GREEN ALICE STOPFORD

TOWN LIFE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY, VOLUME 1

Alice Green

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Содержание

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PREFACE

In the twenty years which have passed since Mr. Green drew his brilliant sketch of the early life of English towns, and of their influence on the history of English liberty, the study of the subject in this country has advanced but little; and it is not, I think, too much to say that the pages of his History still present the most vivid and suggestive picture which we possess of the mediæval boroughs – a picture inspired by ardent sympathy and emotion. In this rapid and original survey the true proportions of civic history in our national life are boldly drawn; and the burghers and shopkeepers of the towns, long neglected and despised, take their place in the distinguished ranks of those by whom our freedom has been won by their sturdy battle against oppression, leading the way in the growth and elevation of the English people, and carrying across the ages of tyranny the full tradition of liberty. But the history of this great civic revolution, which in Mr. Green's day cannot be said to have existed at all, has since then remained strangely neglected among us. While in foreign countries the study of the origin and growth of municipal institutions has been recognized as of overwhelming importance, and has already employed the erudition and tried the ingenuity of a long succession of scholars, English historians have stood aloof. No English name figures in the contests of the schools; nor is any English authority called to witness when a learned theory is advanced to solve the riddle; and if from time to time foreign scholars attempt to draw English towns within the range of their generalizations, the lack of sufficient or trustworthy materials at their disposal makes the result vain and unfruitful. No country indeed has been so backward as our own in municipal history, whether we take it from the popular or from the scientific side. The traveller who has asked at the bookshop of a provincial town for a local history or even for a local guide is as well able to realize the distance which parts us from France, Italy, or Germany, as is the student who inquires for a detailed account of how civic life or any one of its characteristic institutions grew up among us. A certain number of town histories do indeed exist, but they by no means always deal necessarily or even mainly with the life of the borough itself. To a considerable number of local antiquaries the buried relics of the Roman dominion have proved a permanent and pre-occupying interest. For the student of mediæval times the monastery and cathedral tower high above the squalid market-place and thatched town-hall which lie dwarfed and obscured under their vast shadow; and in modern as in older history the butchers and brewers who represent the secular corporations of York and Winchester are practically bid to stand aside before the presence of the spiritual corporations to whom the fame of S. Mary's or S. Swithun's is committed. Where ecclesiastical monuments of historic greatness are wanting, a fervent apologist may still find an excuse for the meanness and dulness of the municipal story, in the fact that at some time or other the town has lent its streets to serve as the stage for a critical scene in the national drama, and thus – through the lifting of a royal standard, or the tragedy of a conspicuous adventurer – derives a borrowed title to our interest. That the story of convent and chapter and solemn pageant should be told with full detail I do not question. I only urge that when the tale is finished we still wait for some notice of the city itself and the humble details of its common life. There are, it is true, signs of increasing interest in such matters, and some admirable studies in our municipal records have lately been made in England; nevertheless the work is still at its beginning, and how much need there is for further study I have had occasion to know in the course of an attempt to trace the developement of some forty or fifty provincial boroughs, so as to gain some idea of the condition of our mediæval towns, and the general drift of their history. The preparatory work which the foreign student finds already finished and organized for his use, the English worker has in almost

every case to do for himself. Even the briefest sketch of a town history too often implies the long labour of seeking out a mass of scattered and isolated details, which must first be drawn together into some connected sequence before it is possible to study the general bearing and significance of the story in relation to the growth of neighbouring boroughs. Those who have attempted to find their way through the uncertainty and confusion of the materials as they at present exist, will probably be the most lenient judges of inevitable errors of detail such as must creep into the performance of so delicate and difficult a task.

It is evident, indeed, from the nature of the subject, that any writer who desires to give a survey of provincial town life as we can now picture it – from printed materials scattered in county histories, archæological journals, reports of commissions, imperfect abstracts of town documents, parliamentary records, charters, and stray pamphlets – must inevitably remain exposed to much correction in matters of detail from experts with local knowledge. At the same time it seems to me that without some effort to obtain a comprehensive view of the general subject, the student may leave himself open to the still graver errors that spring from the want of some ascertained measure of proportion, and from the incapacity to distinguish in each town that which is normal from that which is strange or characteristic. The question of origins I have deliberately set on one side, from the conviction that the beginnings of a society may be more fruitfully studied after we know something of its actual life. Avoiding therefore many dark questions, I have dealt in the first volume rather with the simpler and less contentious aspects of the growth of the borough to wealth and independence. In the second volume, however, the subjects which arise have long been familiar as matters of acute discussion; and it has sometimes happened, that in going over again the sources from which all our knowledge is derived, I have found myself gradually compelled to entertain views contrary to those which are commonly accepted. Thus, for example, in tracing the growth of self-government within the borough itself, I seem to discover in the phrazes of the town records a new explanation for the position of the "communitas" side by side with the "cives" – a problem which, so far as I know, has never been really stated, and the difficulties of which are in no way met by the universally received interpretation. Moreover the theory of an early triumph and rapid decay of democratic government appears to me impossible to maintain, and I have suggested that in the growth of the common council we may find some evidence of a popular movement towards more effectual self-government which seems to have stirred the industrial classes of the fifteenth century. There are other burning questions in which impetuous economists have outrun the historians, and have not found it premature to set in order by the help of accepted theories the obscure chaos of social history in the Middle Ages. In spite of their zealous efforts, however, the whole problem (including even the ascertaining of the facts on which it depends) of the developement of English commerce and manufactures and of its effects on social life, still awaits the student; and it is in the confusion and ignorance which at present prevail, that I may find my best excuse for the fact that with regard to many questions – such, for instance, as the relation of internal traffic to free trade and protection, the general organization of labour, the position of the guild towards the hired worker, the attitude of the municipality to the industrial system, and of the capitalist to the town councillor – I have ventured to differ from conclusions which are commonly put forward.

I would add but one word of personal explanation before I close. The only training or guidance which I have ever had in historical work was in a very brief period during which I was able to watch the method and understand the temper in which Mr. Green's work was done. I never had the opportunity of visiting any English towns with him, or of following his studies in that direction. The most fruitful lesson which remains in my memory is that of a day spent in Ancona between two stages of an invalid journey, when I was able to see the intense enthusiasm with which, as was his habit, he made his way first to the Town-hall, and from the fragments of Greek and mediæval carving built into its walls, from harbour and pier, from names of streets, and the cathedral crypt, he extracted century by century some record of the old municipal life. It was doubtless some such remembrance as this that

unconsciously led me in the course of reading, to turn to the story of the English boroughs. At the same time I have no doubt that I should always have been restrained from any idea of writing by my consciousness of the entire lack of adequate preparation for such a task, if I had not felt bound by an imperative obligation to make the attempt. When Mr. Green's work was over he asked of me a promise that I would try to study some of those problems in mediæval history where there seemed to him so much that still needed to be done, and so much to be yet discovered. In this book I have made my first beginning toward the fulfilling of that promise. Such a work can only be closed with feelings of compunction and dismay.

Alice Stopford Green.

14, Kensington Square,
March, 1894.

CHAPTER I

THE ENGLISH TOWNS

There is nothing in England to-day with which we can compare the life of a fully enfranchised borough of the fifteenth century. Even the revival of our local institutions and our municipal ambition has scarcely stirred any memory of the great tradition of the past, of the large liberties, the high dignities and privileges which our towns claimed in days when the borough was in fact a free self-governing community, a state within the state, boasting of rights derived from immemorial custom and of later privileges assured by law.

The town of those earlier days in fact governed itself after the fashion of a little principality. Within the bounds which the mayor and citizens defined with perpetual insistence in their formal perambulation year after year it carried on its isolated self-dependent life. The inhabitants defended their own territory, built and maintained their walls and towers, armed their own soldiers, trained them for service, and held reviews of their forces at appointed times. They elected their own rulers and officials in whatever way they themselves chose to adopt, and distributed among officers and councillors just such powers of legislation and administration as seemed good in their eyes. They drew up formal constitutions for the government of the community, and as time brought new problems and responsibilities, made and re-made and revised again their ordinances with restless and fertile ingenuity, till they had made of their constitution a various medley of fundamental doctrines and general precepts and particular rules, somewhat after the fashion of an American state of modern times. No alien officer of any kind, save only the judges of the High Court, might cross the limits of their liberties; the sheriff of the shire, the bailiff of the hundred, the king's tax-gatherer or sergeant-at-arms, were alike shut out. The townsfolk themselves assessed their taxes, levied them in their own way, and paid them through their own officers. They claimed broad rights of justice, whether by ancient custom or royal grant; criminals were brought before the mayor's court, and the town prison with its irons and its cage, the gallows at the gate or on the town common, testified to an authority which ended only with death.[1] In all concerns of trade they exercised the widest powers, and bargained and negotiated and made laws as nations do on a grander scale to-day. They could covenant and confederate, buy and sell, deal and traffic after their own will; they could draw up formal treaties with other boroughs, and could admit them to or shut them out from all the privileges of their commerce; they might pass laws of protection or try experiments in free trade. Often their authority stretched out over a wide district, and surrounding villages gathered to their markets and obeyed their laws;[2] it might even happen in the case of a staple town that their officers controlled the main foreign trade of whole provinces. In matters that nearly concerned them they were given the right to legislate for themselves, and where they were not allowed to make the law, they at least secured the exclusive right of administering it; the King and the Parliament might issue orders as to weights and measures, or the rules to be observed by foreign merchants, but they were powerless to enforce their decrees save through the machinery and with the consent of the town. Arduous duties were handed over to them by the state – the supervision of the waters of a river basin, the keeping of the peace on the seas. They

[1] The right of pit and gallows was never formally revoked. The last case was under Charles I. (Rogers's Agriculture and Prices, i. 132). The gallows at Southampton stood on the common; in Colchester at the end of East Street.

[2] The Inquisition de quo Warranto, Ed. I., proves that S. Martin's and other villages were under the jurisdiction of Canterbury; inquests at these places were held by the city coroner. York had a territory of 2,700 acres. (Agric. and Prices, iv. 579.) The burgesses of Dorchester claimed the right to weigh all goods within twelve miles of the town. A special statute was passed in 1430 "that they shall not be disturbed of their right," in consequence of the Act of 1429 ordering weights and measures in every town. (9th Henry VI. cap. vi.) Other instances, such as Norwich, Nottingham, &c., are too numerous to give.

sent out their trading barges in fleets under admirals of their own choosing, and leaned but lightly on state aid for protection or revenge, answering pillage with pillage, and making their own treaties with the mariners of other countries as to capture and ransom and redemption of goods, and the treatment of common sailors or of "gentlemen" prisoners.[3] The necessity of their assent and co-operation in greater commercial matters was so clearly recognized that when Henry the Seventh in 1495 made a league of peace and free trade with Burgundy the treaty was sent to all the chief towns in England, that the mayor might affix to it the city seal, "for equality and stableness of the matter;" and the same form was observed at the marriage of the Lady Mary.[4] Two hundred and twenty-six burghers sat in Parliament[5] beside the seventy-four knights of the shire; and each borough freely decided for itself what the qualifications of its members should be, and by what manner of election they should be chosen, at a time when for country folk all such matters were irrevocably settled by the king's law. While the great lords with their armed bands of liveried retainers absolutely ruled the elections in the shires, in spite of all statutes of Parliament, the towns asserted their freedom to elect without fear or favour, and sent to the House of Commons the members who probably at that time most nearly represented the "people," that is so far as the people had yet been drawn into a conscious share in the national life.

Four hundred years later the very remembrance of this free and vigorous life was utterly blotted out. When Commissioners were sent in 1835 to enquire into the position of the English boroughs, there was not one community where the ancient traditions still lived. There were Mayors, and Town Councils, and Burgesses; but the burgesses were for the most part deprived of any share whatever in the election of their municipal officers, while these officers themselves had lost all the nobler characteristics of their former authority. Too often the very limits of the old "liberties" of the town were forgotten; or if the ancient landmarks were remembered at all it was only because they defined bounds within which the inhabitants had the right of voting for a member of Parliament; and in cases where the old boundaries now subsisted for no other reason, it was wholly forgotten that they might ever have had some other origin. In other boroughs where the right of voting was determined in another way, the townspeople had simply lost all remembrance of the ancient limits of their territory; or else, guided by some dim recollection of a former greatness with broader jurisdiction and wide-reaching subject estates, the corporation still yearly "walked the bounds" of lands over which they now claimed no authority. As the memory of municipal life died away there were boroughs where at last no one suspected that the corporate body had ever existed for any larger purpose than to choose members of Parliament. Knowing no other public honour or privilege and called to no other public service, the freemen saw in a single degraded political function the sole object of their corporate constitution; the representation of the people was turned by them into "a property and a commerce," and this one privilege, fed on corruption and private greed, survived the decay of all the great duties of the ancient civic life.[6]

There were it is true exceptions to this common apathy, and towns like Lynn might still maintain some true municipal life, while others like Bristol might yet show a good fighting temper which counted for much in the political struggles of the early nineteenth century. But the ordinary provincial

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[3] The mariners of the Cinque Ports drew up treaties with "French shipmen," as to ransom for mariners, sailors, or fishing boats that might be captured on either side; the people of the coast were to be set free without charge, while "gentlemen" and merchants were to pay whatever the captors chose to ask. The shipowners and merchants of each port signed the compact; and all the towns of the coast from Southampton to Thanet joined the league. The document which was drawn up was handed over to the keeping of the Lord Warden in Dover, and in case of dispute messengers from the Ports rode there to see its provisions, or to make a copy for their own guidance. Hist. MSS. Com. v. 537-8; iv. i. 434.

[4] Hist. MSS. Com. ix. 146; xi. 3, pp. 12-13, 171, 113. For 1340 see Ashley's Arteveldes, 126-7.

[5] Stubbs Const. Hist. iii. 484-488. Hallam Const. Hist. iii. 36. Gneist, who gives different figures, considers that one of the greatest dangers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was the irrational and meaningless increase of town representation. (Constitution Communale, tr. by Hippert, i. 333, 338; ii. 9.)

[6] Rep. of Com. on Mun. Corp., 1835, 20, 21; 29-34; Papers relating to Parl. Representation, 93, 94. Vol. ix. No. 92. ii.; 31 x.

burghers had lost, or forgotten, or been robbed of the heritage bequeathed by their predecessors of the fifteenth century. With the loss of their municipal independence went the loss of their political authority; and the four hundred or so of members whom they sent to Parliament took a very different position there from that once held by their ancestors. In the Middle Ages the knights of the shire were the mere nominees of the wealthy or noble class, returned to Parliament by the power of the lord's retainers, while the burgesses of the towns preserved a braver and freer tradition.[7] At the time of the Reform Bill, on the other hand, a vast majority of the town members sat among the Commons as dependents and servants of the landed aristocracy, whose mission it was to make the will of their patrons prevail, and who in their corrupt or timid subjection simply handed back to the wealthier class the supreme political power which artisans and shopkeepers and "mean people" of the mediæval boroughs had threatened to share with them.

The true story of this singular growth of independence in the English boroughs and of its no less singular decay would form one of the most striking chapters in all our national history. But the materials for such a story, obscure, fragmentary, and scattered as they are, still lie hidden away in municipal archives, state rolls, and judicial records, as though the matter were one with which Englishmen had nothing to do. It is true indeed that the many ingenious expedients which the burghers devised to meet the peculiar difficulties of a past age would ill serve as models for our use to-day, nor can their success or failure be urged on either side of our modern controversies. They tell us nothing of the advantages or drawbacks of protection in our own time, or of the uses of state regulation of labour, or of the advisability of trade guilds. We cannot revive their courts or their privileges, any more than we can set up their gallows or call out modern citizens to dig a moat that shall be their defence from a hostile world. We cannot borrow their experience and live idly on the wisdom of the dead. But there is no more striking study of the perpetual adjustment and contrivance by which living communities adapt themselves to the changing order of the world than the study of our provincial boroughs in the Middle Ages; and Englishmen who now stand in the forefront of the world for their conception of freedom and their political capacity, and whose contribution to the art of government has been possibly the most significant fact of these last centuries, may well look back from that great place to the burghers who won for them their birthright, and watch with a quickened interest the little stage of the mediæval boroughs where their forefathers once played their part, trying a dozen schemes of representation, constructing plans of government, inventing constitutions, with a living energy which has not yet spent its force after traversing a score of generations.

There is no better starting point for the study of town life in England than the fifteenth century itself, when, with ages of restless growth lying behind them, and with their societies as yet untouched by the influences of the Renascence or the Reformation or the new commercial system, the boroughs had reached their prosperous maturity. It would be vain to attempt any reconstruction of their earlier history without having first stood, as it were, in the very midst of that turbulent society, and by watching the infinite variety of constitutional developement learned to search out and estimate the manifold forces which had been at work to bring about so complex a result; and no study of their later history is possible without an understanding of the prodigious vitality of the mediæval municipalities. There were the workshops in which the political creed of England was fashioned, where the notion of a free commonwealth with the three estates of king, lords, and commons holding by common consent their several authority, was proved and tested till it became the mere commonplace, the vulgar property of every Englishman. There the men who were ultimately to make the Reformation were schooled in all the vexed questions between church and state, and in the practical meaning of interference in civic matters by an alien power, so that the final crisis of religious excitement was but

[7] See Paston Letters, i. 160-1, 337, 339-40; ii. 78, 28, 31, 35-36; iii. 52-3. Richard the Redeless, passus iv. The great people occasionally exercised influence in towns; Hist. MSS. Com. v. 497; ix. 138. For various modes of voting in towns see Lynn, Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 146-151; Chichester, Gross. Gild Merchant, ii. 48; Reading, Coates, 459; Sandwich, Boys, 402; Exeter, Freeman, 152; Worcester, Eng. Guilds, 373, 393; Bristol, Hunt, 86; Cinque Ports, Boy's Sandwich, 774, 796.

the dramatic declamation on a grand scale of lessons diligently repeated class by class for many a generation beforehand. There, too, long before the great national struggles of later centuries between England and the continental powers exalted patriotism to its highest ardour, men were already inspired by the vision of the English nation holding its post against the world, and by a passionate allegiance to its great destiny; and in every market and harbour the love of country was quickened by the new commerce with its gigantic ambition to win for England the dominion of the seas, its federations of merchants held together by the desperate struggle for supremacy, and its hordes of pirates who swept the ocean with the wild joy of their Norse ancestors. There is no break in our history when the old world merged into the new, for the spirit of the fifteenth century was the spirit of the sixteenth century as completely as it is the spirit of to-day.

The towns as we find them in the fifteenth century were the outcome of centuries of preparation. It was by a very slow and gradual process that England was transformed from a purely agricultural country, with its scattered villages of dependent tillers of the soil, into the England we know to-day – a land of industrial town communities, where agricultural interests are almost forgotten in the summing up of the national wealth. Our modern towns, indeed, can almost all trace back their history into the obscurity of a very distant past; but their record as we find it in Domesday, or under the Norman kings, is simply that of little country hamlets, where a few agricultural labourers gathered in their poor hovels, tilling by turns their lord's land and their own small holdings; or of somewhat bigger villages which lay at the branching of a great road, at a river ford, or at a convenient meeting-place for fair or market, and thus grew into some little consequence as the centres of a small local trade; while along the coast a few seaports were just beginning to draw merchants with their wares to a land that had long been almost forgotten by the traders of the Continent. It was not till the twelfth century[8] that our boroughs began to have an independent municipal history – from the time, that is, when the growth of the wool trade under Henry the First gave them a new commercial life; and the organization of local government under Henry the Second opened for them the way into a new world of political experiment and speculation.[9] From this time all went well with the municipalities for three hundred years. In the course of the thirteenth century the great majority of towns obtained rights of self-government, until finally these grants came to an end simply because there were no unenfranchised towns left.[10] Not indeed that the flow of royal charters ceased, for burghers who had got the first instalments of independence were constant in pressing for all such further privileges as could magnify their authority or protect their dignity; and successive generations of patriotic citizens gathered into their town chests under the safe keeping of half a dozen locks piles of precious parchments, each of which conferred some new boon or widened the borders of liberty. Determined as it was by local circumstances the struggle for independence was carried on after an irregular fashion, first in one town, then in another; here the burghers pressed forward riotously, and there loitered indifferently or stopped discouraged on their way. Some towns were allowed to elect their mayor before 1200,[11] others did not win the right till three or four centuries later; Bristol was made a shire in 1375, more than a hundred years before Gloucester; and in the fifteenth century there were still boroughs which had to gain their first charters, or else to exchange narrow and insufficient rights for full emancipation. But the forward movement never ceased; every victory counted for liberty, and every success justified faith and inspired new zeal. The burghers went on filling their purses on the one hand, and drawing up

[8] The first mention of burgesses in the Empire is in 1066 at Huy, in the bishopric of Liege. Pirenne, Dinant, 18.

[9] Dr. Gross gives a list of 150 towns which had gained the right of having a merchant gild – most of them in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

[10] Edward the First in the thirty years of his rule created fifty-four new boroughs. In the first eighty years of the fifteenth century the kings only issued nine charters of this kind.

[11] London was not apparently before other cities in the winning of liberties. (Round, Geoffrey de Mandeville, 372.) There were reasons enough for especial caution of Henry the Second in the matter of London.

constitutions for their towns on the other, till in the fifteenth century they were in fact the guardians of English wealth and the arbiters of English politics.

