

IV. The "Unlikely Quintet" continues with Job Hamer, whose name is already familiar to us. The factual data pertinent to the early years of Job is sparse. It was on November 20th of the year 1865 that he walked onto our stage; and this entrance was made in the form of a superb journal. From this hand-written account, at least sixty pages in length, it is clear that here was a young man determined to succeed in business at a time when conditions could scarcely have been more hectic. This record covers his first trip to the New World, aboard the steamer "China", bound for New York and Havana. While still "Off Halifax", he assures his partners in Manchester that "the passage up to now has been rough and most awfully disagreeable in every sense of the word".

A two-day lay-over in New York provided Job with the opportunity to hear the latest rumors out of Mexico. He wrote in his journal that, whereas public opinion was divided over the chances of an intervention by the U. S. Government into the affairs of Mexico under the Hapsburg Maximilian, he personally predicted that the Austrian Emperor would be permitted to rule undisturbed. This stop-off made Job restive to the point of complaining: "I can assure you that I am anxious to be getting away, especially as I feel that I am doing no business, losing time, and spending money".

The next news from Mexico reached him in Havana, where there "is a general expectation of the arrival of cholera". Job wrote, "The word from Mexico is so far very unfavorable for business and for travellers, and if half be true that is reported in the papers, it would be as well to turn back, but I feel disposed to try . . .".

Job was a dry goods salesman at this time. He was carrying samples with him of textiles, wall-paper, and boxes of spools. He lamented constantly that the gum labels became unstuck in Caribbean humidity. By the 22nd of December, 1865, he was still in Havana and still hesitant about risking the trip to Mexico: "I don't expect to bring back (from Mexico) one half of what I take, and I may have to cover myself with a newspaper". And more discouraging yet was the following entry:

"I have just seen some people who have lately returned from Mexico to Havana, and they represent and give instances of the great dangers on the roads and some of the most barbarous and villainous atrocities ever committed. The railway trains from Vera Cruz have even been stopped several times, and in one case about a dozen men were mutilated in a most shocking manner

(castrated) before being put to death, not content with robbing." ¹.

Finally, however, Job arrived in Veracruz, which only twenty-five years earlier Mme. Calderón de la Barca had described in the following words:

". . . Nothing can exceed the sadness of the aspect of this city and of its environs . . . The scene may resemble the ruins of Jerusalem, though without its sublimity." ².

According to our young travelling salesman, the hotels in Veracruz at this time were "miserable in the extreme".

But nor were conditions any better elsewhere in Mexico as the year 1866 opened. "There has been no communication between San Luis Potosí and Tampico for three months", according to Job's journal, which speaks of a much-hoped-for contract with an English dry goods merchant by the name of Pitman in the city of San Luis Potosí. Furthermore, only one steamer a month plied the waterway from Tampico to Matamoros. He also wrote his partners that to get to Mexico City would be very expensive:

"The diligence fare is \$30 (sic), and I think the railway the same, altogether \$60, with only 25 lbs. of luggage allowed, \$5 for every 25 lbs. over, and then there is the feeding on the way. I think of sending my trunks by mules, which would cost less, but take 10, or more likely 15, days." ³.

This negative communiqué to Manchester ended gloomily with the conclusion, "This country is in a rum state . . .".

Hamer perseverance finally paid off. After one month in the abysmal port city, Job emerged from his depression and began to look forward to an eventual harvest for his efforts "which will continue to be uphill and require downright plodding . . .". He was beginning to receive orders for such diverse products as Owens drills, bedsteads, watches, small knives, and cutlery. In addition to the patterns and prints which were his stock in trade, Job was also able to acquire orders for "undershirts, hosiery, and fancy articles". At one point he seemed particularly gratified by a large order for umbrellas "silk and cotton, the handles to be very French, and packed in tin, as the roads are very bad".

So much for the journal, from which we may ascertain that Job Hamer had a good eye for business opportunities and challenges even under the most inauspicious circumstances. This record ended in 1866, with Job's return to his world of textiles in Manchester, England.

Fifteen years passed in the life of Job Hamer, married to Mary Mosely, and the father of ten children: Thurston, Alice, Lloyd, Mary (of our quintet), William, Ellen (Nellie), Jessie, Geoffrey, Dora, and Norman. In the early 1880s, Job's wife died in childbirth. The oldest son Thurston was by this time employed by the London and Lancashire Insurance Co. and was well travelled in the U. S. and Mexico. He persuaded his father to come to Mexico and to open a business here with the help of two sons, Lloyd and William. In 1887, Job was able to open the first linen factory in Mexico, "La Linera", located at the Garita San Lázaro, near the site of present-day Lecumberri. This proved to be an excellent, though far from fashionable, location close to the San Lázaro Railroad Station. Job next had to decide whether to bring out two new looms or two daughters, Nellie and Jessie, to make a suitable house for the boys, now that they were settling in Mexico! ⁴.

In the greatest contrast to the year 1865, when Job made his first trip to Mexico, the Porfiriato provided foreign business with every advantage. President Díaz believed in order as the first priority, then peace, and then, if possible, liberty. Porfirian philosophy agreed with the concept that Nature abhors equality fully as much as she abhors a vacuum. The factory flourished; yearly, the output increased in spinning, weaving, dyeing, and bleaching some of the world's finest linen. By 1907, La Linera had an annual production of two million meters. ⁵ Definitely a family business, the company was managed by the following officers: Thurston Hamer, President; John B. Body, (son-in-law), Vice-President; Norman Hamer, Secretary; Geoffrey Hamer, Mill Manager.

Thanks to his friendship with President Díaz, Job was receiving large orders for "heavy drill" linen, which was used to outfit the Mexican Army. The business advertisements proudly presented "sheeting up to 70" wide and 'hollands' used for fancy work". The machinery for this massive linen production was 100% British, as might be expected.

Job had developed a "lung condition", which was exacerbated by the high altitude of Mexico City. Thus, by 1904, he was living in Cuernavaca, to which one of his sons went daily by train for

business consultation with the chief. In 1905, he died and was buried in the British Cemetery in Tlaxpana in Mexico City.

When in 1926 this original burial ground was taken over by the Mexican Government, the remains and the headstones were scheduled for transfer to the new cemetery in the Calzada México-Tacuba. It was Dorothy Hamer Golding who discovered her grandfather Job Hamer's tombstone discarded and somewhat damaged in the process of moving. It was Thurston Hamer (III), Job's great-grandson, who arranged for its restoration and placement in its present location.

Probably no name in the British Community is held in higher regard than that of Job Hamer, who founded a dynasty of prominent contributors to the community for many years to come. He played a significant role in the development of Christ Church, serving first on the Building Committee, then, shortly before his death, liquidating the church debt together with Weetman Pearson and Richard Honey. The church today contains several fitting memorials to his name: the exquisitely carved triptych reredos and the screen at the altar.

With World War I came the decline of the linen industry in Mexico. La Linera's sources of flax had been Ireland, Belgium, and Russia. A large shipment from Europe was sunk in 1914, and shortly thereafter, the factory was closed on a temporary basis. After the war, an attempt was made to revive the industry using Mexican flax, but to no avail. A second effort was made when the remaining Hamers' tried to compete with the French in the manufacture of cotton goods, but this also proved to be impossible. Thus ended the saga of La Linera, 1887 - 1914.

