The setting for this study is reflected in the sub-title ‘Merchant and diplomats at work.’ The aim is to follow the partners in their and diverse activities: in their relationship towards each other, in contacts with other houses and in their attitudes towards government officials. Moreover, the author has attempted to show the motives for the commercial and financial actions, where these were discernible. A point of departure such as this implies that the surviving correspondence constitutes the principal source of information. Quantitative data are included, but within this framework their role is subsidiary.

Because this book is intended for various categories of readers, it has been divided into three parts. The introductory chapter, which contains an abridged history of Hope & Co. up to 1815, is intended for those whose interest in the subject is of a more general nature. In the same chapter, a number of main themes such as the growth of foreign loans in the Netherlands and the technique per se of issuing loans are discussed, and attention is devoted to some of the problems of trade and to the question whether Hope & Co. should be viewed as merchants or as bankers. In conclusion, an impression is given of the part played by Amsterdam as a financial centre during the Napoleonic era and of the very exceptional position which Hope & Co. occupied at that time.

In the succeeding chapters, the principal themes are examined in detail with the aid of a number of case studies. There is more to the subdivision into Baltic Affairs and Iberian Affairs than appears at first sight: while Baltic Affairs according to the sub-title deals only with loans, and Iberian Affairs only with produce, it becomes clear in the elaboration of the chapters that, in the eyes of Messrs. Hope, mercantile transactions and financial affairs were inextricably interwoven. Accordingly, only in the final chapter do contents and title correspond.

The Notes are intended for researchers who desire to go deeper into certain aspects of this study. This explains their comprehensive nature.

But for the decision taken by Messrs. Hope in 1953 to commission a history of the house, this study would not have been embarked upon. Without the decision of the present-day Board of Bank Mees & Hope to
allow the study to continue and to have the result published in book form, the work would not have been completed. The great abundance of data in the Hope archives is illustrated by the fact that, in spite of the length of this book, the author was obliged to limit himself to the period up to 1815.

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