At first indeed municipal life, even at its best, was on a very humble scale. The biggest boroughs could probably in 1300 only make a show of four or five thousand inhabitants, and of enfranchised burgesses a yet smaller number;[12] while the mud or wood-framed huts with gabled roofs of thatch and reeds that lined their narrow lanes sheltered a people who, accepting a common poverty, traded in little more than the mere necessaries of life.[13] It was not till the middle of the fourteenth century that the towns as they entered on a larger industrial activity began to free themselves from the indescribable squalor and misery of the early Middle Ages; but from this time forward we begin to detect signs of stirring prosperity, at first under the guise of a frugal well-being, and later carrying its luxury with happy ostentation. In the course of the next hundred years we see trading ports such as Lynn, Sandwich, Southampton, or Bristol, and centres of inland traffic such as Nottingham, Leicester, or Reading, and manufacturing towns like Norwich, Worcester, York, heaping up wealth, doubling and trebling their yearly expenditure, raising the salaries of their officers, building new quarters, adorning their public offices and churches, lavishing money on the buying of new privileges for their citizens, or on the extension of their trade. And while the bigger boroughs were thus enjoying their harvest of blessing and fat things, the small seaports and market towns also gathered in their share of the general good fortune by which all England was enriched.

Take, for example, the town of Colchester, where from the time of the Conquest a population of about 2,200 had found means to live, but in those two hundred and fifty years had never added to their numbers. Of their manner of life we can tell something from the records of a toll levied on their goods about 1300. One of the wealthiest tradesmen in the town was a butcher, whose valuation came to £7 15*s.* 2*d.*; while the stock-in-hand of his brethren in the trade consisted mostly of brawn, lard, and a few salting tubs, though one had two carcases of oxen at two shillings each, and another had meat worth thirty shillings in his shop. If we add to the butchers thirteen well-to-do tanners, and fourteen mercers who sold gloves, belts, leather, silk purses, and needle-cases, besides cloth and flannel, and one even girdles (which, with their silver ornaments, were costly articles), we have exhausted the list of the Colchester plutocrats. In the course of the fourteenth century, however, the makers of cloth came to settle beside the tanners and butchers. Card-makers, combers, clothiers, weavers, fullers, and dyers gathered to the town, and spread their trade out into the neighbouring villages. Wool-mongers pushed their business, till in 1373 the bailiffs made the under-croft beneath the old Moot Hall into a Wool Hall for the convenience of dealers, and added a fine porch with a vault overhanging the entrance to the Moot Hall, and some shops with solars over them. Before the century had closed the population had more than doubled. The poor houses that once lined the streets were swept away, and wealthy men built shops in the new style with chambers over them fronting the street, and let them to shopkeeping tenants.[14]

In the little trading town of Bridport we have the same story. In 1319 Bridport, with its one hundred and eighty burgesses, could not at a "view of arms," or muster of fighting men, produce a single burgher who bore bow and arrows, and sent out its motley regiment equipped with the universal knife or dagger, or, as it might chance, with staves, hatchets, pole-axes, forks, or spears, while an aristocrat or two actually bore a sword. Only sixty-seven burgesses out of the one hundred and eighty paid taxes, and the general poverty seems to have been extreme. The richest man had one cow, two hogs, two brass platters, a few hides, and a little furniture – the whole worth £4 8*s.*; and one of the most respectable innkeepers of the place owned two hogs, two beds, two table-cloths, two hand

[12] Gross, Gild Merchant, i. 73, note; Archæologia, vii. p. 337-347; Stubbs, ii. 486.

[13] Burgage rents in the earliest times were accounted for by the officers not in a lump sum but "as the pennies come in." Rep. on Markets, 13.

[14] Cutt's Colchester, 111-117, 126-7.

napkins, a horse, a brass pot, a platter, a few wooden vessels, and some malt.[15] In 1323 things were a trifle better, for eighty persons were then taxed, the property of some of them being valued only at six shillings, and this under a system in which the whole of each man's possessions was exactly reckoned up – his cards, yarn, shoes, the girths he was making or trying to sell, even his store of oatmeal. A century later, however, we find a new Bridport. Traders from Bristol had settled in its streets, and men of Holland and foreign merchants and craftsmen; and the townsfolk had grown prosperous and began to bind themselves together in fraternities – the brotherhood of S. Nicholas, the brotherhood of S. Mary and S. James, the brotherhood of the Two Torches, a brotherhood of the Light of the Holy Cross in S. Andrew's, and another in S. Mary's, and the brotherhood of the Torches in the Church of the Blessed Mary – apparently the offspring of the first half of the fifteenth century. The Toll Hall was repaired, the houses in the town set in order, and a new causeway made. The Guild Hall got its clock; the church was rebuilt and fitted up with organs, and sittings in it were let out to the wealthy burghers. When, finally, a "view of arms" was again held in the town in 1458, there was not a single name left of those who had appeared in the list of 1319. But these new traders came bravely set out with bows and arrows, as well as with daggers, bills, pole-axes, or spears, or marching proudly with their mails, jacks, salets, and "white harness with a basenet." The Bridport standard had changed, and one man who came carrying quite an armoury – a gun, besides a bow, twelve arrows, a sword, and a buckler – was ordered to have twelve more arrows at the next muster.[16]

Even towns which like Rye had known all the calamities of war were only waiting for a moment of peace to win their share of the common prosperity. Burned by the French in 1377, burned and laid desolate again in 1448, Rye long remained on the level of poverty common in the Middle Ages. In 1414 it sheltered a mere handful of struggling people – twenty-one poor householders in Nesse Ward, twenty-eight in Water Melle Ward, and a somewhat larger number in Market Ward equally poor; within its walls, in fact, there was but one man – the lord of the manor – who was assessed at so great a sum as 6*s.* 8*d.*, though there was the beginning of a fashionable suburb in the Ward without the Gate, where the Mayor lived with some dozen other well-to-do householders, two of whom besides the Mayor were assessed at the aristocratic figure of 6*s.* 8*d.* By the end of the century, however, Rye fishermen were known on distant seas and Rye traders in the fairs at home and abroad. London merchants had bought property in the thriving town, and new quarters had sprung up with names borrowed from the capital – Paternoster Ward and Bucklersbury Ward. In 1493 five of the burghers were assessed as owning £400 each, and the total value of the property possessed by the inhabitants was £6,303.[17]

Evidence of accumulating wealth indeed gathers on every side. The labour and enterprise which in earlier centuries had covered England with castles and cathedrals and monasteries was now absorbed in the work of covering it with new towns. A journey through any part of the country to-day is enough to show us how ruthlessly the men of the fifteenth century swept away the parish churches which their fathers had built in the fourteenth century, to replace them with the big bare fabrics where size and ostentation too often did service for beauty, and in the building of which prosperous burghers gave more conspicuous proof of wealth and lavish generosity than of taste and feeling. In Canterbury and Worcester and Nottingham and Bristol and a host of other towns we may still admire the new houses that were being raised for the traders, with their picturesque outlines and fine carved work. Waste places in the boroughs were covered with buildings and formed into new wards. On

[15] Two other innkeepers had much the same stock-in-trade.

[16] Hist. MSS. Com. vi. part i. 491-2, 478, 489. In Reading at the muster roll of 1311 there appeared eight men armed with sword, bow, arrows, and knife; thirty-three with bows, arrows, and knives; and over two hundred and thirty-five (besides some names lost at the foot of the roll) with hatchets and knives. In 1371 the town was able to raise a body of archers for service abroad; and under Edward the Sixth it sent fifty soldiers armed with bills, swords, daggers, bows, and arrows, and paid each soldier forty pence "for the King's affairs into Boulogne." Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 7, 171, 182.

[17] Ibid. v. 497.

every side corporations instinct with municipal pride built Common Halls, set up stately crosses in the market-place such as we still see at Winchester or Marlborough, paved the streets,[18] or provided new water-supply for the growing population.[19] If we count up the new gates, and quays, and bridges, and wharves, and harbours, and sluices, and aqueducts, and markets of which the town records furnish accounts, we are filled with amazement at an activity which was really stupendous. Public duty and private enterprise went hand in hand. Sometimes the whole commonalty was called out to help at the church-building, or the digging of a new harbour; sometimes the charity once given to religious uses was turned into the channel of civic patriotism, and good citizens left money to found hospitals and almshouses and schools, to pave the streets, to pay the tolls of their town, to fee lawyers to defend its privileges, or buy a charter to protect its rights from invasion. Thus it was two traders of Canterbury who built in 1400 the first private bridge over the river; and in 1485 a mercer from London, William Pratt, constructed at his own expense the first main drain under the Old Street to carry off the rain-water into the river.[20] In Birmingham the whole community formed itself into a "guild and lasting brotherhood" for the doing of works of charity, and chiefly it would seem for the repairing of two great stone bridges and divers foul and dangerous ways on the high road to Wales – a work which the Corporation was too poor to undertake.[21]

Nor was this growth in wealth the only, or indeed the most striking part of the town's history during these three centuries from the time of Henry the Second to the time of Henry the Seventh. Trade is pretty much the same wherever it exists at all, and from its narrow dominion much of human energy will always make a way to escape. When Englishmen had spent a measure of their force in creating a nation of shopkeepers, there was still enough of buoyant and exuberant strength left to elaborate an art of government which has affected the history of the world; and the truly characteristic part of the mediæval story is that which enables us to measure the political genius with which the forerunners of our modern democracy shaped schemes of administration for the societies they had created of free workers. There was much to be done in the new ordering of life.[22] Already in the twelfth century a new force had declared itself when in France the middle and lower classes for the first time found a voice in literature. From that time onwards poets of the people and teachers of socialism, writing in the vulgar tongue for common folk, proposed startling questions and boldly pressed home their conclusions. Nothing was safe from their criticism; as they discussed the original rights of men, the "social contract" between the people and their lords, the tyranny of nobles, or the rights of peasants,[23] these new thinkers among the people gave warning of growing energies too big and passionate to live at ease in the narrow bondage of mediæval custom and tradition. The inevitable changes however came slowly, and those who lived in the midst of the movement were themselves

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[18] Act of Parliament for paving Gloucester, 1455; Fosbrooke's Gloucestershire, i. 157. For Exeter in 1466; Freeman's Exeter, 91. For Canterbury in 1474, because the "evil report" carried away by pilgrims "would be stopped if the roads were properly pitched with boulders and Folkestone stone"; Hist. MSS. Com. ix. 168, 144, 174. For Southampton in 1477, after a century of vain attempts to pave the streets; Davies, 119, 120; in 1384 a tax was levied for pavage; in 1441 accounts were rendered of paving stones provided; payments were made in 1457 to a London paviour. By the Act each citizen was ordered to pave before his own door as far as the middle of the street since "the town was full feebly paved and full perilous and jeopardous to ride or go therein, and in especial in the High Street," so that "strangers thither resorting have been oftentimes greatly hurt and in peril of their lives." For Bristol in 1491 when the whole town seems to have been new paved. Ricart, 47-48.

[19] To take a single instance, in 1421 the water-supply of Southampton was undertaken by the council, and new leaden pipes provided by the grant of a burgess who had thus bequeathed his money "for the good of his soul." An aqueduct was made at considerable expense in 1428; 261 days' work at it was paid at from 4*d.* to 6*d.* a day; over £12 more was spent on an iron grating for it, and 27*s.* 2*d.* given to the plumber who fixed it; great stones from Wathe called "scaplyd stonys" were carried, with loads of chalk, quicklime, pitch, rosin, solder, wax, and wood. In 1490 a new well was made with a "watering-place for horse and a washing-place for women." Davies, 115, 117; Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 138-40. In many towns wells were repaired, enclosed with a wall and covered with a roof and put under the care of wardens.

[20] Hist. MSS. Com. ix. 137, 145. See Paston, i. 434; Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 7, 169; x. 4, 529-30.

[21] English Guilds, 241, 249.

[22] For the contrast in this respect between the shire and the borough see Round's Geoffrey de Mandeville, 356-7.

[23] Luchaire, Communes Françaises, 22-25. See Piers Ploughman, passus i. 139-146; ii. 90-99; ix. 19-76; x. 223-227.

unconscious of the real transformation that was going on. Even at the end of the fourteenth century the writer of Piers Ploughman, when he paints for us the picture of the feudal world as it then was, has no dream that its bondage can ever be broken, that there is any escape out of the prison-house of mediæval society. For the first time we there see England, not as it appeared to historians and satirists of the court or the monastery, but as it looked to one standing in the very midst of that vast "field full of folk from end to other" – to the poet who walked among the people with his heart full of charity and pity, who by day mixed with the crowd at the fair, or watched the bargainings in the market-place, or travelled along country by-ways and entered the hovels of the poor, and at night sat in the ale-house among beggars and mendicant friars. But while he shows us all the trouble and confusion of that tumultuous crowd, the social order remains to him simple and unchangeable – fixed, in his belief, as firmly as the decrees of God and nature could establish it. He could only repeat the old time-honoured counsels of work and obedience as the final remedy for all social ills: "Counsel not the commons the King to displease." But it was more than possible that work and obedience might still leave, as it had left before, life empty of all but misery. Then the last solace lay in resignation.

> "Yea, quoth Patience, and hente out of his poke
> A piece of the Pater Noster and proffered to us all.
> And I listened and looked what livelihood it were;
> Then was it 'Fiat voluntas tua' that should find us all.
> 'Have, Actyf,' quoth Patience, 'and eat this when thee hungreth
> Or when thou clomsest for cold or clyngest for drought;
> And shall never gyves thee grieve nor great lord's wrath,
> Prison nor other pain for —*patientes vincunt*."[24]

Such was Langland's final solution for the disorders of his time. But the English were not a patient people, and the problem of the reorganization of society had become a very serious one towards the close of the Middle Ages, and was perhaps more urgent to men's fears and consciences in the fifteenth century than it had ever been before, or was to be again till our own day. It was a pressing question for humble folk, for shopkeepers and traders and artisans and journeymen who in the absence of privilege were driven to think of liberty; and in the crowded lanes, the mean workshops, the disorderly market-place, the little thatched Common Hall of the mediæval town, great principles of freedom found their early home, and fought their way to perfection and supremacy. It was not enough that the burghers should create societies of free men – "*gentlemen*," as Piers Ploughman would have said,[25] to whom the great difference that distinguished between man and man was not wealth or poverty, labour or ease, but freedom or bondage. This was the easier part of their task, and was practically finished early in their history. It was a longer and more difficult business to discover how the art of government should be actually practised in these communities, and to define the principles of their political existence. But in these matters also the burghers became the pioneers of our liberties, and their political methods have been handed down as part of the heritage of the whole people. As by degrees the multitude of privileges promised and confirmed left the important towns with no more demands to make, they turned their energies to the work of framing those elaborate and highly artificial constitutions which mark the highest point to which their proud and self-sufficient independence had attained. Instead of tamely accepting the pattern or the theory of its neighbours,

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[24] Piers Ploughman, passus xvi. 248-255.

[25] "The Jews that were gentlemen, Jesus they despised,Both his lore and his law, now are they low churls,As wide as the world is woneth (dwelleth) there noneBut under tribute and tallage as tikes and churls.And those that become Christian by counsel of the BaptistAre franklins and free…And gentlemen with Jesus."(Piers Ploughman, ed. by W. Skeat for Early English Text Society, part iii.; pass. xxii. 34.) I have ventured to give quotations from mediæval writers in modern spelling, as I am here concerned neither with philology nor the history of literature: and there are many to whom the old methods of spelling only serve to obscure the sense.

every town was making its own peculiar experiment in the art of governing, with a vivacity and a restless ingenuity proper to the culminating moment of their activity.

Meanwhile by a happy coincidence the boroughs were called to take part in the great movement by which the House of Commons was created, at a time when the discipline and experience of local self-government had prepared them to exercise a very real influence in the moulding of the English constitution into its present form. Having for the most part secured their fundamental liberties just before Simon de Montfort in 1265 summoned the middle class to take their share in the work of Parliament, and having steadily strengthened their position during all the thirty years of changing counsels and tentative experiments which followed, they saw the representation of the boroughs definitely established in 1295 – the very year after county representation had been at last perfectly acknowledged.[26] If for a time they played apparently a small part in political battles, if the separate action of the borough members is scarcely mentioned,[27] the fact still remains that throughout the century during which the House of Commons was being fashioned[28] members sent from these free self-governing communities formed almost two-thirds of that House. Edward the First sent Parliamentary writs to 166 towns, and in the Parliament of 1399, 176 representatives of boroughs sat by the seventy-four knights of the shire.[29] Silent and acquiescent as they were for a while, there are significant instances to show the steady growth of their importance, and the way in which statesmen had begun to appreciate the new force with which governments had henceforth to reckon.[30] By the close of the fourteenth century their influence was marked; and it was doubtless through its vigorous burghers that the House of Commons in the early part of the fifteenth century laid hold of powers which it had never had before, nor was to have again for two hundred years.[31] In the list of petitions and statutes throughout the century in which their influence on legislation was plainly dominant, we may look for the true beginning of democratic government in England.[32] Indeed at a yet earlier time, when the House of Commons was not seventy years old, its power had been already measured and men's imaginations kindled by its mighty destiny. If supreme over all the King kept his state at Westminster,

> "him lord antecedent,
> Both their head and their King, holding with no party,
> But stand as a stake that sticketh in a mire
> Between two lands for a true mark";

if his power was absolute, and he could

> "claim the commons at his will
> To follow him, to find him, and to fetch at them his counsel,"[33]

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[26] Stubbs, ii. 137-144, 239-244.

[27] Ibid. ii. 560, 671.

[28] Stubbs, ii. 332-4.

[29] Ibid. ii. 257; iii. 16.

[30] The former devices for illegal taxation on the King's part broke down when the commons looked so sharply after these matters that no attempt at unauthorised taxation of merchandise was made after the accession of Richard the Second. Stubbs, ii. 574-578. How completely the relation of King and commons had been reasoned out by the people we see in Langland's writings."Then came there a King, and 'by his crown,' said, 'I am a king with crown the commons to rule, And holy Church and clergy from cursed men to defend. And if me lacketh to live by, the law wills that I take There I may have it hastelokest; (quickest) for I am head of law, And ye be both members, and I above all.' ····· 'On condition,' quoth conscience, 'that thou conne defend And rule thy realm in reason right well, and in truth; Then, that thou have thine asking as the law asketh; *Omnia sunt tua ad defendendum, sed non ad deprehendendum*.'" (Piers Ploughman, passus xxii. 467-472, 478-481.)

[31] Stubbs, iii. 77; Rogers, Agric. and Prices, iv. viii.

[32] See the description of a session of Parliament in Richard the Redeless, passus iii. A.D. 1399.

[33] Piers Ploughman, passus iv. 376, &c.

yet even then Conscience warned the sovereign that to frame a righteous government "without the commons' help it is full hard, by my head";[34] and Reason

> "counselled the King his commons to love,
> For the commons is the King's treasure."[35]

The whole part however played by the towns in national politics, the degree of influence they exercised, in what ways it differed from that of the aristocratic class, how it affected matters of administration, finance, foreign policy, commercial laws, the strength of the monarchy, and the forms of the constitution – all these questions have still to be investigated. What is perfectly clear is that wise rulers in those days saw the tremendous change that was taking place in the balance of forces in the State, as even the most foolish among them felt that the power of the purse at least was passing from the country magnates to the town merchants;[36] and they gave expression to their convictions by a change in the whole character of their policy. To kings and statesmen the friendship of the burghers even in times of comparative quiet was daily becoming a matter of greater consequence to be bought at their own price. It was no longer the nobles whom they sought to bribe to their interest, but the towns; and as gifts and pensions to Court favourites declined, courtesies and gracious remissions of rent were lavished on the boroughs.[37] From this time, even when the towns had fallen to their lowest estate, their heritage of power was never wholly lost, and through their later humiliation and corruption we may still discover the evidence of their political consequence, since the measure of their influence was in fact the price set on their obedience.

If such a tale of long centuries of national growth ending in a satisfied maturity carries its suggestion of dull monotony, we need only turn to the history of towns in other times and places to discover that in this very monotony is hidden a real element of singularity. The most striking contrast lies perhaps close at hand, in the brilliant and dramatic story of the communes in France – the shortest lived of all the feudal independent lordships in Europe.[38] Of earlier origin than the English, their history goes back to the first part of the twelfth century, fifty years before the movement had effectively begun in England; and the story of their liberties is, taken all together, but a brief tale of some two hundred years, from 1130 to 1330. Their progress was rapid and their decay as swift. Indeed decline had already set in by 1223, at the very time when Norwich, Nottingham, and a number

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[34] Ibid. passus v. 176.

[35] Ibid. passus vi. 181. M. Jusserand (Epopée Mystique du Moyen Age, 101-118), justly points out what a typical representative of common opinion Langland was. Compare the popular manifesto of 1450. (Hist. MSS. Com. viii. 267.) "They say the King should live upon his commons, and that their bodies and goods are his; the contrary is true, for then needed him never to set Parliament and to ask good of them."

[36] The burden of taxation was gradually being transferred from one class to another as subsidies on moveables, and customs on import and export were found more productive and more easily managed. Stubbs, ii. 570.

