. Another aim was to reverse the role of the fiercely hostile Dutch who would allow no goods to be shipped to and from Surat. Above all, the committee was to assume absolute command.

On the voyage north the Company force sailed into the Maratha pirate, Kohanji Angria fleet. They were taken and detained at Versora. The pirates kept some Company ships, and an Andrew Price was first despatched to Tannah and then Bassein to get other vessels. Astonishingly, the brigands then acted as a protective convoy as far as Surat.

The committee reaching Surat on 31 December 1751, took property from all inhabitants except the Europeans, and blocked the harbour. An attempt to take control of the besieged Surat castle where Atchund was holding out came to nothing because of the 'shameful disorder' of the Company's military force and its supply of ammunition. After consultations designed to dispel military ineptitude, it was decided again to try and reach the castle, when word was received that Atchund was preparing to give up the position. News followed that the forces of the Sidi were already in the fortress, forestalling their military plans. The struggle was at an end without the committee actually being involved at all.[36]

Devoid of bargaining power, Savage and Sulivan could only treat with Atchund and Sidi Ma'sud as best they could; but to get the best settlement for the Company, they resorted to any leverage that could be mustered. They took command of the river; resolved to prevent all trade; were determined that no 'insolent Dutch would pass without search'; and that they would commandeer as much property as possible. Neither held out much hope of success stripped as they were of alliances and burdened with problems.[37]

On 11 January 1752 the committee informed Bombay there was no change in the situation and that they were awaiting overtures from the enemy. Although they suffered small harassments, like the efforts to prevent them from getting fresh drinking water, this was certainly the best course of action they could have taken, and it soon began to show results. First though, James

Lambe was dismissed from his post of Chief at the Surat factory. This was done to convince their enemies of the powers the committee possessed. Savage and Sulivan then focussed their displeasure on the Dutch whose 'insolence will lead to seizure of one of their councillors as reprisal'.[38]

At the end of January there was tense concern over the arrival of the Maratha fleet in the Surat roads. Then the appearance of a large ship from Batavia gave the Dutch a temporary ascendance. Fortunately, both dangerous situations passed without mishap; and at once the struggle was carried to the Dutch who were made responsible for the whole situation.

They were also helped in that cracks were appearing in the hostile and intransigent attitude held by Sidi Ma'sud. A meeting was arranged aboard the *Defence*. Steps were then taken to bring all the principals together for peace negotiations. The situation was made easier because the local Asian merchants complained ceaselessly that business was suffering. Their lobbying reached sympathetic ears; a poverty-stricken Surat gave no advantage to anyone. There was an immediate emphasis by the committee on the needs and requirements of freight and other business. Bales were loaded on the *Hector* right away.

By 19 February the committee was certain of having achieved the end it set out for, securing peace. The President and Council at Bombay were urged to send the men who would replace Lambe, Pym and Hunt. With successful completion of the mission, Savage and Sulivan wanted to depart as soon as possible 'because the season advances apace and as we both intend for England by the first ships we shall barely have time sufficient to adjust our own private concerns'.[39]

Sidi Ma'sud signed the articles of peace on 25 February and on 5 March Charles Crommelin was appointed the new Chief. The Board expressed its delight, and approved of the initiative taken by Savage and Sulivan in advising the Court of Directors of the peace, although they had not consulted Bombay first. They had no wish to have their own roles diminished in a report issued from Bombay. The treaty with Sidi Ma'sud was finally concluded on 17 March, by which time Crommelin had arrived and was deemed acceptable. Savage and Sulivan chose this as the moment to depart. By 27 March the two were once more in Bombay.

8

Although Sulivan had intimated a wish to leave Bombay for England, upon his return from Surat he resumed his duties. On 31 March 1752 he again became Collector; then on 10 April, provisionally, Customs Master. During his absence he had been made ninth in Council, and took his seat on the Board. The amount collected in rents and revenues, now paid into the Company's treasury was astonishing after three months' absence. It paid tribute to the reliable system he had introduced. His books could, and did, balance.