[37] Reductions of rent are too numerous to give; they occurred everywhere, and were sometimes apparently bought at a considerable price. (See Round's Geoffrey de Mandeville, 366.) Loans from the towns seem to have been voluntary. In 1435 the Sandwich commonalty refused to lend money to the King; and further excused themselves from sending him soldiers for the defence of Calais, "having all the men they can spare already employed in the service of the Duke of York." (Boys, 672.) A grant to the King was again refused in 1486. (Ibid. 678.) The Norwich citizens got into trouble for instituting a suit to have their loan returned (Blomefield, iii. 147, 152). In 1424 Lynn lent 400 marks, and in 1428 the council agreed that burgesses of parliament should receive from executors of the late king a hundred pounds for a pledged circlet of gold because they could not get more (Hist. MSS. Com. xi. part 3, 161). In 1491 the king was at Bristol, where he had a benevolence of £1,800 (Ricart, 47-48). At the coming of Richard the Third in 1484, York, to gain a reduction of the fee-ferm, agreed to give him 100 marks in a cup of gold, and to the queen £100 in a dish. A list is given of the citizens who subscribed – the mayor giving £20, the recorder £100, and so on. The whole sum subscribed was £437 (Davis' York, 167-9, 174). It would be quite impossible to mention all the loans, but the instance of Canterbury is curious as the first foreshadowing of the national debt. In 1438 £40 was lent to the king, and in 1443 £50; in these cases private individuals advanced the money in various amounts according to their taste for speculation, and probably got certificates promising interest and redemption at par (Hist. MSS. Com. ix. part 1, 139).

[38] Luchaire, 288-9.

of the greater English towns were just receiving for the first time powers of choosing their own rulers and administering their own justice. In 1280 their condition was almost hopeless,[39] and half a century later the life of the free communities was over and their liberties utterly extinguished, saving always the liberty to carry on trade.

And yet we can only wonder that the attempt lasted for two hundred years, set as they were amid difficulties wholly unknown to English burghers, or with the ghosts or dim reflections of which these at the worst had only to contend in a kind of phantom fight. What were the far-off echoes of foreign conquest or defeat heard on our side of the water, or the report of an occasional local rising, compared to the devastating wars that swept the plains of France, and amid the miseries of which the communes were struggling into life? The necessities of war proved fatal to local liberty, and that in more ways than one. If warring kings and lords created independent communities for their own purposes, with the sole idea of forming fortified centres capable of self-defence, such communes could hardly prove strongholds of freedom, and the self-government of the people soon fell in fact before the requirements of military discipline. Sometimes the death of freedom was brought about by more violent methods; and the trembling inhabitants who made their way back from the woods to their ruined homes after a town had been sacked and burned by the enemy, would pray to be disenfranchised that they might thus be delivered from the burdens and dues of a commune which they were no longer able to maintain. Abroad moreover feudalism retained the authority which had been torn from it here by Norman kings, and was yet more dangerous to the burghers than war itself. Against the might of their feudal lord, king or noble or ecclesiastic, they could make in the long run but a sorry fight, and perhaps after a century of desperate struggle for emancipation in which the peasants saw their brethren slain in thousands, their farms devastated, their wealth torn from them, their emigrants driven back starving to plundered homesteads, the outcome of all their misery was finally to gain a few trading privileges by consenting to a charter which once more laid them bound at the feet of their master. Too often the lord avoided open violence by calling political craft to his aid, and devised for his burghers some form of charter which while it admirably suited his own purposes robbed the communal government of any true democratic element and made the name of liberty a mockery. As for the vast number of towns big and little under ecclesiastical dominion, they contended in vain against princes of the Church whose mighty state was measured on the grand scale of the Continent – princes with the Pope always in the background, ready at their complaint to fulminate the decree of excommunication which left all the burghers' goods at the mercy of their lord. Whether the prelate sought to annihilate rebellious serfs with fire and sword, whether with more subtle intention he devised some cunningly delusive form of charter, or contrived to hinder all the operations of free government, to thwart its developement, and to check the spread of its influence, the tragic close was always at hand – political slavery and degradation. Amid the innumerable troubles that compassed the French communes round about, the administrative difficulties, the financial cares, the public bankruptcy of town after town, the evil moments when the king's fiscal officer and the starving people made alliance to destroy the privileges of the burghers, civic freedom failed. Time and fate were allied against the commune, and the issue of the battle was decided before the fight had well begun.

Against the century of growth and the century of decay which made up the record of the French communes, we have to set three hundred years of unbroken prosperity and privilege in which the English burghers added charter to charter and filled their "common chests" with a regularity that knew no check. It is not necessary, however, to assume that Englishmen reached that happy state wholly by virtue of their native superiority; it would perhaps be truer to thank the good fortune of insignificance that so long waited on them. England, in fact, was lagging far away in the rear, where there was little of the noise and dust of battle. It was not there that the idea of municipal liberty was first proclaimed; for in the Dark Ages of riot and disorder and piracy, Celts, Latins, Teutons, all

[39] Luchaire, 64, 137.

the members of the European brotherhood in fact, found in association their natural succour against danger and aid to labour; and along the great trade routes that traversed Europe the more important societies of men confederated for protection and assistance were formed before ever Englishmen had begun to organize themselves into self-governing communities. In that European drama, everything took great continental proportions; men disputed for tremendous stakes, and in the long battle the mighty lords of the old world were never wholly routed, but still laid their grip on the modern society that was struggling to usher in a new order. In the great fight there were great defeats, such as we have seen in France, and liberty had to begin its course afresh and lead men along new roads in search of freedom and content. But we in our distant island had throughout the Middle Ages all the advantages of obscurity. According to any valid method of determining our place in the European order, whether by yearly income, or size of merchant fleets, or strength of armies, or number of inhabitants, we remained for a time after the loss of Normandy and Anjou unimportant in the eyes of Europe-of little account among the peoples; and as far as popular feeling went ourselves heedless of what went on on the Continent.[40] Tranquil and secure because no one took the trouble to think of us while we were regardless of their quarrels, we were left to learn our lessons as slowly as we would, to lay sure, if lowly, foundations, to practise our skill by safe experiments till our art was mastered. The humble display which we made in our national capacity was repeated in our municipal story. There indeed the tiny dominion of the community, the sparse population, the poor little treasure-box, the solitary "common barge," the handful of militia passing in review with their clubs and forks, present a sorry figure beside the majestic state of the big corporations over sea. But this humble condition was their true security. Set from the first in pleasant places where by conquering kings the lofty had been brought low and the humble lifted up, and where no enemy of invincible strength lay any longer across their path, the burghers might carry on their own business without care. Within the narrow area enclosed by the city wall and ditch, amid a scanty population scarcely bigger than that of a small country town to-day, experiments which would have been impossible on a great scale were tried with every conceivable variety of circumstance and expedient; and the boroughs owed to their early insignificance and isolation a freedom from restraint and dictation in which real political experience became possible.

Thus in England, as elsewhere, the character of the nation and the mould of its political thought were ultimately shaped by outward circumstance; and the forms of our freedom have been profoundly affected by the way which the towns took to liberty, by the manner in which they modified its expression according to the peculiar conditions to which each community was subject, and by the use they made of their power. But since the very existence of the towns as important centres of life, as well as the character of their development, depends on the complete transformation which English society underwent in the later Middle Ages, I venture, before beginning my real story, to give a very brief and rapid sketch of the Industrial and Commercial Revolution in which mediæval England was buried and modern England born.

[40] M. Jusserand in his Epopée Mystique du Moyen Age has well pointed out that the war with France was royal rather than national. Pp. 7-9, 117.

CHAPTER II

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The history of the fifteenth century has long remained but little known. It is very generally regarded as the "profoundly tragic close of a great epoch," and the historian looks back to the golden age of the thirteenth century as the glorious time of English and of European history – the culminating period to which all the foregoing generations slowly mounted, and from whose heights the later sons of men as slowly and surely declined and went backward. The period of this backsliding is seen as an age altogether wanting in picturesqueness and moral elevation, sunk in materialism, sordid and vulgar, a time of confused and indiscriminate corruption, where "heart and treasure" were linked in ignoble union, and the political demoralization of the people was only matched by their private degradation; and the fifteenth century has long borne the heavy burden of its evil reputation, while its records have been left comparatively undisturbed by inquisitive search.[41] For hackneyed as the period of the Wars of the Roses may seem to the superficial reader, no student has yet adequately studied the secret of the age in which the great revolutions of the next century were being prepared – the age which made possible for England the revival of letters and the reformation, which founded her commercial greatness, which revolutionized her industrial system, which cast away the last bonds of feudalism and laid the foundations of the modern State.

It is indeed true that no great man has made this century illustrious. No general or warrior of the first rank distinguished wars which were born in iniquity, and kept alive by greed. No gifted statesman left his mark on the government or administration of the country. Among the people themselves interest in national affairs seemed dead; they made revolutions and set up new kings as they were bidden to do, and kept stores of badges of the houses of York and Lancaster alike, to be ready with either sign of loyalty as the fortunes of war turned this way or that;[42] they forgot the stirring political

[41] Stubbs, Lectures on Mediæval History, p. 342; Friedman, Anne Boleyn, i. pp. 1-4; Gneist, La Constitution Communale, trans. by Hippert, i. p. 334, &c. "England at the accession of Henry the Seventh was far behind the England of the thirteenth century." (Denton, Lectures on the Fifteenth Century, 120, 118.) "This low and material view of domestic life had led to an equally low and material view of political life, and the cruelty which stained the Wars of the Roses was but the outcome of a state of society in which no man cared much for anything except his own greatness and enjoyment. The ideal which shaped itself in the minds of the men of the middle class was a king acting as a kind of chief constable, who, by keeping great men in order, would allow their inferiors to make money in peace." (Gardiner's Student's History, 330-1.) "The despondency of the English people, when their dream of conquest in France was dissipated, was attended with a complete decay of thought, with civil war, and with a standing still or perhaps a decline of population, and to a less degree of wealth." (National Life and Character, by Charles Pearson, p. 130-1.) "There are few more pitiful episodes in history. Thirty-five years of a war that was as unjust as it was unfortunate had both soured and demoralised the nation." "England had entirely ceased to count as a naval power." As for the burgesses, "if not actively mischievous they were sordidly inert." (Oman's Warwick, 4-11, 67, 133.)

[42] In Ricart's Calendar in Bristol he enters duly the fact that a battle had been fought and that one side or other was victorious without further comment. He misplaces the date of the murder of Suffolk three years, though he might well have remembered it; and he writes as a sort of after-thought in the margin of his record, "and this year the two sons of King Edward were put to silence in the Tower of London." (Ricart, 40-46.) In 1460 Norwich had its captain and 120 soldiers with King Henry in the north, and all the rest of its available forces had to hurry off to Edward at his accession. (Blomefield iii. 162-163.) The city raised £160 for the coming of Richard the Third to the city, and £140 for the coming of Henry the Seventh. (Ibid. 173-174.) For Nottingham, see vol. ii. There is no mention of Bosworth in Canterbury, and Henry the Seventh was received with the same pomp as former kings. (Hist. MSS. Com. ix. 145.) For Bosworth, where men stood afar off waiting to join the victorious side, see Fabyan, 672-673. The policy of the burghers was the same in this respect as that of the great Churchmen, who were entirely passive in the real crises of the civil war, and so ready to serve every king, that not one of them suffered loss from fidelity to any side. (Rogers' Agricul. and Prices, iv. 9, 10.) The people in general were equally indifferent. "I have read thousands of documents penned during the heat of the strife, and have found only one allusion to the character of the times in the earlier, and one about the later war of 1470-1." (Ibid., 19.) An interesting parallel to the indifference of the trading communities of the fifteenth century during the Wars of the Roses may be seen in the action of the Merchants' Company in the civil wars of the seventeenth century. (Lambert's Gild Life, 177-178.)

ballads of former generations and sang moral ditties instead. In place of the mighty theologians of an earlier time there came commentators and interpreters of little significance. Nor did a single religious leader or reformer or scholar arise to stir the popular thought or conscience: Lollardy with its questionings and criticisms was still heard of from time to time in the bigger towns and manufacturing districts, but the people generally acquiesced in the demands of the authorized religion and discipline. Literature was well nigh lost as well as the graver kinds of learning. In the beginning of the century one or two nobles had collected libraries and brought tidings of the Renascence in Italy, and later on half a dozen scholars made their way to the Italian universities; but there was neither poet nor scholar to follow the masters of an earlier age. In the fifteenth century the very language in which Chaucer wrote was but half intelligible to the mass of the people, and his tales must have been unknown out of court circles. Men were content with rhymes innumerable – on morals, on manners, on heraldry, on the art of dining, on the rules of thrift and prosperity; and in all our history there is no time so barren in literature as the reign of Henry the Sixth.

Even in a democratic age it is not easy at first sight to recognise where the interest lies of an epoch destitute of all that has made other times illustrious, and whose significance seems to shrink in comparison with the struggles and victories of the ages that preceded, and the splendid achievements of the age that followed it; and historians finding themselves face to face with so dreary a century may have been tempted to give it a character of its own for grossness, for cruelty, for any distinction whatever which will at least take it out of the range of the absolutely commonplace. But the distinguishing mark of the fifteenth century lies neither in its crime nor in its vulgarity. We must judge this period in fact as a time of transition in many ways extraordinarily like our own. In the centuries between the Great Plague and the Reformation, just as in the nineteenth century, the real significance of our history lies in the advent of a new class to wealth and power, as the result of a great industrial revolution. The breaking up of an old aristocratic order, and the creation of a middle class to be brought into politics and even into “society,” the enormous increase of material wealth, the new relation of the various ranks to one another, and the failure under altered circumstances of traditional rules of conduct, the varied careers suddenly opened to talent or ambition, the reproach for the first time attached to incompetence and poverty, the vulgarization of literature and morality which followed on their adaptation to a class as yet untrained to criticism or comparison, the extension of a habit of religion closely related to a plain morality – all these things recall to us many of the experiences of our own days, and may make us more tolerant of the unpicturesque and Philistine element whether then or now. If the chief centre of interest had once lain in the offices of the royal palace it might now be seen rather in the new Town Hall which was being built in almost every borough in England, or in the office where the mayor’s clerk was busied in making his copies of Magna Charta or extracts of Domesday, or in translating from the old French the customs and ordinances of the town, or in hunting up the rolls of the itinerant judges; or over the country-side where estates were being sold and bought with the development of a provincial instead of a national nobility and the rise of new men to possess the old acres, and where the quickening of the struggle for life was reflected in the stormy conflicts and significant concessions of the manor courts. The new middle class of shopkeepers and farmers had indeed no chroniclers and no flatterers, for it was long before men could realise how rapidly and completely the weight of influence was being transferred from the old governing class to the mass of the governed, and chroniclers still went on mechanically retailing events now comparatively trivial and unimportant. It was not till the next century that they turned from spinning out these worthless annals to a discussion of matters really important which had by that time forced themselves on the dullest apprehension.

The whole interest of the fifteenth century thus lies in the life of very common folk – of artisans and tradesmen in the towns, and in country parts of the farmers, the tenants of the new grazing lands, the stewards and bailiffs and armies of dependents on the great estates, who did all the work at home while the lord was away at the wars or at the halls of Westminster. If the century produced no

great administrator or statesman, it did create a whole class of men throughout the country trained in practical affairs, doing an admirable work of local government, active, enterprising, resolute, public-spirited, disciplined in the best of all schools for political service. If there was no great writer, the new world of the middle class was patiently teaching itself, founding its schools, learning its primary rules of etiquette and its simple maxims of morals, reading its manuals of agriculture or law or history, practising its Latin rhymes, and building up in its own fashion from new beginnings a learning which the aristocratic class had been too proud, too indifferent, or too remote to hand on to it.[43] If no religious revival shook the country, the new society was solving in its own way the problem of helping the sick and poor;[44] it was earnest in religious observance, it was framing its English litanies and devising its own plans for teaching the people an intelligent devotion.[45] The burghers began to perform in the national economy the work which in earlier centuries had been performed by the great monastic societies. The extension of trade and manufacture had fallen into their hands; they were busied in the gathering together and storing up of the national wealth.[46] They gave to labour a new dignity in social life and a new place in the national councils. From the towns came a perpetual protest against war and disorder; throughout the troubles of the fifteenth century, civil war, court intrigues, the tyranny of usurpers and the plots of the vanquished, local raids of private revenge or of land hunger, their influence was always thrown on the side of peace and quietness. Art found in them patrons; illuminators and painters, architects and bell-founders, the makers of delicate shrines and images,[47] engravers of seals, goldsmiths and workers in brass, whether of English birth or brought from foreign parts, prospered within their gates; while their harpers and minstrels doubtless had a part in the musical developement of the country at a time when English artists set the fashion of the best

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[43] See vol. ii. ch. i.

[44] In Lydd corn was given to the poor at Christmas and Easter, and gifts to lepers; payments made from 1480-1485 for Goderynge's daughter, "poor maid," "hosen, shoes, her keep, kertyl-cloth and for making thereof;" also in 1490, "paid to the poor man keeping the poor child 12 pence." After a long list of expenses for a thief and making stocks for him and a halter, "paid for one pair of shoes to his daughter 3*d.*," and "given to the quest of women 4*d.*"; summoned perhaps in reference to the daughter. (Hist. MSS. Com. v. 527, 526.) In Rye sums were paid to the poor on opening the box of maltotes. (Ibid. 494.) For Southampton, Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 112; the steward's book in 1441 contains a list of alms, £4 2*s.* 1*d.*, given away every week to poor men and women. (Davies, 294.) According to the usual calculation at this time in almshouses of a penny a day for living, this sum would mean that the corporation paid weekly for the mere subsistence of 140 persons. For Bristol, Ricart's Kalendar, 72-80, 82, &c. For Chester, Hist. MSS. Com. viii. 371. For Romney, Hist. MSS. Com. v. 535-6. The Mayor of Sandwich had to manage the hospitals of S. Bartholomew and S. John, to appoint their officers, to audit their accounts, and administer their estates made up of innumerable parcels of land and houses left by pious people. (Boys, 17-21, 526.) The municipal council of Exeter appointed every year a Warden of the Poor to look after their many charitable foundations. It had charge of Magdalen Hospital, of the Ten Cells Hospital for Poor, founded in 1406 by Simon Grendon, Mayor; the Combrew Almshouse, founded by Sir William Bonville, 1408; and an almshouse founded by John Palmer. (Freeman's Exeter, 175-6.) There was a municipal almshouse in Hereford supported by way of payment to the corporation from ecclesiastical tenants for a share in the city's privileges. (Arch. Ass. Journ. xxvii. 481.) In the fifteenth century bequests by burgesses for these purposes were very frequent and were usually left to the management of the corporation. In all large towns the mayor and aldermen presided over the court of orphans. (Davies's Southampton, 239.) The indications of poor relief by the towns must modify Mr. Ashley's conclusion (Economic History, I. part ii. 338) that "no attempt was made by the State as a whole, *or by any secular public authority*, to relieve distress. The work was left *entirely* to the Church, and to the action of religious motives upon the minds of individuals." It seems difficult to follow in this connexion his distinction drawn between the craft associations which had or had not grown out of religious fraternities (p. 325).

[45] Besides the customary Latin prayers a Norfolk guild used English prayers for Church and State, harvest and travellers, like our Litany. (English Guilds, 111-114.) The play of the Lord's Prayer was performed by a York guild. "They are bound to find one candle-bearer, with seven lights, in token of the seven supplications in the Lord's Prayer." "Also they are bound to make, and as often as need be to renew, a table showing the whole meaning and use of the Lord's Prayer, and to keep this hanging against a pillar in the said cathedral church near to the aforesaid candle-bearer." (Ibid. 137-9.) See also Hibbert's Shrewsbury Guilds, 62. For Pecok as "the first author of the Middle Ages who propounded reason as a judge of faith," and one who "might be claimed as at once the forerunner of the Erastian theory of the church, and of the Rationalist interpretation of its theology"; and for the place now given to general councils see Rogers's Agriculture and Prices, iv. 11-13. For the first signs that the revenues of monastic houses were to be devoted to other purposes. (Ibid. 101.)

[46] Agriculture remained stationary during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was in fact but little changed from the time when Walter of Henley published his treatise until the time when Fitz Herbert wrote his work about 1523 embodying most of the rules which Walter had given before him. The real progress lay not in the country but in the town.

[47] Nott. Records, ii. 143, 145, 167, 179, 191; iii. 21, 29.

music as far as the court of Burgundy.[48] They laid in fact the foundations of a new English society. The men of the New Learning, the men of the Reformation, the men who revealed the New World, were men who had been formed under the influences of the fifteenth century.

All this activity was the outcome of the great industrial and commercial revolution which was passing over the country. Until the middle of the fourteenth century, England had been to Europe what Australia is to-day – a country known only as the provider of the raw material of commerce.[49] At the close of the fifteenth century she had taken her place as a centre of manufactures, whose finished goods were distributed in all the great markets of the Mediterranean and of the Northern Seas. It is no wonder that during a change which transformed the country from a land of agricultural villages into a land of manufacturing towns, and opened for her the mighty struggle to become the carrier of the world's commerce, the whole energy of her people, thrown into a single channel, should be absorbed in accomplishing their enormous task. Every one was honestly busy in learning either how to make or how to sell, and in conquering the difficulties that beset traders as they strove to push their way into the world's market on equal or, if possible, more than equal terms with competitors who had long held unquestioned supremacy.

From the twelfth century wool had been the one great export of England, and the one great source of wealth for nobles, churchmen, farmers, even kings. So important was its sale that statesmen very early saw the necessity of securing for the national Exchequer a share in the profits of the main national trade; and in aid of the royal treasury they devised in the first half of the thirteenth century a system which was quite peculiar to England, the organization of the Staple.[50]

The Staple was an appointed place to which alone certain goods might be brought for sale, raw materials such as wool, wool-fells, skins, lead, or tin, of which wool was far the most important. Fixed for the first hundred years in some foreign town, generally in Bruges, it was shifted from place to place by Edward the Third, who from 1353 made various experiments as to establishing it in England; but finally about 1390, Calais was decided upon as the most advantageous spot. Thither every dealer had to carry his wares (unless he was ready to pay a high tax to the Crown, or to buy at the King's price a license for free trading); and he must carry them along certain appointed routes only – from Lincoln by St. Botolph, from Norwich by Yarmouth, from Westminster by London, from Canterbury by Sandwich, from Winchester by Southampton, as the government in its wisdom might decide. In a kind of secondary sense these places where the wool was gathered for export thus became towns of the Staple, and certain officers, Mayors and Aldermen of the Staple were appointed to control their trade. The merchants' goods, first weighed at the point of departure, must be weighed again at the port where they were shipped, and sealed with the seal of the Mayor of the Staple, while to check fraud there was an elaborate system of official papers to be sent to the Treasury in London and to the Staple in Calais for every such transaction of weighing and toll-taking. Every possible precaution was taken to maintain the position of the merchants in the European market by rules which practically forced the wool into the hands of foreign and not native buyers, so that English traders complained that their interests were sacrificed to courting the patronage of the Continent. If, for example, the chief Staple town was for any reason moved from over sea to England, native dealers were absolutely forbidden to export any Staple wares, so that foreigners might be forced or encouraged to come and take part in the trade. Foreign dealers were allowed to vote along with them for officials, and so late

[48] Clément, Jacques Cœur, 196-7. Nicholas Sturgeon was ordered by the Privy Council in 1442 "to go and choose six singers of England such as the messenger that is come from the Emperor will desire for to go to the Emperor." Proceedings and Ordinances of Privy Council, ed. Sir Harris Nicholas, 1834, v. 218.

[49] Mr. Jacobs tells me that he has found no direct evidence of Jews lending to townspeople in the twelfth century; there are only some indications such as that they sought for debtors in S. Paul's; (The Jews of Angevin England, p. 45) and that they claimed to attend the assizes at Bury. (Ibid. 142.) If their business lay, as it seems, with nobles and landowners, it would prove the absence of any demand for capital in the towns.

[50] For an account of the Staple see Schanz, i. 327 et seq.; von Ochenkowski, Englands Wirthschaftliche Entwickelung im Ausgange des Mittelalters, 220; Stubbs, ii. 446-8.

as 1445 the English merchants vainly prayed that no Stapler might take part in election of Mayor or Constable of the Staple unless he had ten sacks of wool cocketed at Calais.

In thus forcing all the export trade of the country through one narrow channel the first purpose of the State was merely to provide a convenient method of gathering customs into the Exchequer; and in course of time it further discovered that this trading system might be used as a weapon against foreign peoples in case of quarrel. But the very last object of the Staple organization was the convenience of the traders. Nor had the merchants themselves any illusions in this respect. To them the Staple seemed at its beginning contrary to the liberties of Magna Charta;[51] and a long experience taught them how its provisions might keep them shut in between the rapacity of those in authority and the hatred of the farmers who produced the wool which they sold.[52] They could however still wring a rich advantage out of superficial calamity – the advantage to be found in monopoly and corporate privilege – and this was developed with consummate art. The wool trade gathered into their hands was hedged round with monopolies and regulations, protected by fixed prices and times of sale. The concourse of customers at Calais was diligently maintained; no buyer was allowed to order his work through a commission house, so that traders might be forced to come to the market in person and do their business. By the charter of Edward the Third a Mayor and twenty-four Aldermen chosen by the whole body of merchants absolutely ruled the Staple trade, appointed officers, supervised markets, made regulations as to the treatment of foreigners, the duties of innkeepers, or the general conduct of business, and administered justice according to the Law Merchant with a sworn jury of foreigners or English or both together, according to the case to be tried.[53] And since the governing body had general control beyond Calais itself over all English merchants, not only in Bruges but throughout Flanders, while they governed in England through their local officers, the power of the Staple extended far and wide and brought all the scattered merchants under one general organization.[54] Formidable through their wealth and power, they could command the support of English kings and Burgundian dukes against rival traders. The profits to be made at Calais tempted the landowners at home,[55] and all who were wealthy enough to pay the required dues and fees flocked into their body, till the great association at last included all rich wool-growers and shut out only the poor farmers and people of no account in the country. Their monopoly was so complete, and their discipline so effective, that they could absolutely dictate prices; and a judicious pooling system took away any temptation on the part of the members to break the ranks.[56] At last against the original intentions of legislators they even got into their own hands the carrying of the export trade, and so long as wool remained the chief export of England 80 per cent. of this trade passed through their hands.

But so far as the State was concerned all this elaborate system for the protection of the wool-trade had simply grown out of the fundamental conception of the Staple as a fruitful source of supply for the royal treasury; and this theory was carried out to its logical issues. A fixed sum was demanded from the merchants year by year which they had to pay whether their trade was good or bad; while in their mercantile dealings they were terribly hampered by a host of regulations issued as to the mint in Calais, and invented by financiers who from the middle of the fourteenth century were haunted by alarms as to a possible dearth of gold and silver, and arbitrarily used the Staple as a means of forcing the flow of precious metal into England.[57] Nor was the drain of taxation at all times legal and regular.

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[51] Schanz, i. 329, &c.

[52] Ibid. 657.

[53] Schanz, i. 543; von Ochenkowski, 216-7. For the Law Merchant see Mr. Maitland's Pleas in Manorial Courts (Selden Soc.), p. 137. For Staple Statutes see 14 R. II. cap. 3, 4.

[54] Schanz, i. 332, 338.

[55] See Paston Letters, iii. 166.

[56] Schanz, i. 501.

[57] Von Ochenkowski, 202, 210; Schanz, 495-500. Petition of merchants in 1442 to be relieved from these rules refused. Proc. Privy Council, v. 217.

Merchants paid money down for the protection and favour of the king in reiterated loans or gifts, whether free or forced. The Captain of Calais, as head of the only standing army which the English kings then possessed, advanced a kind of public claim on the Staplers' wealth for the security of his soldiers' pay; and the merchants had many a time good reason to tremble for their wool, and might cry in vain for redress if their whole store was confiscated to pay the soldiers' arrears of two or three years, or if militant lords "shifted with the Staple of Calais" for £18,000 or so for costs of war.[58]

All these burdens however could be borne so long as business prospered in their hands. If a Parliament like that of 1258, or a great statesman like Simon de Montfort, urged that England should herself become an independent and self-supporting centre of manufactures, these seemed as idle words to monopolists dealing in wool with command of the world's market, who saw no need to forsake their easy path to wealth at a moment when the growth of manufactures in the Netherlands opened a vast market for English produce. In the time of Edward the Third it is said that 30,000 sacks of wool were shipped every year from English ports.[59]

But before the reign of Edward had closed, the exporters of wool knew that they had fallen on evil days. Trade began to slip from their grasp. The revenue they paid from their profits to the King's Exchequer fell in the few years from 1391 to 1411 to one-fifth of its former value,[60] and was still calculated at this melancholy fifth in 1449. Instead of the thirty thousand sacks which they yearly counted in the fourteenth century, they could not at the close of the fifteenth century collect more than 8,624 sacks, and in the last year of Henry the Eighth even this number had shrunk to under 5,000.[61] Taxes which lay comparatively lightly on them in happy days, fell as an intolerable burden when their warehouses lay empty, and their ranks were thinned by bankruptcy and desertion.[62] At the very moment when all England was being rapidly turned into a land of sheep pastures for the endless production of wool, the great company of the wool traders was finally and irrevocably ruined.

The wool, in fact, was being sold at home, and out of the ruin of the merchants of the Staple the cloth-makers sucked no small advantage. For the great revolution in trade was rapidly being completed – the revolution by which England was turned from being a country whose chief business was exporting wool into a country whose chief business was exporting cloth.[63] The people had indeed long manufactured rough cloth for common use.[64] But during the reigns of the three Edwards the idea had constantly gained ground that by working up their own raw material[65] Englishmen might easily retain for themselves the profits which foreigners had till now secured, and manufacturers were undoubtedly doing a considerable export trade in the middle of the fifteenth century.[66] Half a century later, in 1411, the very year when the subsidy on wool fell to a fifth, broad-cloths are first mentioned in an Act of Parliament; and from this time they became the chief cloths of trade. As though they had been for a while half forgotten by the Exchequer, the exporters of cloth found themselves free from all

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[58] In 1442 the merchants of the Staple of Calais begged that payment should be made to the soldiers for the surety of the merchants' wools. (Proceedings of Privy Council, v. 215, 216.) When the lords seized Calais in 1459, "they shifted with the Staple of Calais for £18,000" to carry on the war with. After Edward's accession, in 1462, the merchants claimed repayment. Edward refused, and after long efforts the merchant who represented them and had borne the chief charges died a ruined man in sanctuary at Westminster (Fabyan, 635, 652-3).

[59] A sack was 364 lbs. of 16 oz. each (Schanz, ii. 569).

[60] Stubbs, iii. 69, Stat. 27, H. VI. c. 2.

[61] Schanz, ii. 15.

[62] Under the system of paying a fixed sum in good and bad years alike the poor merchants became bankrupt, and in the middle of the sixteenth century the number of wool exporters fell enormously (Schanz, ii. 17). An extremely interesting statement by the Staplers of the causes of their decay is given by Schanz in vol. ii. 565-9.

[63] In the years from 1485 to 1546 general trade had increased by one-third, while the wool trade had decreased by one-third (Schanz, ii. 12).

[64] In the Paston Letters there is even in the fifteenth century complaint of the quality of Norfolk cloth, i. 83.

[65] Ashley's Woollen Industry, 39, afterwards expanded in his Economic History, part ii., chap. iii. This book was published after these pages had been printed. Riley's Mem. London, 149-50; Schanz, i. 436-440, 588-9.

[66] The first charter to the company of drapers or dealers in cloth in London was in 1364.

subsidy tax and only obliged to pay to the indifferent authorities tolls that amounted to less than two per cent. for natives and merchants of the Hanse occupied in the trade, and less than eight per cent. for aliens; and complacently measured this sum with the tolls of the Staplers – the thirty-three per cent. paid by merchants of the Staple, or seventy per cent. by all other traders,[67] a tax which perhaps explains why in 1424 Parliament had to forbid the carrying of sheep over sea to shear them there. The manufacturers, too, made alliance with the discontented wool-growers. A farmer who could sell his wool next door, did not trouble to send it with vexatious formalities over sea to Calais; and in course of time the cloth merchants insisted upon laws which gave to them during certain seasons the first choice of the wool before the Staplers were even allowed to enter the market.[68]

Under these circumstances trade grew apace. Carracks of Genoa carried English cloths to the shores of the Black Sea; galleys of Venice fetched them to the pits of the Venetian dyers; merchants of the Hanseatic League sold them in the fair of Novgorod; English traders travelled with them to the inland markets of Prussia, and gave them in exchange for casks of herrings in Denmark. At the close of the century the English Merchant Adventurers exported about 60,000 pieces of cloth yearly; and in the beginning of the sixteenth century the cloth dealers boasted that never before in the memory of man was so much cloth sold out of England. The 60,000 bales rose in 1509 to 84,789 pieces, and in 1547 to 122,354;[69] and the dealers claimed further gratitude and admiration of their country for the fact that they had "by their industry" raised by a fifth the price demanded from the foreigner.[70] Meanwhile the manufacturer was also getting hold of the home market, as the great religious corporations and landowners who had once provided on their own estates for all local wants recognized the new condition of things, and instead of making cloth at home as of old, sent every year far and wide across the country to the great clothing centres to buy material for the household liveries,[71] seeking from one place the coarse striped cloth of the old pattern and from another the goods of the new fashion. The fine black copes of worsted were favourite gifts of benefactors to churches, and a patriotic Norfolk gentleman, after seeing a "tippet of fine worsted which is almost like silk," decided to "make his doublet all worsted for worship of Norfolk."[72]

Nor was the growth of manufacturing enterprise confined to the making of cloth. For a couple of centuries the iron trade had made of the Weald the Black Country of those days, and had stirred the Forest of Dean with the din of its seventy-two moveable forges; and now, what with the metals and what with the coal of the country, "the merchants of England maintain and say that the kingdom is of greater value under the land than it is above."[73] In the reign of Edward the Fourth when there was a riot among the Mendip miners, and the Lord Chief Justice went down to "set a concord and peace upon the forest of Mendip," it is said ten thousand people appeared before him at the place of trial.[74] But for all this miners could no longer keep pace with the demands of the country, now that new industries on all sides required metal that had once gone to supply the wants of the farmer

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[67] This statement is made by Schanz, i. 441, and his reasons are given, ii. 1-7. 31 H. VI. c. 8.

[68] 4 H. VII. c. 11; Schanz, i. 449.

[69] Schanz, i. 11; ii. 17, 18.

[70] Schanz, ii. 571-2.

[71] In 1472 the prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, buys from a London alderman two pieces of cloth for gentleman's livery, nine for yeoman's, and five for groom's, the price, £39 14*s.*; from a "raymaker" in New Salisbury he buys similar cloths in 1475 and 1480; again from Hadley, in 1499, he got eighteen pieces, and russet cloths from a Cranbrooke clothier. (Hist. MSS. Com. v. 436-7, 459.) Fastolfe bought cloth for his soldiers at Castlecoombe, Wilts (Paston Letters). The Warden of Merton, Bishop Fitz James, bought for his fellows and himself at Norton Mandeville in Essex. (Rogers' Economic Interpretation of History, 151.)

[72] Paston Letters, ii. 235. 1465.

[73] Debate between the Heralds of France and England, probably published from 1458 to 1461, translated by Pyne, p. 61. Published in French by the Société des Anciens Textes Français. In 1454 the commons petitioned that silver mines in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, and Somerset, should be worked (Schanz, i. 493). For coal see Paston, iii. 363. Nottingham Records, i. 145. In 1307 there were complaints about the corruption of London air by use of coal. Cruden's Gravesend, 84-5.

[74] Hist. MSS. Com. vi. 347.

only; and though stores were brought from Sweden and Spain, the price of iron increased to double what it had been before the Plague.[75] Shipbuilders at the end of the fourteenth century were fitting out vessels for foreign as well as for English buyers. English gunsmiths began to send out of their workshops brazen guns and bombards superior to anything made in France, and which were said to have given England its success in the French war under Henry the Fifth.[76] A number of towns, big and little, boasted of their bell-foundries, as for example London, Salisbury, Norwich, Gloucester, Bridport, and others.[77] The copper-workers of Dinant had traded with England since the thirteenth century, and in the fourteenth century had an entrepôt at Blackwall; but in 1455 the founders set up their industry in England, stealing away secretly from Dinant to profit by the cheaper labour and ready sale in this country.[78] Flemish experts taught to Englishmen the art of brickmaking, and native builders were setting up throughout the country the first brick houses that had been seen in it since the departure of the Romans.[79] A whole series of industrial experiments proclaimed the enthusiasm with which the people accepted the challenge to secure for themselves the profits of foreign manufacturers. Artificers often more ambitious than skilful tried to establish a native industry of glass painting.[80] Instead of fetching from abroad carpets and the tapestry used for churches, manufactories were set up at Ramsey,[81] whence came perhaps also some of the "counterfeit Arras" which adorned the humbler tradesmen's homes. Frames "ordained and made for the making of silk" were at work;[82] lace-makers and ribbon weavers begged the protection of the government; and English workers sent into the market large quantities of the linen called Holland from its first home. The export of raw material fell altogether out of fashion. Traders no longer carried skins over sea undressed to be prepared by foreign labour, but had the work done by English artizans at home. And whereas at the beginning of the fifteenth century merchants brought beer from Prussia to England, at its close they were carrying beer from London to Flanders.[83]

What with the inland and the outland trade, riches gathered into the hands of the merchants with bewildering rapidity, and with results which alarmed good conservatives. A statute of Parliament passed in 1455 lamented the good old days when Norfolk and Norwich used to employ only six or eight attorneys at the King's Court, "in which time great tranquillity reigned in the said city and counties." This "tranquillity" was broken by the manufacturing and export trade, for now a body of eighty or more lawyers busily frequented every fair and market and assembly, moving and inciting people to lawsuits, and while having nothing to live on but their attorneyship yet prospered so well that a wise legislature had to order that Norfolk should henceforth as of old have only six attorneys

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[75] Rogers' Econ. Interpretation, 276.

[76] Brazen pieces, invented 1340 or 1370, were first used in England at the siege of Berwick, 1405 (Eng. Chron. 1377-1461, p. 184); not known in France so well (Three books of Polydore Vergil's English History, 9-1 °Camden Society). For the Lydd gun of 1456 the gunmakers were paid 11s. 8d.; the binding and iron for it cost 18s. "Guns with six chambers" mentioned as early as 1456 in Cinque Port towns. (Hist. MSS. Com. v. xvii.)

[77] Journ. of Archæl. Association, 1871, p. 416; Hist. MSS. Com. vi. 489.

[78] Pirenne, Dinant, 102, 94, 95. In the fifteenth century the Dinant traders sent their wares by Antwerp, not by Damme.

[79] For English brick building see Rogers' Agric. and Prices, iv. 440. First notice of bricks at Cambridge 1449, in London 1453, in Oxford 1461; common in eastern counties before end of fifteenth century. Ibid. iii. 432, 433. The proverb, "as red as Rotherham College," refers to one of the first brick buildings in Yorkshire.

[80] There is good fifteenth century English glass at Malvern and elsewhere. But according to Dugdale English glass was forbidden in the Beauchamp chapel at Warwick.

[81] Turner's Domestic Architecture, 98.

[82] Silk manufacture in London in the fifteenth century was carried on by women; their complaints of the Lombard merchants noticed in Act of 1454 (33 H. VI. c. 5). A bill with the royal sign manual prays that the king would grant to Dom. Robert Essex his frames "ordeigned and made for the makyng of sylkes," with their instruments which now "stondith unoccupyed within your Monastery of Westminster," and he will ordain workmen to use them. Temp. Edward the Fourth, Hist. MSS. Com. iv. I, 177.

[83] Libel of English Policy. (Political Poems and Songs, composed between 1327 and 1483, ii. ed. Wright Rolls Series.) For export of English beer to Flanders, see Fœdera, xii. 471 1492. Beer was a "malt liquor flavoured with bitter herbs," as distinct from ale, made before 1445, though commonly ascribed to a century later.

and Norwich two.[84] Nor does it seem that Norwich was exceptionally wicked, even though in Piers Ploughman Covetousness is represented with a "Norfolk nose,"[85] for about the same time we read in Nottingham of twenty-four rolls written within and without with the pleas concerning trading questions of a single year. The whole country in fact shared in traders' profits from king to peasant. It is calculated that in the reign of Henry the Eighth English exports so far exceeded imports as to bring about £50,000 yearly into the country, and the balance of trade inclined yet more strongly in favour of England under Henry the Seventh.[86] Not only did the king lay up vast treasure, but the very goldsmiths' shops in London were reported by a foreign traveller to contain more precious metals than all those of Rome, Milan, Florence, and Venice taken together.[87] So far as the middle class is concerned evidence of accumulating wealth is to be found on every side, and the masses of the people in spite of the drain of war taxation shared in the general prosperity. In the middle of the fifteenth century Chief Justice Fortescue contrasts their state with that of the French commons. "These drink water; they eat apples with bread right brown made of rye. They eat no flesh, but if it be right seldom a little lard, or of the entrails and heads of beasts slain for the nobles and merchants of the land. They wear no woollen but if it be a poor coat under their outermost garment made of great canvas and called a frock. Their hosen be of light canvas and pass not their knee, wherefore they be gartered and their thighs bare. Their wives and children go barefoot; they may in none otherwise live… Their nature is wasted and the kind of them brought to nought. They go crooked and be feeble, not able to fight nor to defend the realm; nor they have weapon nor money to buy them weapon withal… But blessed be God, this land is ruled under a better law; and therefore the people thereof be not in such penury, nor thereby hurt in their persons but they be wealthy and have all things necessary to the sustenance of nature." "In France the people salt but little meat except their bacon, for they would buy little salt" unless the king's officers went round and forced every household to take a certain measure, such as they thought reasonable. But "this rule would be sore abhorred in England, as well by the merchants that he wont to have their freedom in buying and selling of salt as by the people that use much to salt their meats."[88]

An industrial revolution on such a scale as this brought a political revolution in its train. The English population, says a writer of about 1453, "consists of churchmen, nobles, and craftsmen, as well as common people."[89] It was a novel and significant division. Traders and manufacturers took their places somewhat noisily beside their fellow politicians of older standing, filling the whole land till it seems for a moment as if nothing counted any more in English life save its middle class – a busy, hard, prosperous, pugnacious middle-class. Slowly emerging from its early obscurity, in this century it had arrived at power definitely, ostentatiously, carrying a proud look and a high stomach, intent on its own affairs, heedless of the Court, regardless of ministers save when it had to bribe them, irreverent to the noble, the "proud penniless with his painted sleeve,"[90] tolerant of ecclesiastics and monks only so long as they could be kept rigidly within their allotted religious functions.[91] Henceforth in the workshop and the market-place home politics and foreign affairs were discussed from a new

[84] Blomfield, iii. 160. 33 H. VI. cap. vii.