The last serious thought given to Collector duties concerned some disputes between the Company and the inhabitants of Bombay; and

particularly those concerning a certain Ramseth who had rented from the Company the right to plant all vacant spaces in Bombay and in Mahim. The Company had said that it would pay half the value of such improvements to the amount of 11,000 rupees. But it could not be decided whether or not damage done to trees and to wells and waterways was due to neglect and abuse by the renters. Upon this decision depended the Company's duty, or otherwise, to repair and pay for the damage. Sulivan was asked to evaluate the extent of the harm done and determine responsibility.

He spent from August to October in research and taking evidence on oath. He costed every conceivable item, and gave many sound reasons for the inability of the renters to account properly for either what they owed or were due. These ranged from property being seized by the raiding Maratha General Damaji, to the effect of the monsoon. Company records were searched for proofs of lease and terms offered. Unsurprisingly, it was Sulivan who found a 'mistake' had been made by Governor Wake's Secretary, which provided the farmers with an unusual demand on the Company allowing them a total of 23,155 rupees for 'improvements'.

He brought forward evidence that suggested a great deal of fraud; with lack of precedent for these advantageous terms. No comment was made at the time, by those in Council, upon the unique nature of the lease. An examination of Secretary Price's writing also showed that the clauses permitting such unusual profits had been put in afterwards.

This was clear indication of corruption at the highest level; and Sulivan made sure Governor Bourchier did not miss the point that Governor Wake was ultimately responsible for this chicanery, and had attempted to defraud the Company. He indicated this had to be the case because every written article required explanation by the Governor in Council, and this had to be understood by the merchants. He had completed his revenge on Governor Wake.

9

Avenues by which money made in India could be realised in England were always needed. Sulivan became a master of all this, knowing how cash could find its way home with as little loss in real value as possible. He perfected a few tricks using the Company treasury. For example, advantage was taken of fellow servants with no wish to remit money home yearly. Bills were paid into the funds in Bombay made out to such a colleague's account. These were endorsed that payment was to be made to a specified agent in England, supposedly that of the colleague, but in fact Sulivan's man.[40]

The ways of remitting India money were not to change very much throughout the eighteenth century. Thus, the guidance he later gave to his son gives perhaps the best description by an expert. These channels excluded bills drawn upon the English East India Company.

> From Madras to China money is frequently wanted by persons going thither…The next are remittances thro. the Dutch to their Company in Holland… A third is with the French…The last

> method is by diamonds…always advise me in time that I may insure. If any of our India Captains should want money for their ships, use; and will grant you bills upon the Husband…Formerly the Commanders and Agents of His Majesty's ships took money at an high exchange and gave their bills upon the Navy Ordnance or Victualling boards.[41]

The variety and number of these channels discloses his ingenuity. He continued to be engaged in such activities when he reached England in 1753. For an unbroken eighteen years, from 1740 until 1757, and fitfully beyond this, he continued in this pursuit. Other more dubious enterprises in common use were: borrowing money from the treasury; using Company ships; not paying interest on sums borrowed from the Company; and lending to Asian agents, without interest, in return for private favours.

Unfortunately, Sulivan was not averse to taking risks; best summed up in advice to his son: 'Remember, you never have money lying dead in your chest.'[42] He probably took this too far. As he ruefully commented later in life, 'From a strong propensity in my nature (which you inherit) I began early to risque my fortune in lending money and standing security.' That this had proved a rather painful occupation encouraged him to advise his son, 'positively and peremptorily be security to no man'.[43]

What these activities do portray are the systems Sulivan was capable of developing, and the temperament he possessed. These were some of the skills that would help him in the years ahead. His first maxim was:

> Enter into no schemes before you have perfectly digested them, traced every material circumstance, and are clearly satisfied you can confide in the person you may connect with. Habituate yourself not to a ridiculous but a suitable reserve. Be ever master of your affairs.[44]

There are also interesting glimpses of his attitude towards the Asians he worked with: 'Black clerks and Dubashes are in general a set of artful, plausible scoundrels... however, at the same time, under a proper curb, with care that you are drawn into no scrapes, they may often be extremely useful.'[45]

The feature, however, which more than anything else enabled him to amass his fortune and build his career, was the strict method and regularity he applied to his affairs. He said to his son:

> Ever bear in mind these truths that method and regularity ensures you ease and satisfaction, that irregularity and neglect constantly involves you in trouble and perplexity, that method and order in accounts, apportioning your time to invariable habits is so essential that upon it will depend the permanence of every good resolution.[46]