[85] Piers Ploughman, Introduction to Text C, xxxi.

[86] Schanz, ii. 35, 36.

[87] Italian Relation, 42-3 (Camden Soc.); Schanz, i. 513; Heralds' Debate, 65.

[88] Plummer's Fortescue, 114-5, 132. Compare Bacon's Henry the Seventh, 71-72.

[89] Heralds' Debate, 61, 1453-1461.

[90] Richard the Redeless, passus iii. 172.

[91] Brinklow's Tracts, published in the first half of the sixteenth century, afford interesting illustrations of the type of radical politician formed in the towns. His proposal for a single chamber and the list of reforms sketched out are not more significant than his criticism of parliamentary despotism and inefficiency, "This is the thirteenth article of our creed added of late, that whatsoever the Parliament doth must needs be well done. and the Parliament, or any proclamation out of the parliament time cannot err … then have ye brought Rome home to your own doors and given the authority to the King and Parliament that the cardinal bishops gave unto the Pope … if this be so, it is all vain to look for any amendment of anything." Brinklow's Complaynt, E. E. Text Society, 35. See also pp. 8, 12.

point of view – the interest of the trader and the manufacturer; and the middle and working classes presently began to fling to the winds the old statecraft whose maxims had done service before their advent among the makers of the national policy.

In the matter of our foreign relations we see the drift of public thought and discussion reflected in a pamphlet by which one of the King's ministers, Moleyns, Bishop of Chichester, sought to appeal to the popular imagination and define our right attitude to continental peoples. His Libel (or Little Book) of English Policy, published about 1445, was clearly designed for the vulgar use.[92] Written, as the common taste of the day demanded, in rhyming form where the absence of poetic art and the inspiration of a plain common-sense constituted a double claim on public attention, it made its frank appeal to the prejudice of the stall-holder in the market and of the craftsman who lived by making his homely English wares – men who saw in foreign products articles whose sinful extravagance could only be matched by the worthlessness that distinguished all work not turned out by an Englishman. With vigorous strokes the Bishop sketched the outlines of England's trading interests with every nation in Europe, and at the end of each paragraph passionately drove home his moral. Laying hold of the fundamental axiom that the sole and undivided concern of England in all her foreign relations was the protection of her commerce, he maintained that so long as she kept a firm hold on the narrow seas between Dover and Calais, she might rule the trade of the world. For there all commerce from north to south or south to north had to pass through the strait gate held by her sentinels on either side; so that while an inexorable fate drove the nations into her net, England safely hidden behind her wall of defence, the stormy Channel, need have no care so long as she looked well to her navy and kept it swift to seize her prey and strong to drive her enemies back from looking over the wall. At its very outset the commercial society had thus its Cobden to preach after his kind the doctrine of non-intervention and the kingdom of the seas.

The exponents of a new home policy pressed hard on the heels of the founders of a new diplomacy. About thirty years after the Libel of English Policy, another "Libel" was composed in imitation of the first tract.[93] Less pretentious and elaborate than the first, the new poem was probably the work of some person of less exalted rank, whose converse had been with the working men of the country rather than with merchants of London or peers of the realm and ministers of the King, and who was far more troubled about our industrial policy at home than our commercial policy abroad. His view of our position was also finely optimistic. For, seeing that foreign traders were bound, whether they would or no, to come to us either for wool or for cloth, and thus depended on England for one of the first necessaries of life, we, who were put in this happy position of universal provider, were clearly "by God's ordinance," destined first to satisfy ourselves, and then "to rule and govern all Christian kings," and make paynims also "full tame";[94] and so "of all people that be living on the ground" were most bound to pray and to please God. The recognition of these inestimable blessings should bring of course its corresponding sense of our duty to sell our goods as dear as we could; to "restrain straitly" the export of wool so that "the commons of this land might have work to the full";[95] and in any case to export only the coarsest wool, on the working of which the margin of profit must be small – but a fifth in fact of what might be made on good material. "The price is simple, the cost is never the less; they that worked such wool in wit be like an ass." Above all, the working men must be protected by law in the conditions of their labour, so that "their poor living and adversity might be altered into wealth, riches, and prosperity," and that for the profit of the whole realm. The growth of industry

[92] Libel of English Policy (Political Poems and Songs, ii. 157-205. Roll's series, ed. Wright). The Libel was probably written after 1436. The Bishop was murdered in 1450. (Agric. and Prices, iv. 533.)

[93] Wright's Pol. Poems, ii. 282-7. Schanz, i. 446.

[94] Compare the very similar expression of faith in a modern labour paper. "To this island, small as it is, has been given the work of leading the industrial organization of the world; that is to say, of governing and ordering the affairs of the world." Trade Unionist, Dec. 26, 1891.

[95] Compare Paston Letters, i. 531; Brinklow's Complaynt 11.

was already bringing in its train a modern theory that "the whole wealth of the body of the realm riseth out of the labours and works of the common people… Surely the common weal of England must rise out of the works of the common people."[96]

From this time therefore the policy of England was to be the policy of a great industrial state. But the new way on which its people were thus striving to enter was not to be a way of good-will at home or of harmony with the nations. Merchant and burgher might remain, as they did, absolutely indifferent to all schemes of mere military aggrandizement[97] such as the conquest of France, so that after the taking of Bordeaux by the French in 1445 not a single cry was raised for the recovery of our lost possessions; and they might rather look for the extension of their trade to the bold enterprising genius of trading companies and pirates exulting in freedom from royal interference and military restrictions, and only calling on the State for diplomatic aid in the case where this proved convenient for the winning of a commercial treaty. But the secret of peace was not yet found, nor was the settlement of industrial frontiers to prove simpler than the definition of military borders.

For as yet England had wakened no jealousies simply because she had never been a competitor with other nations; but obvious trouble lay in wait for her people so soon as they were fairly swept into the commercial struggle of the Continent, and introduced by their manufactures to their first real trade disputes. The weaver of the Netherlands, for example, had gladly welcomed the English trader as the inexhaustible provider of his raw material; but it was another matter when the Englishman came as a rival manufacturer laden with bales of cloth, grudging the old supply of wool, and setting up stalls in Flemish markets to seduce away his ancient customers. The Flemish towns had seen an end to their prosperity, and towns in such a case were bitter in negotiations with their rivals.[98] Bruges which in the thirteenth century had 40,000 looms, was at the end of the fifteenth century offering citizenship at a mere trifle to draw back inhabitants to its deserted streets; Ypres, which in 1408 had a population of from 80,000 to 100,000, and from 3,000 to 4,000 clothworkers, had in 1486 only from 5,000 to 6,000 inhabitants, and twenty-five to thirty cloth-factories; and in Ghent matters were little better. Against all the misery of a century of slow death in Flanders – a misery on which the English weaver throve and fattened – the doomed manufacturers set up hasty barriers on this side and on that, taxes and tolls and municipal ordinances and State decrees to shut English cloth out of Flanders, which were met by angry English rejoinders forbidding Flemish cloth in the English markets. Similar difficulties followed everywhere the appearance of the English trader with his goods. The Hanseatic League drove him out of Denmark, and the Teutonic Order banished him from Prussia. Moreover while disputes of manufacturers kept the North in a tumult, commercial quarrels disturbed the South, and English merchant vessels met the Genoese or the Venetians in the seas of the Levant to fight for the carrying trade of the Mediterranean. No limit was set to the pirate wars that raged from Syria to Iceland till a great statesman, Henry the Seventh, made his splendid attempt to discover through international treaties the means of securing a settled order for the new commercial state.

Nor was the question of home politics more easy of solution. Under the steady pressure of public feeling the government was gradually forced out of the early simplicity of its view of regulating commerce as a financial expedient in aid of the Treasury, and began to concern itself anxiously about the protection of industry in the interests of the community. Cloth manufacturers in particular entered on a period of protected security such as the Staplers had never known, when

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[96] Pauli, Drei volkswirtschaftliche Denkschriften, s. 61, 75.

[97] In 1447 exactions in England were so heavy "as that the minds of men were not set upon foreign war, but vexed above measure how to repel private and domestical injuries, and that therefore neither pay for the soldier nor supply for the army were as need required put in readiness." (Polydore Vergil, 77 Camden Soc.) For interruption of trade by the war, Paston, i. 425-6. Davies' Southampton, 252-3. The Staplers complain that before the war the French bought yearly 2,000 sacks of wool, now only 400 (Schanz, ii. 568). For effect of the war on the salt trade, Rogers' Econ. Interpretation of History, 100. For the wine trade, &c., Schanz, i. 299-300, 643-50. "It cannot be brought to pass by any mean that a French man born will much love an English man, or, contrary, that an English will love a French man; such is the hatred that hath sprung of contention for honour and empire." (Pol. Vergil, 82.)

[98] Schanz, i. 32-33.

kings became the nursing fathers of their trade, and its prosperity was considered an absorbing charge to the government. But when Parliament began in 1463 (almost the very year in which the second "Libel" appeared) to concern itself very actively with industrial problems,[99] the question of trade legislation had already become extremely complex and difficult. As soon as the village weaver began to make cloth for the Prussian burgher or the trader of the Black Sea instead of for his next door neighbour, the old conditions of his trade became absolutely impossible. The whole industry was before long altogether re-organized both from the commercial and the manufacturing side. The exporting merchants, as we shall see later, drew together into a new and powerful association known as the Merchant Adventurers. Meanwhile the army of workmen at home was broken up into specialized groups of spinners, weavers, carders, fullers, shearers, and dyers. The seller was more and more sharply separated from the maker of goods. Managers and middlemen organized the manufacture and made provisions for its distribution and sale. The clothier provided the raw material, gave out the wool to be made up, and sold again to the draper.[100] And the draper "lived like a gentleman," and sold to the big public, despising the lower forms of trade. Old-fashioned economists and timid conservatives looked on aghast at the accelerating changes, and declared that the country was being brought to certain ruin by the reckless race of its people to forsake handicrafts or the production of wealth, and press wholesale into the ranks of merchants or mere distributors.

With this division of labour and the quickened contest for profits, there started into life rival interests more than enough to break up the whole community into groups of warring factions. The "upper classes" generally, statesmen, treasury officials, nobles, the greater proprietors lay and ecclesiastical – in fact all the wealthy owners of flocks who could enter the company of the Staplers and share their profits – desired an abundant export of wool; while the small farmers and the yeomen, shut out by poverty from the association, and bitterly hostile to the wealthy monopolist, sided with the townsfolk to whom visions of wealth had first dawned in the manufacturing industries and the export of cloth, and who would gladly have kept all the wool of the country at home.[101] Merchants and manufacturers had their own special controversy, for while the foreign trader was boasting of his energy in raising the price of cloth, the middlemen and makers at home, whose whole interest lay in rapid sales, complained that people in the Netherlands would no longer buy English goods owing to the increased cost, and that the English towns were thus brought to destitution.[102] Moreover the great London merchants were making a determined effort to force the whole foreign trade of England through their warehouses in London, and to shut all channels of commerce save those provided by themselves;[103] and demanded that all cloth for the Netherlands, that is practically one-third of all the cloth then exported, must be carried by the maker to London, and there sold, as was averred, to the exporting merchants either for credit or below cost price.[104] Here of course they came into conflict with the local dealers who wanted frequent and convenient markets for their wares, and liberty to make their own bargain with foreign buyers visiting their town; for to the clothier this question of

[99] See the series of statutes with which the reign of Edward the Fourth opens. 4, Ed. IV. c. 1-8. Schanz, i. 447.

[100] Ashley's Wool. Ind. 81-2; expanded in his Economic History, part ii. Schanz, i. 445.

[101] Schanz, i. 446. "The caryage out of wolle to the Stapul ys a grete hurte to the pepul of Englond; though hyt be profitabul both to the prynce and to the marchant also." (Starkey, England in the Reign of Henry the Eighth. Early English Text Society, p. 173.)

[102] Brinklow's Complaynt, E. E. Text Soc. p. 11. Schanz, i. 479, note.

[103] The fellowship of the mercers and other merchants and adventurers living in London "by confederacy made among themselves of their uncharitable and inordinate covetous for their singular profit and lucre contrary to every Englishman's liberty, and to the liberty of the Mart there" made an ordinance and constitution that every Englishman trading with the marts of Flanders or under the Archduke of Burgundy should first pay a fine to the Merchants' Fellowship in London on pain of forfeiture of all their wares bought and sold. The fine was at first half an old noble, and demanded by a colour of a fraternity of S. Thomas at Canterbury, and "so by colour of such feigned holiness it hath been suffered to be taken for a few years past." Finally, however, the London Fellowship raised the fine to £20, then the other merchants began to withdraw from the marts and the cloth trade to suffer. On the complaint of the merchant adventurers living outside London Parliament ordered that the fine should only be ten marks. (12 Henry VII., cap. 6.) For the complaint of the Hull traders against the merchant adventurers of London in 1622 see Lambert's Gild Life, 171-2.

[104] Schanz, i. 342.

distribution was all-important, since it was in vain for him to increase production by machinery, or by the improved organization of labour, or by division of toil among groups of skilled artizans, unless he could find his profit in a corresponding developement of the means of sale. The exporting merchants had also a quarrel with the artizans, who naturally desired to keep the dressing and finishing of cloth in their own hands, while the merchants insisted on the advantages of a free trade in undressed cloth; in their judgement the cloth-dressers, seeking but their "singular and private wealth," forgot that more men lived by making and selling cloth than by dressing it, and that therefore the rapid developement of exports by carrying out material in the rough to be finished in the Netherlands was really for the enriching of the whole realm.[105] These same dealers, however, looked more leniently on the "singular and private wealth" that went into their own pockets through the profits of the export trade, and also found themselves set at variance with the big public of consumers who were always anxiously on the watch against the raising of prices. At times the manufacturer had his grievances against the municipal authorities, whenever he found himself worried and fettered by the traditional wisdom of Town Councils, who for a variety of reasons of their own wanted to keep the ultimate control over his trade so as to draw a profit for the town. Lastly, the working class had begun to feel difficulties springing from the new methods of industrial organization, and troubles about wages and prices and the relation of employer to employed assailed the authorities both at Westminster and in the municipal councils. Artificers of all kinds, it was constantly declared, could no longer live of their occupation and were in great misery;[106] in fact, to judge by preambles to Statutes, and the loud complaints as to his condition, the working man believed himself to be in such bad case as to need all the aid of the State to keep him supplied with employment.

This old industrial revolution in short brought with it difficulties which bear to us the familiar look of our own constant and persevering visitors – visitors that force their entrance at every breach in the accustomed order by which trade is fenced round, and that appear as the unwelcome escort of every new form of industrial competition. Moreover, to add to the troubles of the mediæval legislator, the consumer of those days was always insisting on his vested right to the first consideration of the government, as the ultimate dictator for whose benefit the whole colossal structure of trade had been reared, and by whose approval alone it was allowed to remain at that ambitious elevation. With every fresh enterprise of manufacturer or merchant, the problem with which the law-makers had to deal became more subtle and complex. Driven hither and thither by the new conflict of public opinion and the passion of rival interests, baffled by the insoluble problem of how to frame laws which should benefit equally all the claimants for its aid, the government hesitatingly felt its way along an ill-defined path, veering from side to side according to the direction of the last impelling force. Even Edward the Fourth had no fixed policy of protection, and passed laws now on this side, now on that, as the imperious necessity of the moment seemed to demand.

But with a rapidly increasing trade, and with a House of Commons three-fourths of whose members were burghers personally concerned in these questions, it was impossible to stand still; and the new industrial legislation gradually became the expression not of the autocratic rule of kings, but of a self-conscious government of the people.[107] A long series of Statutes illustrates this great experiment. The new protection devised by burghers and merchants for the fostering of industry was altogether different from the old protection devised by a Court mainly occupied with the problem of re-filling an empty Treasury. The English manufacturer and the English working man were its recognized charge, and in their interest no measure was considered too heroic and no detail too insignificant, whether the matter in hand was the closing of English markets to a whole people, or the decision of how big a piece of leather it might be well in the interest of the shoemaking trade to allow

[105] Schanz, ii. 571.

[106] 3 Ed. IV. c. 4.

[107] Schanz, i. 618-19.

the cobbler to buy for the patching of an old boot. All native trades were "protected" by laws which declared that none of the wares which Englishmen could manufacture at home might be imported from foreign parts, and that none of the raw material they used might be carried out unwrought, or even half finished, to be worked up abroad. The whole people, save a few of the "great estates" and mighty men, must go simply clad in honest goods of English make, and so save themselves from waste, and English workers from poverty. As to the long dispute about admitting foreigners to trade in England, in which the King and the people had ever been in strong opposition, that matter was now more and more regulated according to the desires of the traders. England ceased to be the acquiescent host of guests who, in the vulgar opinion, came to thrive and fatten on her wealth; and a determined resistance was declared against the competition of strangers, till the Hanseatic trader scarcely dared show his face outside the strong walls of his Steel-yard citadel, and the Lombard vainly struggled to protect his last privileges from the assaults of his enemies.

The theory of State protection of industry grew fast, and by the time of Henry the Seventh its triumph was complete, and the foundations of a new national policy were firmly laid – a policy which was to be largely guided by industrial interests and to represent the claims of an elaborate industrial organization established by law and built into vast proportions by international agreement. The new relation of a sovereign to his people in such a State was seen at the end of the century in the first peaceful king of England whose subjects had submitted to his rule, the only English monarch till then who had not been a strong leader in war and who had yet escaped murder or imprisonment at the hands of his people. It has been the singular misfortune of one of our greatest rulers, Henry the Seventh, to be the first sovereign of the modern pattern who ruled over Englishmen, and his memory has in consequence come down to us shorn of all the conventional glory that tradition had until then declared proper to royalty. He has remained in history as we see him in one of his portraits, a dim obscure figure, sadly looking out from the background of a canvas where the big blustering figure of his son, set squarely in front, seems to elbow all virtue save his own out of recognized existence. But in the delicate, careworn, refined face with its suggestion of unrecorded self-effacement, in the penetrating intelligence devoted to the apprehending of the new problems and the infinite labour spent in solving them, in the inscrutable acquiescence with which, "loving to seal up his own dangers,"[108] he carried the burdens that were henceforth to fall to the lot of kings, and the unflinching resolution of his methods, we recognize a new type of royal dignity, and measure the work demanded of rulers who saw the power of mere personal dominion founded on force gradually passing from their hands, and in the changing order of the world were called to take up the leadership of the new commonwealth that was to be.

[108] Bacon's History of Henry the Seventh, 38.

CHAPTER III

THE COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

A French proverb of the twelfth century tells us what the world thought in old days of the origin and uses of a navy. “Point de marine sans pelerinages,” men said, seeing in pious penitents its means of support, and in the shrines of St. James or St. Peter or the Holy Sepulchre its destinations. Trade in those days avoided the way of the ocean, and followed the well-known land routes across the heart of Europe, and where the land came to an end took the very shortest way over the water to the next point of solid earth.

And slowly as commerce by sea developed in Europe it developed yet more slowly among the English. All goods that came to them from abroad were carried to their shores by powerful confederations of foreign merchants who controlled the great continental trade routes of the north-west. The “men of the Empire” or the Hanse of Cologne, masters of the highway of the Rhine and of Cologne, the great seaport of the Empire, commanded the whole Eastern trade which then for the most part passed through Germany.[109] The Flemish Hanse of London,[110] which included all the great towns of Picardy and Flanders, and perhaps at one time even Paris itself, carried over sea the wares that were gathered from half of Europe to the great fairs of Champagne. Through these two great companies England first exchanged her wool for certain necessaries such as salt and fish and iron and wood, and for a few luxuries such as spices and silks from the Levant.

And even when commerce swept beyond the narrow seas and passed out of the hands of the men of Cologne and the Flemish Hanse, it was not Englishmen who took their place. If the waterway of the Rhine was forsaken of half its trade as merchants of Northern Italy abandoned the old route across Europe, and instead of sending their goods to the warehouses of Cologne despatched fleets through the Straits of Gibraltar to the ports of the Channel and to Bruges; if the fairs of Champagne languished when armies encamped on its plains and turned them into battle-fields, and the Flemish Hanse of London slowly sank into insignificance – it was only to make way for other competitors of foreign blood. Commerce with the East through the Mediterranean and the Bay of Biscay was seized by the ships of Florence and Genoa and Venice.[111] The towns of the German Ocean and the Baltic gathered under the banner of Lübeck into a new Hanseatic League[112] which broke the supremacy of Cologne, claimed the whole carrying trade of the Northern seas, and opened a new line of communication with the Levant. Novgorod became the centre of the Baltic trade, as Alexandria was the centre of the Mediterranean traffic, and the merchants of the Teutonic Hanse offered to the English trader the silks and drugs of the East, with skins and hemp and timber of Novgorod, and the metals of Bohemia and Hungary.

The Mediterranean merchant was the great minister to the growing luxury of mediæval England. “The estates and lords of the realm” and bishops and prelates and parish priests bought from him cloth of gold, rich brocades, vestments of white damask powdered with gold of Venice,[113]

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[109] The men of Cologne had a house in London as early as 1157.

[110] Founded before 1240 (Schanz, i. 291-3). Some interesting details are given in Mr. Hudson’s Notes on Norwich (Norfolk Archæology, xii. 25; see section on madder and woad.) For merchants of Lorraine, Denmark, &c., Liber Custumarum, Nunimenta Gildhallæ Londiniensis (Rolls Series), vol. ii. part 1, xxxiv. &c.

[111] In the beginning of the fourteenth century (Schanz, i. 113-8).

[112] See Keutgen, Die Beziehungen der Hanse zu England, 40.

[113] Boys’ Sandwich, 375; Paston, iii. 436. The foreign trade is illustrated by some of the things in Fastolf’s house; the Seeland cloth, i. 481; iii. 405 – brass pots and chafferns of French making, i. 481 – silver Paris cups, 475; iii. 270-1, 297-8 – blue glasses, i. 486 – habergeons of Milan, 487 – ”overpayn of Raines,” 489 – cloth of Arras, 479 – harness from Almayne, iii. 405 – German

and precious work of goldsmiths and jewellers, new-fashioned glass, and many other fine things – articles that "might be forborn for dear and deceivable," grumbled the English dealer in homely goods of native manufacture. The whole luxurious traffic down to the "apes and japes and marmosettes tailed, nifles, trifles, that little have availed,"[114] roused the bitter jealousy of the home trader; and even statesmen foretold with alarm the perils that must come to the nation from a commerce which filled the land with fancy baubles and vanities, and carried away in exchange the precious wealth of the people, their cloth and wool and tin, sucking the thrift out of the land as the wasp sucks honey from the bee. But in spite of the hostility of English dealers needy kings anxious to win favour with the great banking companies of Italy diligently encouraged the trade; and (always in consideration of adequate tolls for privileges) freed merchants who came from beyond the Straits from the vexatious control of the Staple;[115] allowed their vessels to put into port undisturbed at Southampton instead of being forced to go to Calais; and their agents to travel through the country and buy and sell at will.

It was Florence which in the first half of the fourteenth century took the lead in the trade of the Mediterranean with England,[116] and whose merchants lent to Edward the Third the money which alone enabled him to carry on the war with France. But when Edward declared himself unable to pay his debts and repudiated the whole of the Florentine loans ruin fell on the city; its trade was paralyzed, and commercial disasters ended in political revolution. Bankers of Lübeck took the place of its financiers as the Rothschilds of the mediæval world; and ship-masters of Genoa seized the commerce which fell from its hands. Though the winning of the port of Leghorn in 1421 brought a fresh outburst of trading activity to Florence,[117] though its merchants established depots and banks and commercial settlements in all the great towns of the North, though cargoes of wool were again shipped to its harbour (one English merchant alone in 1437 selling to an agent of the Albertine Company wool to the value of almost £12,000),[118] the supremacy of the Republic in the Mediterranean trade was never restored.

For its great competitors, Genoa and Venice, were now fairly in the field. Through their station on the Black Sea the Genoese held until the Turkish conquest the chief market in the East for European cloth; and their fleets laden with cloth of gold, silk and spices of the Levant, with alum and mastick from the subject islands of Chios and Phocœa, with the woad of Toulouse, and the wines of Provence, sailed to Southampton to exchange their cargoes for English cloth, which they sometimes carried back direct to the Black Sea, and sometimes took on to sell at the Flemish markets, and so make a double profit on their journey.[119] For their world-wide business the Bank of St. George was founded at Genoa in 1407, with a system of credit notes of acknowledgement for money deposited which could be transferred from hand to hand.

The great galleys of Venice, however, were formidable rivals of the carracks of Genoa. For Venice, hidden away in the Adriatic, with nothing of its own save salt to offer, showed in perhaps a higher degree than any other Italian State what might be achieved by a lavish system of State protection.[120] It was the State that built its merchant fleets; the State that leased out the vessels every

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girdles, iii. 270-1 – the treacle-pots of Genoa, ii. 293-4, bought of the apothecary. The merchant's marks were especially noted for fear of adulteration. The grocer, or dealer in foreign fruits, also sold hawks, iii. 55-6. In the reign of Henry the Eighth about a dozen shops in London sold French or Milan cups, glasses, knives, daggers, swords, girdles, and such things. Hist. MSS. Com. viii. 93. "A discourse of the commonwealth of this Realme of England."

[114] Libel of English Policy; Political Poems and Songs (Rolls Series), ii. 173, 172. Fabyan, 630. See petition of burghers against the Lombards, 1455, in Rot. Parl. v. 334

[115] Schanz, i. 65. Strangers exporting wool had to pay 43*s.* 4*d.* a sack, English merchants only 5 nobles or 33*s.* 4*d.* (Fabyan, 594-5).

[116] In 1372 there is a receipt by two of the company of the Strozzi for money from Archbishop Langham. Hist. MSS. Com. iv. part 1, 186.

[117] Clement, Jacques Cœur, 23-4.

[118] For the failure of this company in 1437 and its effect on English traders, see Bekynton's Corres. i. 248-50, 254.

[119] Libel of English Policy. Pol. Poems and Songs, ii. 172.

[120] Schanz, i. 124-6.

year to the highest bidders for trading purposes; the State that ordered the conduct of their business for the greatest public wealth; the State that protected them from competition by forbidding its citizens to send out their spices by the overland route, or to take in cloth from England that had not been carried in Venetian galleys by long sea. By the authority of its government Venice had been made the emporium of the Mediterranean, and Italian traders obediently carried cloths or tin or bales of skins from England to Venice, and from Venice to Corfu. Fortune favoured the most astute among her wooers, and showered on Venice the coveted blessings of trade. Her ships travelled far, and Italian merchants who had once been only known in England as financial agents employed by the Papal Court to collect the tribute due to Rome, now flocked to the island on business of a very different character. The harbour of Southampton was crowded with galleys, in which cunning tailors sat day and night cutting the bales of material bought into garments, so as to save the export dues on cloth.[121] In the time of Richard the Second a Genoese merchant who had leased the castle as a storehouse for his wares proposed to the King to make of Southampton the greatest trading port of the west, and he might well have carried out his promise if the London merchants had not prudently sent a messenger to murder him at his own door.[122] Notwithstanding the inhospitable and grudging welcome given by London itself the Lombards found means by the King's help to maintain a thriving settlement, and in the fifteenth century the Venetian Consuls gathered letters for the regular mail to Venice once every month.[123]

What the Venetians were to the commerce of the Mediterranean that the merchants of the Hanseatic League were to the commerce of the Baltic and the German Ocean. A double strength had been given to the confederation of towns which Lübeck had drawn under its banner by its union with the Teutonic Order – an order which had originated in Bremen and Lübeck and then settled on the Baltic to create the trading prosperity of Danzig and Elbing. These Prussian cities, while they owned the Grand Master of the Order of Teutonic Knights as their feudal chief, were still dependent on Lübeck.[124] And with them were joined a multitude of towns so imposing in their very numbers alone that when the ambassadors of the Hanseatic League in England in 1376 were asked for a list of the members who made up their vast association, they answered scornfully that surely even they themselves could not be supposed to remember the countless names of towns big and little in all kingdoms in whose name they spoke.[125] Under the strangely diverse lordship of Kings, Dukes, Margraves, Counts, Barons, or Archbishops, they found a link in their common union in the Holy Roman Empire, and ever counted England, cut off from that great commonwealth, as a "foreign" nation.[126]

In war or in commercial negotiations this mighty confederation, with its members disciplined to act together as one body, dealt proudly as a nation on equal terms with other peoples, and in the strength of its united corporation it was in fact a far more formidable force than the jealous and isolated Republics of the South. Denmark was laid at its feet by a triumphant war. Norway was held in complete subjection. It forced the English traders in the North Sea to bow to its policy and fight at its bidding. So powerful was the League in the fourteenth century, that when Edward the Third had ruined the banks of Florence it was the merchants of Lübeck who became his money-lenders; they were made the farmers of the English wool-tax; they rented the mines of the northern counties and

[121] Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, p. 11, 87. 11 H. IV. c. 7. Yarn and unfulled cloths paid only subsidy – finished cloths paid also customs and measuring tax. Schanz, i. 448, note.

[122] Davies' Southampton, 254.

[123] Denton's Lectures, 192; Paston Letters, iii. 269.

[124] Pauli's Pictures, 126-132.

[125] Keutgen, 41.

[126] Keutgen, 41. Dinant was the only town outside German-speaking countries that belonged to the Hanseatic League. It entered the League in the middle of the fourteenth century as a sort of external member – only *sharing its privileges in England* and never voting in its assemblies – tolerated rather than holding its right by formal grant. Pirenne, Dinant, 97-102.

the tin-works of Cornwall.[127] The whole carrying trade of the northern seas lay in their hands. It was vessels of the Hanse that sailed from Hull or from Boston to Bergen with English wares and brought back cargoes of salt fish;[128] that fetched iron from Sweden, and wine from the Rhine vineyards, and oranges and spices and foreign fruits from Bruges; and that carried out the English woollen cloths to Russia and the Baltic ports, and brought back wood, tin, potash, skins, and furs. Within the strong defences of their Steel-yard[129] on the banks of the Thames by London Bridge, the advance guard of the League lived under a sort of military discipline, and held their own by force of the King's protection against the hatred of London traders and burghers, which now and then burst into violent riots.

Thus throughout the fourteenth century it was strangers who held the carrying trade to England along the two great commercial routes – the passage by Gibraltar to the harbours of Italy and thence to Alexandria, and the passage by the Sound to the Baltic ports and so to Novgorod. All the profits of transit as of barter were secured by alien dealers who travelled from village to village throughout the country in search of wool or cloth to freight the foreign vessels that lay in every harbour – vessels bigger and better built for commerce than any of which England could boast.[130] Moreover, the English government was content to have it so, and Kings who wanted to build up alliances for their foreign wars, or to replenish their failing treasury at home, in all commercial regulations showed their favour mainly to foreign traders and left the native shipowner to do as best he could for himself. Once, indeed, in the reign of Richard the Second, a solitary attempt was made to encourage the shipping industry, and the first Navigation Act passed in England ordered "that none of the King's liege people do from henceforth ship any merchandise in going out or coming within the realm of England but only in ships of the King's liegance."[131] This Act, however, after the fashion of the time, was only to be in force for a few months; and after very brief experience Parliament wisely decided that the law need only be obeyed when "the ships in the parts where the said merchants shall happen to dwell be found able and sufficient … and otherwise it shall be lawful to hire other ships convenient."[132] With this the experiment of State protection came to an end for the next century; and against the great confederations and State-protected navies of the Continent English merchants were left to wage singly as best they could their private and adventurous war.

English shipping, indeed, so far as it existed at all, may be said to have existed in spite of the law. There was no navy whatever in any national sense. A few balingers[133] and little coasting vessels lay in the various ports – some of them belonging to private merchants, some to the town communities – and when the King wanted ships for the public service, whether it was to fish for herrings for his household or to fight the French, he simply demanded such vessels as he needed in any harbour, kept them and their crews waiting on his will for weeks or months, sent them wherever he chose, and laid all costs on the town or the owner's shoulders.[134] Moreover, the unlucky merchant forfeited his ship

[127] Keutgen, 5, 30.

[128] Keutgen, 14-18.

[129] For a description of the Steel-yard see Pauli's Pictures.

[130] The ordinary size of French ships seems to have been 1,000 or 1,200 tons. (Heralds' Debate, 51-2.) Cannyngs, of Bristol, had in his little fleet vessels of 900, 500, or 400 tons. (Cruden's Gravesend, 131.) The "Harry Grace à Dieu," built at Woolwich, 1512, was of 1,500 tons, and cost £6,472. (Ibid. 143-9.)

[131] 1382; 5 Richard II., Stat. 1, c. 3. See Schanz, i. 360, for the scope of this law.

[132] 6 Richard II., Stat. 1, c. 8.

[133] A small war vessel with probably about forty sailors, ten men-at-arms, and ten archers. Nott. Rec. i. 444.

[134] Southampton had to keep a ship, "le Grâce de Dieu," at its own expense for the king's service. In the last year of Henry the Sixth its master received from the mayor £31 10*s.* 0*d.* In the first year of Edward the Fourth the mayor paid for the victualling and custody of the ship £68 5*s.* 10*d.* In 1470 there was a great deal of difficulty about the matter. The king ordered certain payments to be made for the ship which the town for some months absolutely refused to carry out. The sheriff at last stepped into the breach and paid the sums due from money in his own office, and the next year the town was forced by the king to refund what he had spent. Three successive sheriffs were in difficulties about this dispute between the king and the town. They made payments as best they could, and were afterwards given indemnity for the sums they spent. (Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 98-100; Davies, 77. See also H.M.C. xi. 3, 215-16, 188-191, 221-2; Ibid. iv. 1, p. 426, 429-31; Ibid. v. 517-18, 521, 494; Boys' Sandwich, 663; Nottingham Records, i. 196; Paston Letters, ii. 100-105;

to the Crown for any accident that might happen on it – if a man died, or fell overboard, or if it struck another vessel or touched a rock. The masters might suffer ruin, or in mere self-defence give up the owning of ships, and the sailors might forsake the sea and turn to other occupations to escape being impressed for war: government interference to regulate wages only sent men to take service at more tempting pay in foreign boats.[135] We cannot wonder that towards the end of the fourteenth century it seems to have been thought more profitable under these conditions to make ships for others than to own them, and that builders were selling their vessels to aliens, and these aliens "by reason of the excessive profits thence arising have often sold the same to the enemies of the realm."[136] Henry the Fifth, indeed, proposed to build up a royal navy, but his plans were cut short by his death and his ships sold under Henry the Sixth, and matters went on as before.[137]

English traders, however, did not sit down idly to wait for State protection.[138] Already in the middle of the fourteenth century a new life was stirring in the seaports, and before long every one of them began to send its contingent to the host that went out for the conquest of the sea. Towns big and little were creating or strengthening their fleets, made up either of the "common barges" of the community, or the private ships of their trading companies. Shipbuilding was dear in England from the want of wood in the country as well as of iron suitable for the purpose, and cost, if we may believe a contemporary observer, twice as much as in France.[139] So poor communities like Lydd that could not afford big ventures made shift by hiring vessels from Britanny, Sandwich, or London, and fitting them out as economically as might be, with an old wine-pipe sawed in half to serve for a bread barrel.[140] On the other hand, prosperous ports like Lynn added large sums year after year to the town budget for shipping.[141] A far poorer place, Romney, spent £73 on its common barge in 1381; in 1396 another was bought and fitted out for £82; and a third in 1400 at over £40; while a few years later yet another ship was procured for the Bordeaux trade. These vessels sailed to Scotland and Newcastle and Norfolk and the ports of the Southern coasts; or to Ireland for wood, to Amiens for sea-coal, to Britanny for salt, to Flanders for the wares of the Levant, to Southern France for cargoes of wine, and oil, and wood. In 1400 "the new barge" carried forty-two tuns of wine from Rochelle; in 1404 it brought forty tuns besides oil and wood, and in a later voyage carried fifty-six tuns.[142] Everywhere the trading temper laid hold upon the people. In Rye, where the inhabitants had been wont to pay their yearly oblations punctually on the 8th of September, there came a time when so many of them were abroad, some attending fairs, some fishing in remote seas, "that Divine worship is not then observed by them as it ought to be, and the due oblations are withheld and hardly ever paid;" and the day of offering had to be changed.[143]

Rot. Parl. i. 414, ii. 306-7.) Full accounts of the making of a barge in Ipswich in 1295 are given in Hist. MSS. Com. ix. 257-8.

[135] Schanz, i. 356-7, 362, 367. On page 357 he quotes from a petition of the commons in 1371 (Rot. Parl. ii. 306-7) to prove that the one result of the foreign policy of Edward the First was the *narrowing of town franchises*, and consequent decline of the navy. If the petition is read to the close the passage seems to be merely a piece of fine writing to arrest attention, and the town franchises are not mentioned again when the king asks to have the real grievances stated. In the second petition (Rot. Parl. ii. 332) the gist of the complaint is that foreign merchants are allowed to sell and buy in England, which is represented as a loss of all their franchises.

[136] Hist. MSS. Com. v. 501.

[137] Edward the Fourth made one futile attempt to revive the protection of English shipping, but the Act only lasted three years. (3 Ed. IV. c. i.)

[138] Schanz, i. 328.

[139] Heralds' Debate, 51-2.

[140] Hist. MSS. Com. v. 528. See the hiring out of the London barge; loss by accident from tempest or enemies to fall on the commonalty; Mem. Lond., 478.

[141] Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 215-16, 221-2, 188-191.

[142] Hist. MSS. Com. v. 534-540.

[143] Hist. MSS. Com. v. 496. Rye kept its own "schipwrite," John Wikham, who had the freedom of the town for sixteen years while building the ships of the port, and at last left in 1392 with a glowing testimonial from the mayor and barons of Rye. Along with other towns it had made profit by selling ships to aliens, which might afterwards be used by the enemies of England, and a proclamation was sent to Rye in 1390 forbidding such sales. For the export of eggs from Norwich in 1374, as well as butter and cheese and corn, and

The more important side of the movement, however, was the growth of private enterprise as shown in the associations of merchants formed in all the bigger towns for trading purposes. Already in the time of Richard the Second there was a "Fellowship of Merchants" in Bristol who directed the whole foreign trade and the import of foreign merchandise, and who even then did business on a very considerable scale, for when in 1375 Bristol ships laden with salt were captured and burnt in the Channel the losses were set down at £17,739. Before fifty years were over their trading vessels were known in every sea from Syria to Iceland. The richer merchants built up by degrees little fleets of ten or twelve vessels varying from 400 to 900 tons; and one of them, William Cannynges, an ancestor of Lord Canning, who in 1461 had ten ships afloat (one *The Nicholas of the Tower* from whence came Suffolk's headsman), employed 800 seamen and 100 carpenters, masons, and artificers.[144] Nor was Bristol singular in its activity. The Guild of Merchants at Lynn rivalled that of York. "With the Divine assistance, and the help of divers of the King's subjects," John Taverner of Hull in 1449 built a great "carrack" on the scale of the mighty ships of Genoa and Venice. Far and wide the movement spread till the brief tale of 169 merchants which had been counted up by Edward the Third when he wanted to borrow money from them, expanded towards the close of the fifteenth century into a company of more than 3,000 traders engaged in sea-commerce alone.[145]

From whatever town they came these traders with foreign ports were all alike known to the men of the fourteenth century by one significant name – the Adventurers. For since there was but one protected industry in England, the Staple, every merchant who was not a Stapler was a free Adventurer. All trade that lay outside the Staple was for his winning.[146] Bound to no place or company or government or laws, he was left to discover for himself a corner in the world's market, and to protect himself on sea and land. A perfectly indifferent State gave him no help in his first ventures to become the carrier of English commerce, and vouchsafed no encouragement to shipbuilder or master by offers of special favours or grants of reduced tolls on a first voyage.[147] He sailed out of port into a sea of peril. Pirates of all nations, Vitalien Brüder in the Baltic and the North Sea, Likedelers of Calais,[148] Breton cruisers, vigorous monopolists of the Hanse, outraged merchants of the South burning for vengeance, lay in wait on every quarter of the horizon. In 1395 Norfolk traders were robbed of £20,000 "by the Queen's men of Denmark, the which was an undoing to many of the merchants of Norfolk for evermore afterwards;"[149] and frequent and piteous were the complaints that went up to the Privy Council from English shippers begging redress and protection as outrage followed outrage.[150] But a State which was without any organized naval force was powerless to establish order.

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possibly oysters, see Hudson's Norwich Leet Jurisdiction (Selden Society), 62, 63, 65. The practice of forestalling, carried to so great an extent as is here and elsewhere described, doubtless implied buying for the foreign market.

[144] Hunt's Bristol, 74, 94-96.

[145] Schanz, i. 328. For St. Mary's Gild in York see Hist. MSS. Com. i. 109, 110. This "mystery of Mercers," or "Community of Mercers" in York formed into a body with a governor in 1430 – in fact, became a company of Merchant Adventurers. (Gross, ii. 280.) The Shipmen's Guild of Holy Trinity in Hull drew up its constitution in 1369, but got its first royal grant in 1443. The Merchant Guild of S. George also dates from the fifteenth century. (Lambert's Guild Life, 128-131, 156-161.)

[146] In 1422 a writ was issued by the Privy Council to permit a Bristol merchant to take two vessels laden with cloth, wine, salt, and other merchandise not belonging to the Staple. The cloth and wine were to be sold, and meat, hides, salmon, herrings, and fish to be bought, and the salt used for salting these provisions. Proc. Privy Council, ii. 322-3.

[147] When Taverner built his ship for the Mediterranean trade he got no reduction of tolls, but had to pay the high export dues fixed for foreigners. Schanz, i. 367.

[148] Keutgen, 79; Plummer's Fortescue, 232-3.

[149] Eng. Chron. 1387-1461, 113. French pirates "whirling on the coasts so that there dare no fishers go out," (Paston Letters, iii. 81) behave "as homely as they were Englishmen." (Ibid. i. 114-116.)

[150] For the frequent disputes in the reign of Henry the Fourth see Hist. MSS. Com. v. 443. In 1419, when some Bristol merchants had seized vessels belonging to the Genoese, the King sent a messenger to choose for him a portion of the prize, for which, however, he promised honestly to pay the merchants. Proc. Privy Council, ii. 267. The mayor of Lynn attended by two proctors travelled with the King's embassy to Bruges in 1435 "for the worship of the town" as its representative to declare the wrongs done to Lynn merchants "by the master of Pruce and his subjects and by them of the Hanse." Hist. MSS. Com., xi. 3, 163; Polydore Vergil, 159; Davies' Southampton, 252-3, 275, 475.

Whether it gave the charge of keeping the peace on the high seas to the merchants themselves, or to the Staplers, or by special commission to the Admirals[151] of the coast, or to a committee of lords, or to the foremost among the offenders, the Captain of Calais himself, its experiments were equally vain. In self-protection town barges and merchants' ships sailed in companies under an admiral of their own choosing, armed to the teeth like little men of war against the enemy, and even carrying cannon on board as early as 1407, before any kind of hand-guns had been invented.[152] If when disaster overtook them their masters appealed for compensation to the government they did not wait solely on the State for redress; and English rulers seem to have been often less perplexed to bring a remedy to their sufferings than to conciliate the great foreign confederations whose anger had been roused by their swift and violent retaliation. There were indeed probably no more formidable pirates afloat than these English cruisers themselves, for they were hard fighters who took a prompt revenge; and among foreigners at all events they won the reputation of using their shipping for no other purpose than to harass all trade of other peoples in the narrow seas, and "obstruct the utility of commerce throughout all Christendom."[153]

Under these conditions we can easily understand that throughout the century whenever the question of the English navy emerges in Rolls of Parliament and Statutes and official statements, we have a contemporary picture drawn in the gloomiest colours.[154] Statesmen heap up details to show how badly the merchant service fulfils its vague functions as a royal navy. Ship-owners bring their loud complainings to prove how ill they have been used by the State. Each side burns to waken the other to a sense of its duty, and talk of the decay of English power by sea might be pressed into the service of either, while the loss of Southern France and the temporary blow which this gave to English shipping was used to point the argument on both sides. The sea was our wall of defence, it was said; but now the enemy was on the wall and where was our old might of ships and sailors? The very Dutch were laughing at our impotence, and when they insolently jested at the ships engraved on the coins of Edward the Third and asked why we did not engrave a sheep on them instead, the pun was felt to inflict a deep wound on the national honour.[155]

Such judgements, however, should be read in the light of the records which tell us what English ships afloat upon the sea were actually doing in those days. For at this very time the unofficial Englishman seems to have been boasting that his people possessed a greater number of fine and powerful ships than any other nation, so that they were "kings of the sea;"[156] and if the boast was a little premature it lay on the whole nearer to the truth. Even now the fleets of the Adventurers were going forth to the conquest of the seas, and their enterprise marks one of the great turning points in our history. It was in fact during this century that England raised herself from the last place among commercial peoples to one of the first. At the close of the fourteenth century, as we have seen, English merchandise was mostly borne in foreign ships; a hundred years later, English vessels carried more than a half of all the cloths exported from the country, and about three quarters of all other goods,[157]

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[151] Stubbs, ii. 314, iii. 57, 65; Plummer's Fortescue, 235-7. From time to time money was collected for the protection of trade; (Nott. Rec. ii. 34-36). In 1454 Bristol gave £150 for this purpose – the largest sum given by any town save London. (Hunt's Bristol, 97-8.)

[152] Rymer's Fœdera, viii. 470.

[153] Debate of Heralds, 49. In 1488 a letter from London to the money-changer Frescobaldo, at Venice, told that Flanders galleys which left Antwerp for Hampton fell in with three English ships, who commanded them to strike sail, and though they said they were friends, forced them to fight. Eighteen English were killed. But on the complaint of the captain of the galleys the King sent the Bishop of Winchester to say he need not fear, as those who had been killed must bear their own loss and a pot of wine would settle the matter. Davies' Southampton, 475.

[154] See Libel of English Policy, Pol. Poems and Songs, ii. 164-5. For complaints in 1444 and 1485 see Rot. Parl. v. 113.

[155] Libel of English Policy, Pol. Poems and Songs, ii. 159. Capgrave de Illust. Henricis, 135. A man at Canterbury was accused in 1448 of saying that the king was not able to bear the fleur-de-lys nor the ship in his noble. (Hist. MSS. Com. v. 455.)

[156] Heralds' Debate, 17.

[157] Schanz, ii. 27.

and the Navigation Act that had failed under Richard the Second was put in triumphant operation by Henry the Seventh.[158]

It was in the Northern Seas that the real stress of the battle lay. There from a very early time bands of roving adventurers went cruising from harbour to harbour to discover what spoils of trade the orthodox merchants of the Staple or the Hanse had left ungathered, and how the fertile resources of the lawless free-trader might be used to shatter these stately organizations. When the older merchants concentrated themselves in Bruges and Calais the free lances of trade sought out the neglected markets of Brabant and Holland. Driven from the marshes of Middleburg they turned to Antwerp which the Staplers had forsaken. Scarcely had the Hanse merchants under the stress of their Danish wars withdrawn from Bergen than the Adventurers forthwith slipped into their place, set up their own Staple, gathering goods there to the value of 10,000 marks, and for years fought steadily against fire and sword to hold their own.[159] If the Baltic towns fell behind the western members of the League in maritime enterprize, the Adventurers' fleets flocked to their harbours, so that three hundred of them were seen in the harbour of Danzig alone, carrying dealers in cloth ready to spread their wares in every market town of Prussia. They pushed their way into the fish-markets of Schonen, offering bales of cloth instead of money[160] for salt herrings, and rousing the alarm of the Hanseatic merchants there also. By the close of the fourteenth century they had so prospered in the world on all sides that they professed to look on large branches of trade as their own exclusive property, and to make a grievance of interference with their profits by other "meddling merchants who were not content with their own business in which they had been brought up and by which they were well able to live."

This was the beginning of a new stage in their history. The Adventurers now proposed to enter the decent ranks of recognized associations, and exchange their roving wars for the more formal aggressions of a chartered company; and at their prayer Henry the Fourth granted them in 1406, for their better ordering and for their protection from other "meddling merchants," a charter by which they took as their official title their old name of the Merchant Adventurers.[161] The grant included all dominions over-sea, and allowed them to wander where they would in the wide world, and to draw within their ranks all the Adventurers of England.[162] As yet their organization was loose and free, and was in fact no true incorporation as a Guild. But it marked the passing away of their free and stormy youth. From this time privileges came to them from all sides by English grants, by gifts from foreign towns, by protection of the rulers of various countries. Finally in 1446 they received a new charter of privileges from the Duke of Burgundy[163] by which their tolls were fixed, full protection assured to them, and an organization provided which lasted for the next century. So confident did they become of their power, that when Henry the Seventh at his accession raised the tolls required of them they refused to pay, and he did not dare to enforce the order.[164] Seeing indeed in their success the triumph of English commerce, he remained their steady supporter, confirmed their privileges,[165] and when at Calais they desired greater centralization and a stricter discipline, he gave them a regular organization after the pattern of the Staplers under Edward the Third, with governors and a council of twenty-four assistants.[166] Amid all their successes it was little wonder that there came a time when they themselves

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[158] 4 H. VII. cap. x.; Schanz, i. 368-9. Encouragement was also given to building of English ships – as for example by remission of tolls on the first voyage (Schanz, ii. 591).

[159] Keutgen, 55, etc.

[160] Ibid. 54.

[161] Schanz, i. 332; ii. 575. A list of the charters granted to them follows, ibid. 575-8. See also treaty given, ibid. 159.

[162] Ibid. i. 339, 340.

[163] Ibid. ii. 162.

[164] Ibid. i. 340.

[165] 1500; Schanz, ii. 545-7.

[166] In 1505. Henry VII. issued regulations for the Merchant Adventurers. They might meet *in Calais* to elect governors; and they were at the same time to elect a council of twenty-four called "assistants," who were to have jurisdiction over all members and power

forgot the free audacity of their adventurous youth. In their maturer years, as the vehement assertors of monopoly and State protection, they cast behind their backs the very remembrance of their lawless predecessors, and for a braver pedigree they traced their greatness back to ancestors made respectable by a fabled charter from King John himself, and boasted of Aldermen clothed in scarlet who were supposed to have borne rule over them in good old times in Antwerp.

The legend was the product of a time when Antwerp was in fact the capital of the Merchant Adventurers – the home and centre of their trade. For there in the fifteenth century they entered on an inheritance which had been left waste when the merchant princes of the Staple had finally retired to Calais, and had thus practically abandoned all direct trade between Antwerp and England to private hands. The Adventurers soon solved the question of who was to carry it on.[167] In 1407 the city gave them a House in perpetual succession. Three of their merchants sat in the Toll-hall with the toll-keepers of the borough to see justice done to their brethren. Known among the people as "the nation,"[168] they early showed their power, and in the first half of the fifteenth century privileges in the English trade were more and more withdrawn from the native traders of the Netherlands, and gathered into their own hands. They used their powers to the full, governed firmly, ordered the whole English trade with the Low Countries, dictated what fair was to be attended, and ruled the prices, in spite of the loud remonstrances of the unlucky natives.[169] At the great marts held in the Netherlands four times a year[170] "they stapled the commodities which they brought out of England, and put the same to sale,"[171] and by 1436 they could boast that they bought more goods in Brabant, Flanders, and Zealand[172] than all other nations, and that if their merchants were withdrawn it would be as great a loss to the French trade as though a thousand men of war were sent into the country.[173] The growing jealousy of the manufacturers in Flanders indeed threatened at times to cut off their entire business; and as they were the first to bear the rising storm of commercial rivalries, so again and again they were brought within sight of ruin by the laws passed on either side the water forbidding all import or export trade.

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to make statutes, and to appoint officers both in England and in Calais to levy fines and to imprison offenders. The council filled up its own vacancies. Every merchant using the dealings of a Merchant Adventurer was not only to pay its tolls and taxes, but must enter the fellowship and pay his ten marks. The Calais officials were to proclaim the marts whenever required to do so. The Adventurers might appoint their own weighers and packers, and have nothing to say to the royal officers. (Schanz, ii. 549-553.)

[167] Schanz notes the settlement in Antwerp as one of the most critical turning points of English industrial and commercial history (i. 339). The movement had well begun in the fourteenth and early part of the fifteenth centuries, but the real influx of English traders was from 1442-4 (ibid. i. 9). For the treaties with the Duke of Burgundy in 1407 concerning English traders in Flanders, Rymer's Fœdera, viii. 469-78.

[168] Schanz, ii. 577, 581, 582.

[169] Ibid. i. 343, 344.

[170] 12 Henry VII. c. 6.

[171] Wheeler, Treatise of Commerce, 19, 23.

[172] "Déjà au quinzième siècle les Écossais avaient à Veere en Zélande un dépôt pour leurs marchandises, administré par un 'Conservator.' Sir Thomas Cunningham remplit cet office jusqu'à sa mort en 1655, et ce ne fut que le 28 novembre, 1661 (*sic*), que Sir W. Davison en fut chargé; il demeura de temps en temps à Amsterdam, où il eut des querelles à l'occasion des impôts municipaux. Plus tard, il eut des différends avec le pasteur épiscopal Mowbray, qui par suite fut déplacé, et enfin avec les Écossais de Veere eux-mêmes. En 1668 Davison fit un traité avec la ville de Dordrecht, pour y transporter les affaires d'Écosse; mais comme les Écossais ne voulurent pas s'y conformer, Davison fut contraint de prendre son congé en mai 1671; Veere resta le dépôt du commerce écossais. Consultez encore l'ouvrage très rare. "An account of the Scotch Trade in the Netherlands, and of the Staple Port in Campvere. By James Yair, Minister of the Scotch Church in Campvere. London, 1776." (Œuvres Complètes de Huygens. Amsterdam, 1893. Note on a letter from R. Moray to Huygens, Jan. 30, 1665.)

[173] Libel of English Policy. Pol. Poems and Songs, ii. 180, 181. See Hist. MSS. Com. x. 4, 445-6. William Mucklow, merchant at London, sent commissions to his son Richard at Antwerp; a Richard Mucklow was warden of S. Helen's, Worcester, either in 1510 or 1519 (446). An account book of Wm. Mucklow, merchant, "in the Passe Mart at Barro, Middleburg, in the Synxon Mart at Antwerp, in the Cold Mart and in Bamys Mart," in 1511 records sales of white drapery and purchase of various goods – a ball battery, fustian, buckram, knives, sugar, brushes, satin, damask, sarsenet, velvet, pepper, Yssyngham cloth, spectacles, swan's feathers, girdles, "socket," treacle, green ginger, ribands, brown paper, Brabant cloth, pouches, leather, buckets, "antony belles," "sacke belles," sheets, &c.; and the names of the vessels in which the goods were shipped.

For in their desperate attempt to save the Flemish weavers from ruin the Dukes of Burgundy forbade dressers to finish English cloth, or tailors to cut it in the Netherlands, and laid heavy penalties on any man in Flanders who was seen dressed in woollen stuffs of English make;[174] but still the cloth came in, smuggled by speculating dealers from Antwerp, or scattered broadcast by licensed merchants who had bought from the authorities leave to evade the law.[175] Once in consequence of political disputes[176] the Adventurers had to migrate to Calais, and see the legal trade with the Low Countries given to the Easterlings, a sight which "sore nipped their hearts;" but first in "disordered" fashion, then lawfully, they were soon back at their old occupations.[177] With the steady support of Henry the Seventh, whose whole policy was directed to develope the trade with Burgundy and bind England and the Netherlands into a united commercial state, their prosperity was assured; and before the close of the century Antwerp, after two hundred years of struggle for supremacy in trade, took its place as the great centre of commerce[178] in the Netherlands, while its rival Bruges sank into utter poverty and decay. When at last after many chances and changes, the English won in 1506 through Henry the Seventh free trade in cloth throughout all the dominions of the Archduke Philip save Flanders, they actually found themselves better off in the Netherlands than the native merchants, paid less tolls than they, and were in a position whence they might easily overrun the country with their wares and finally destroy its decaying cloth industry.[179]

From their central stronghold in Antwerp the Merchant Adventurers further maintained a lively war to right and left, on the one side with the Staple at Calais, on the other with the Hanseatic League.

It was practically the jealousy of the Staplers that had first driven the Adventurers from Bruges, and no sooner did they feel their strength than they prepared to make their ancient enemies pay the penalty for old wrongs. Towards the merchants of the Staple the very character of their trade from the first forced them into a militant attitude. Shut out from all interest in the sale of wool, their fortune rested solely on the manufacturing industries, and the more weaving at home was encouraged the greater were their gains.[180] And since the wool merchants proceeded both to claim and to practise the right of exporting and selling cloth as well as wool, they became in a double sense obnoxious to their rivals. Now, however, the Adventurers could fight from the vantage ground given them by their new position as a chartered company. Out of their acknowledged right to demand tolls on the sale of cloth in their marts, they deduced by a liberal interpretation of their powers the right to require from each trading Stapler in addition to the ordinary tolls an entrance fee or hanse of ten marks, by payment of which he became a freeman of the Adventurers' Company and was made subject to their laws and courts,[181] and if he refused to pay they seized his wares, or imprisoned him till he gave the "hanse."[182] Wealthy merchants of the Staple who had taken their wares to Middleburg might find themselves thrown into prison among felons and murderers infected with odious diseases; the resolute Adventurers refused bail, and quietly ignored royal letters of remonstrance.[183] Already in 1457 the Staplers complained bitterly to the English King and to the Duke of Burgundy, that under colour of letters patent and charters, their enemies so vexed them both in their goods and persons

[174] Rot. Parl. iv. 126; Schanz, i. 443-445. For English reprisals, 27 H. VI. cap. i.; 28 H. VI. cap. i.; 4 Ed. IV. cap. 5.

[175] Schanz, ii. 191-3, 203-6. Negotiations were still going on in 1499 as to the trade disputes between Henry the Seventh, the Archduke, and the Staple at Calais (Schanz, ii. 195-202). The main point in dispute was allowing English cloths to be cut in the Netherlands for making clothes.

[176] In 1493; Schanz, i. 17, 18.

[177] Schanz, ii. 582-5.

[178] Ibid. i. 7-11.

[179] Schanz, i. 31, 32.

[180] Ibid. i. 339.

[181] Schanz, i. 345; ii. 561, 562.

[182] Instances, Schanz, ii. 557, 558.

[183] Ibid. ii. 564.

as to threaten them with utter ruin.[184] But the decision of Henry the Sixth that the Adventurers were asserting unjust claims which were strictly forbidden for the future[185] scarcely interrupted the battle, and the same series of complaints and aggressions was brought in 1504 before the Star Chamber, by whose judgement the Adventurers were again forbidden to go beyond their right of levying tolls. But if the law was against them they had on their side their own inexhaustible activity, their unscrupulous audacity, their large self-confidence, and the weakness of the dying company of the Staple. Six years later when the Staplers again summoned them before the King for their "crooked minds and froward sayings" and lawless deeds of violence, they answered with uncompromising contempt. The Staplers, they allowed, might have certain privileges in Calais – but as to talking of rights in Burgundy, that in their opinion was absurd to urge after the removal of the Staple thence. Outside Calais the Staplers had no rights. With regard to their claim to exclusive jurisdiction over their members, "that article might have been left out of their book, for why every reasonable man knoweth the contrary." In spite of such "reasonable men," however, once more the law was proclaimed to be against them; but as they knew well the law was powerless to set up again the ruined company of the Merchant Staplers.[186]

With the second and more formidable army arrayed against them, the merchants of the Hanseatic League, the war of the Adventurers had to be carried on with greater circumspection. Through a couple of centuries the doubtful conflict was maintained on every sea and in every port from Danzig to Iceland. For the first hundred years things went ill for the Adventurers. The League monopolized the whole commerce between the Scandinavian kingdoms and England;[187] drove out the English from Schonen, the centre to which all the fishers of the Baltic and North Seas gathered for the salting, packing, and selling of their fish;[188] harassed them with fire and sword in Bergen, the Staple town of the north,[189] scattering them at one time by starvation, at another by decrees of expulsion; banished them from the Prussian towns belonging to the Teutonic Order which they were "destroying" with their cloth,[190] and sought to ruin their trade by issuing an order that no merchant of the Hanse should buy English cloth outside England itself. When the League waged war with Denmark and Norway in 1368-9 to confirm its mastery of the Northern Seas, it dragged the English traders at its heels into the fight, and at its close threw them off without a thought.[191] It gave a scornful answer to demands made by Parliament under Edward the Third and Richard the Second that the tolls exacted from Hanseatic traders for exporting goods from England should be increased; and retorted by a decree that all trade with England should be utterly broken off, thus shutting the great market at Elbing to the English merchants who had made it the centre of their trade with Russia and the towns of Prussia.[192]

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[184] Ibid. ii. 543.

[185] From Antwerp Archives; Schanz, ii. 539-43.

[186] In November, 1504, the Staplers and Adventurers appeared before the Star Chamber. The Staplers pleaded a charter which declared them free from the jurisdiction of the Adventurers. The Star Chamber decided that every Stapler who dealt or traded as an Adventurer was to be subject to the courts and dues of the Adventurers: and every Adventurer dealing as a Stapler in like manner to be subject to the Staple (Schanz, ii. 547). This decision seemed to imply the ruin of Staplers, but the next year it was explained that the authentic interpretation was simply that "the merchants of the Staple at Calais using the feate of a Merchant Adventurer passing to the marts at Calais should *in those things* be contributories to such impositions and charges" as the Adventurers had fixed (ibid. 549); and that they could not be compelled to join the Adventurers' company. In 1510 Henry the Eighth repeated the decree of Henry the Seventh that the Adventurers must not force Staplers to join their body (555). For the pleadings before the Star Chamber under Henry the Eighth see Schanz, ii. 556-564.

[187] Schanz, i. 249.

[188] Keutgen, 42, 51-54.

[189] Schanz, i. 251.

[190] Keutgen, 30, 81.

[191] Ibid. 44, &c.

[192] Pauli's Pictures, 172, 185. Keutgen, 10-43. Richard the Second complained to the Grand Master that traders were forced to carry their cloth to Elbing instead of Danzig (ibid. 72). In 1388 three citizens of London and York were sent to Marienberg with an interpreter to make a treaty of commerce with the "general master of the house of S. Mary of Teutonia." (Hist. MSS. Com. i. 109.)

The English traders, however, took all misfortune with the hardihood and exuberant courage of youth. Help from their own government was beyond hoping for, so long as conquering kings like Edward the Third and Henry the Fifth were bound hand and foot to the great mercantile houses of Lübeck and the Hanse towns by the loans raised from them to carry on the French wars; while Henry the Fourth, who, before he came to the throne, had been in Danzig and seen the troubles of the English merchants there,[193] and who in his anxiety to win the support of the trading class, was persistent in negotiations to improve their position, had not the power to give effect to his desires. The Adventurers, therefore, could only follow the one obvious course open to them, and kept up a steady brigandage on the seas and a series of opportune attacks on the enemy's out-posts. They held on desperately at Bergen,[194] and stoutly clung to the formal right which Henry the Fourth had given them to organize themselves under consuls in Norway, Sweden, or Denmark, for the carrying on of their trade.[195] Fishing boats which were shut out from the Baltic or from Bergen sailed on to Iceland, where, as the island was the private property of the King of Norway (who was himself the servant of the League) and was allowed to receive no ships save the King's, or those licensed by the King, opportunities for illegal trade were abundant and profits large. A frugal people, needy and remote, eagerly welcomed smuggled goods from England in exchange for their fish; and the smugglers carried on a rough business – outlaws and daring men of their company plundered and killed and stole cattle and desolated homesteads, and bartered after their own self-made laws.[196] It mattered nothing to them that Henry the Fifth, in obedience to the League, forbade the trade, or that in a storm of 1419 twenty-five English ships were driven on the coast of Iceland in three hours. Bristol men found their way to its shores by help of the compass, leaving for us the first record of its use in England, probably in 1424; and about 1436, in a year when the English had been expelled from Bergen, so many vessels sailed to Iceland that they could get no return cargo, and half of them had to come empty home.[197] But the northern trade was not all violent or lawless. English merchants bought double licenses from the English and the Norwegian kings, which allowed them to carry on a regular traffic; and in the middle of the fifteenth century one of the Bristol merchants, Cannynges, had in his hands the chief trade with northern Europe. Not only were his factors established in the Baltic ports, but his transactions with Iceland and with Finland were on so great a scale that when in 1450 all English trade with these regions was forbidden in virtue of a treaty with the King of Denmark, Cannynges was specially exempted on account of the debts due to him there by Danish subjects, and for two years he had a monopoly of the trade.[198]

In 1397, however, trade with the Easterlings was practically stopped. The English imposed enormous duties on German imports; the Germans forbade traffic in English cloth. For the negotiations carried on by Henry the Fourth see Literæ Cantuarienses, iii. xxviii. – xxxi., and the various letters on the subject. The English colony in Danzig increased greatly after the peace of Marienberg. (Schanz, i. 231.) In 1392 more than 300 English came into Danzig to carry corn. (Keutgen, 71.) But the resistance of the Danzig burghers to English trade was strenuous. They were less jealous of the Netherlands manufacturers, and the Teutonic Order in the fifteenth century sent to Dinant for the rough cloth needed for the Baltic trade. (Pirenne, Dinant, 97; Keutgen, 81-83.)

[193] Pauli's Pictures, 135-8.

[194] 8 H. VI. c. 2; Proc. Privy Council, iv. 208; Schanz, ii. 170.

[195] In 1425 there were letters from Henry the Sixth to the King of Dacia, Norwegia, and Swecia, concerning the merchants of Lynn who traded with the parts of North Berne; (Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 203). In 1427 he wrote to the English merchants "in partibus Prucie, Dacie, Norweie, Hanse, and Swethie commorantes," to assemble in a sufficient place, elect governors and make ordinances for self-government in mercantile matters, and for reasonable punishment of any merchants disobedient (203). At times the English even forced compensation from the Hanse merchants for outrages (Schanz, i. 250). In 1438 rye was brought from Prussia "by the providence of Stephen Browne," the mayor, at a time of famine in England, when a bushel of corn was sold for 3s. 4d., and the people were making bread of vetches, peas, beans, and fern-roots. (Fabyan, 612.)

[196] Schanz, i. 254.

[197] Libel of English Policy. Pol. Poems and Songs, ii. 191. The bailiffs and community of Chepstowe did trade with Iceland and Finmark. (Proc. Privy Council, iv. 208.) In 1426 Lynn forbade trade with Iceland to its inhabitants and the whole community sent a petition against the trade to the King's Council. (Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 160.)

[198] Hunt's Bristol, 94-6. In 1491 fishing-smacks starting for Iceland had to get leave to sail, after finding surety that they would not carry more grain nor any other forbidden thing than sufficed for their own food. Paston Letters, iii. 367-9.

Meanwhile the Adventurers watched their opportunity to carry the war nearer home, for the League, already weighted with the effort to maintain its monopoly before the rise of Scandinavian powers and the consolidation of the Duchy of Burgundy, was further troubled within its own ranks by divided counsels.[199] In the reign of Henry the Sixth, therefore, the English renewed among other claims their old demand that the Hanseatic merchants should no longer be favoured at their expense, but should be treated like any other foreigners and forced to pay the same tolls on wine and wool. There was a chance of success, for Lübeck and the western towns finding in their strength and self-reliance arguments for a policy of peace with England, were generally for amicable compromise; though the eastern towns led by Danzig, weaker at sea and peculiarly sensitive to any increase of money burdens, preferred fighting to submission with its apprehended dangers.[200] The party of violence won the day and a fierce maritime war followed with open hostilities and reprisals and lawsuits and endless negociations. On one occasion the English seized a fleet of 108 sail returning to Lübeck and Riga, and the men of the Hanse retaliated by laying hands on rich English prizes. Trade was so ruined that Henry the Sixth declared himself unable to pay to the Count Palatine the dowry of his aunt Lady Blanche, because there were now no dues and customs coming into his Treasury from the German merchants.[201] At last the dispute came to a climax in 1469, when the English quarrelled with the German traders in London, summoned them before the courts and imposed a fine of £13,520,[202] while members of the Steel Yard were thrown into prison, and the corporation nearly broken up.[203] The answer of Bremen, Hamburg, and Danzig was given in a fleet which gathered against England under the leadership of Charles the Bold. But just at this moment came the English revolution by which Edward the Fourth was driven out of the country, and all the great trading bodies, the Hanseatic League, and the Flemish and Dutch corporations, seeing the danger which threatened their commerce from the new political situation, cast aside minor quarrels and united to set Edward again on the throne.[204] Such a service demanded a great reward; and in 1474 a treaty was signed at Utrecht, by which the Hanse was given back all its earlier privileges, and secured in possession of its Guild Hall and Steel Yard in London, and its houses in Boston and Lynn. The Adventurers who made a bold demand that the Easterlings should renounce the right of carrying out wool or wool-fells from England can scarcely have expected to succeed; but they at least gained some measure of peace for their colony in Danzig.[205]

The Hanseatic League, however, had now come to an end of its triumphs. From this time the English pressed them hard. A law which forbade the import of silk and the export of undressed cloths struck a heavy blow at their trade. Then came the order that Rhine wine must only be carried in English ships. Officials used their infinite powers of annoyance with hearty good will, and the merchant who landed with his goods, harassed first by the relentless officers sitting at the receipt of custom, and then thwarted in every possible way by the Mayor and corporation,[206] was at last driven

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[199] Keutgen, 30.

[200] Ibid. 84-5, 70-71. For these negotiations see Rymer's Fœdera, x. 656-7, 666-70, 753. Bekynton, i. 215.

[201] In 1439. Bekynton's Corres. i. 183-4.

[202] "Whereof the payment was kept secret from writers" (Fabyan, 657.)

[203] The fortunes of Memling's Last Judgement now at Danzig give a curious illustration of this war and the trade complications of the time. Ordered at Bruges through the Florentine agents there (the Portinari), probably by Julian and Lorenzo de Medici, the picture could not be carried to Florence on account of this war begun in 1468. At last in 1473 it was sent off from Sluys in a British-built ship, which had been bought by English merchants as a French prize, chartered by Florentines in Bruges for a voyage to London, registered in the name of the Portinari, commissioned by a French captain, and navigated under the Burgundian flag for greater security against capture. It was, however, taken off Southampton by a privateer sailing under the Danzig flag and commanded by a noted captain Benecke. In spite of a bull issued by Sixtus the Fourth the cargo was sold at Stade and the picture brought by the owners of the ship to Danzig. (Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Early Flemish Painters, 257-260.)

[204] Henry the Sixth, on the other hand, brought the help of the Genoese. Possibly the excessive price of fish mentioned in the Paston Letters in 1471 may have been caused by the political troubles (iii. 22, 254).

[205] Schanz, i. 172-9; ii. 388-396. Pauli's Pictures, 185-7.

[206] Schanz, i, 186.

by public abuse behind the walls of the Steel Yard, so that in 1490 a member of the Hanse dared scarcely show himself in the streets of London.

Meanwhile the great confederation of Commonwealths itself showed grave signs of falling asunder. The bigger towns that no longer needed the protection of the association were quite ready to forsake it, and in 1501 began to refuse to bring their cloth to the Staple at Bruges, and to look for freer conditions of trade. At the same time the monopoly of the League was being threatened on all sides. The Prussian and Livonian towns treated them as enemies. A Dutch fleet competed with them in the Baltic. A Danish trading company had risen to dispute their monopoly in Denmark. The Swedes shut them out. The Norwegians made intermittent experiments at independence. At last in 1478 came the worst calamity that could befall their trade, the capture of Novgorod by the Muscovites, with the destruction of its free government and the ruin of its position as one of the commercial capitals of the world.

With the demolition of the League factory, the loss of all its possessions in the city, and the whole dislocation of the Eastern traffic, the supremacy of the Hanseatic Confederation was shattered, as the supremacy of the Italians in the Southern trade had been shattered half a century before by the conquest of Alexandria. English Adventurers naturally saw in every fresh trouble that assailed their rivals a new argument for aggression, and welcomed in Henry the Seventh a leader equal to the great occasion. Never had they found a better friend, or one who so finely interpreted the popular instinct of his time. How completely his determination to strengthen by every means in his power the position of the Adventurers in Antwerp against the Hanseatic traders at Bruges, and to bind England and Burgundy together into a united commercial state, fell in with the needs and temper of his people was strikingly shown after a two years' interruption of commerce with the Low Countries caused by the affair of Perkin Warbeck, when a burst of popular joy hailed the renewal of trade, and the wild enthusiasm of the people gave to the treaty of 1496 which restored the old kindly relations the high-sounding name of the *Intercursus Magnus*.

The big name has, as usual, imposed a little on later generations, and greater treaties have gone unnoticed for want of an equally pompous title. At first, indeed, amid the political disquiet and the trade depression which marked the early years of his reign, Henry went to work slowly and patiently, and in 1486 even confirmed the Utrecht treaty of 1474 which ensured a number of privileges to the Hanse. But this policy of peace was only assumed for a brief space while he was making ready for war. In 1486 he renewed the commercial treaty made by Edward with Britanny in 1467.[207] The real campaign, however, may be said to have opened by the Navigation Act of 1489, when the shipping trade was definitely taken under State protection. And what that State protection implied was at once shown in a series of commercial treaties with almost every trading country of Europe, whether its traffic lay in the northern or the southern seas. Building up on every hand alliances against the Hanseatic Confederation he steadily drew to himself the friendship of the Scandinavian peoples tired of the domination of the League. In 1489 he sent an embassy (two of the deputation being Lynn merchants), to make terms for a commercial alliance with Denmark and Norway, and won from the Northern powers freedom of trade for the English in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, with the right to acquire land, to form corporations and choose aldermen, and to be under special protection of the Danish King.[208] To defeat the pretensions of Danzig he turned to the Livonian towns, and by treaty with Riga attempted to secure a Russian trade which might open the way of Novgorod and the East to English Adventurers – an attempt which however was frustrated a few years later.[209] A conference was held in 1491 at Antwerp with the Hanseatic envoys, whom Henry with diplomatic insolence kept idly waiting for four weeks till the messengers he had sent to Denmark with friendly proposals of

[207] Schanz, i. 294.

[208] Schanz, i. 257.

[209] Schanz, i. 237-42.

a treaty as unfavourable as possible to the interests of the Hanse, returned with their answer. The promise of this inauspicious opening for the League was amply fulfilled in the long negotiations which lasted at Antwerp from 1491 to 1499, and in which the foreigner was consistently humbled before the triumphant Merchant Adventurer, all his compromises rejected so far as they tended to limit the freedom of the English trader, and the League compelled to accept terms ruinous to its interests and disastrous to its great tradition of supremacy.[210]

The story of these Antwerp negotiations gives us a true measure of the place gained during the last hundred years by the Merchant Adventurers in the North, where, having dealt the last blows to the ancient company of the Staple, and broken the power of the Hanseatic League, their fleets now sailed triumphantly on every sea. And yet this was but half their work; for the North was a small thing to win unless they could also load English vessels with the cargoes of the East and the tribute of the great commercial cities of the Mediterranean. Until the middle of the fifteenth century the trade of the eastern Mediterranean had been altogether carried on by Italians.[211] It was only in 1432 that the French merchant Jacques Coeur (the stories of whose wealth and power read like fables beside the modest doings of our native traders), had sent out some ships to take part in the Eastern trade; and the Levant was not really opened to Western merchants till 1442, when the Venetians were driven out of Egypt and the monopoly of the Italians broken up. It was very soon after that a Bristol merchant, Sturmys, fitted out probably the first English ship that visited the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. But the new inheritors of the East were received with bitter jealousies. Rival vessels fought for the spoils and carried off the booty like common pirates; and the Genoese traders in their anger seized Sturmys' ship on its return voyage and robbed it of its cargo of spices and green pepper. He reckoned his loss at 6,000 francs, and on his complaint to the government all the Genoese merchants in London were thrown into prison until they should give bonds for the payment of this sum.[212]

The question of the Mediterranean was thus vigorously opened. In London, indeed, the Italians might securely reckon on hard treatment. Merchants just beginning to feel their strength, half-ruined Staplers, London shopkeepers and manufacturers, all alike hated their Italian rivals with a common hatred, and were crying out for the most decisive measures against foreign competition. Less careful than their King of nursing political alliances[213] in view of foreign wars and complications, the traders boldly proposed a bill in the Parliament of 1439 to forbid the Venetians from carrying any wares save those of their own manufacture – a measure which if it had passed would have practically annihilated the whole Venetian trade to England. Their next proposal was a law to forbid selling anything to the Genoese or carrying anything to their port. Steadily supported as the Lombards were by the King against the people, they nevertheless saw their privileges from this time limited step by step; and once after the persecution of 1455 in London even attempted to leave the capital for ever. The great days of their trade monopoly were gone. Edward the Fourth and Richard the Third laid heavy burdens on them. Henry the Seventh kept them dependent on his arbitrary will for a very slight increase of freedom, such as he might see fit to grant from time to time, tried to limit their gains, and in the

[210] For the negotiations between the Easterlings and the English merchants, see Schanz, ii. 397-430; i. 179-201. In 1498 Archduke Philip, seeing the utter ruin into which Bruges had fallen, tried to revive it by ordering that all foreign merchants should do their business there only, by improving the harbour, *and by making it the Staple for English cloths in Flanders.* (Schanz, i. 26-27.) In 1501 Philip made Bruges a Staple where English cloth might be sold in Flanders under strict conditions. (Ibid. ii. 203-6.) In 1506 Henry won from the Archduke the right to sell cloth by the yard and to have the manufacture of it finished in all his dominions except Flanders. (Ibid. i. 31.)

[211] The friendly way in which the English merchants even in 1405 looked on Genoese traders is illustrated in the story told by Fabyan (571), of three carracks of Genoa laden with merchandise plundered by English lords. The Genoese merchants made suit to the King for compensation, and meanwhile borrowed from English merchants goods amounting unto great and noble sums. When their suit was seen to be in vain they made off with their spoils "to the undoing" of many merchants.

[212] Hunt's Bristol, 97-8.

[213] For the anxiety as to the friendship of powerful maritime states see the French boast of the alliance of Spain and Genoa; Heralds' Debate, 59. It is interesting to notice that both Edward the Fourth and Henry the Seventh preferred Florence to Venice. Disputes about the Venetian wool trade under Henry the Sixth are mentioned in Bekynton's Corresp. i. 126-9.

very first year of his reign forbade them to carry French woad or wine, or silk goods, and further hindered them in the export of wool.

At this time the population of the Venetian Republic was bigger than that of all England, and English traders had a good many other affairs on their hands beside their quarrel with Venice. The dispute, nevertheless, did not languish. No sooner were Henry's regulations proclaimed in 1485 than English merchants set sail for Crete, bought up the stores of malmsey there,[214] and carried them off to the Netherlands under the very eyes of the Venetian captains. Venice passed a law against such traffic, and in the stress of anxiety as to the English competition took to building better ships to maintain her own carrying trade; while England retorted by setting up a monopoly of her own wool in revenge for the Venetian monopoly of wine.

Meanwhile, the quick-witted Florentines, driven out of traditional routine by the intensity of the long competition for supremacy, had begun to doubt the value for them of the old policy of naval protection which the city had shared with Venice and Genoa; and had frankly adopted in 1480 a system of free-trade. In Constantinople and Egypt Florence began again to hold her own against Venice and to win back command of Eastern markets, and she eagerly welcomed English wool merchants to her port at Pisa.[215] In 1485, the year when England entered into the lists with Venice, these had become so numerous and powerful a body that a consul was appointed over them; and five years later, Henry made a commercial treaty with Florence which was one of the most remarkable acts of his reign. By its provisions English merchants undertook to carry every year to Florence sufficient wool to supply all the Italian States save Venice, and in return they were given every privilege their hearts desired.[216] The only resource left to the Venetians was to forbid that any wine should be shipped from Crete to Pisa, so that English vessels which went out laden with wool finding no return cargo should be driven to sail home empty. Henry immediately set such heavy import duties on malmsey in England that the Venetians, seeing their wine-trade on the point of ruin, bowed at last to the inevitable. The victory of the English merchants was finally proclaimed when Henry in 1507 only consented to renew the charter that gave Venetians rights of trade in England on condition that they bound themselves to do no carrying trade between the Netherlands and England, but to leave that to the Merchant Adventurers.[217]

Meanwhile, in all the ports visited by English ships between the Mediterranean and the Channel the same buoyant spirit of successful enterprise vanquished every obstacle. Englishmen had always traded much with their fellow-subjects in Aquitaine. From the days of St. Thomas Canterbury had dealings with the wine-growers of the south.[218] Ships of Bordeaux were known in every port of the Channel, and in 1350, 141 vessels laden with wine sailed thence to London alone,[219] while the early wealth of Bristol had been created by the cargoes of wool carried from its port to feed the Gascon manufactories, and the casks of wine sent back to fill its cellars. Conditions so pleasant for the Bristol burghers were rudely changed when in 1445 Bordeaux fell into the hands of the French, and English

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[214] The price of wine had been raised in England by new rules about measures.

[215] A pilgrim to Rome in 1477 got letters in London on the bank of Jacobo di Medici. (Hist. MSS. Com. vi. 361.)

[216] 1. English merchants might trade freely with Florence in all kinds of wares of home or foreign origin.2. The Florentines promised to buy no wool save from English ships. The English on their side were bound to carry yearly to Pisa an average quantity for all the Italian states save Venice. In Pisa they were to have all the privileges of inhabitants and to have land for a building.3. The English were to be free from personal services and from taxes which might be raised on trade.4. The merchants might form a corporation in Pisa.5. Quarrels between Englishmen to be settled by their own head. Quarrels between an Englishman and a foreigner to be decided by the municipality and the English consul. Criminal cases by the municipality alone.6. The English to share all advantages the Florentines might win by trading treaties.7. The wishes of the English to be considered in all new privileges granted in the Florentine dominions.8. The English King was to allow no stranger to carry wool out of England. The Venetians only might carry 600 sacks.9. The wool was to be of good quality and well packed. (Schanz, i. 126-137.)

[217] Schanz, i. 119-142; 7 Henry VII. c. 7.

[218] An interesting account of this is given in Hist. MSS. Com. v. 461.

[219] Schanz, i. 298.

traders instead of being the masters had to go humbly at the bidding of the men of Bordeaux with a red cross on their backs, doing business only in the town, or going into the country under the guardianship of a police agent. But if the burghers of the later fifteenth century cared nothing for the re-conquest of the French provinces, on the other hand they were determined not to lose their trade. The wool dealers, shut out of Bordeaux, turned to the North, to Rouen and Calais, changed their wool there for the wine of Niederburgund, and so started the woollen manufactures of Normandy, while those of Bordeaux declined. By a succession of commercial treaties[220] and by the Navigation Act of 1489, which shut out Gascon ships from the English wine trade, Henry secured for English merchants in Bordeaux such adequate protection that the efforts of Louis the Twelfth to limit their freedom of trade by passing a Navigation Act of his own were utterly vain. The Bordeaux citizens, filled with impotent rage, watched the English traders going up and down the land, 6,000 to 8,000 of them, as they averred, armed with sticks, and scouring the country for wine.

The ports of Spain and Portugal also were visited by increasing numbers of English vessels on their way to the Mediterranean, and old trading alliances were renewed with countries whose harbours were such valuable resting places.[221] There had long been commercial treaties with Castile and Catalonia, who competed for the profits to be won by carrying to England Spanish iron and fruits along with the wine and woad of neighbouring lands. But Henry the Seventh took the occasion of the negotiations for the Spanish marriage in 1489 to stipulate anew for freedom of trade and protection of English ships; while at the same time the English merchants asserted that by the new Navigation Act the whole export trade was now their exclusive right, and under the plea that their ships could not make the voyage to Spain unless they had a certainty of coming back well laden, forbade the carrying of Toulouse woad and Gascony wine in Spanish ships. By this time the Englishman had as usual roused the fear and hatred of the native merchants, and the Spaniards violently resisted the new policy. Heavy tolls were imposed on either side to ruin the trade of the other, and in one season eight hundred English ships were sent home empty from Seville because the patriotic Spanish dealers with one accord refused their wares to the enemy. Again fortune came to help the pertinacity of the Adventurers. In 1492 Spain drove the Jews and Moors from her shores. But their business simply fell into alien hands waiting to receive it, and the hated English merchants flocked to Spanish harbours now swept of their old rivals, and sailed back to England laden with the gold of the New World.[222]

Nor was the good chance that favoured them in Portugal less wonderful. With the traders of Lisbon and Oporto England had entered into a commercial treaty in the middle of the fourteenth century – a treaty which was altered in 1386 to include the whole of Portugal.[223] But by some happy destiny whose favours strewed the path of English traders, they asked and obtained in 1458 a revision of old agreements so as to secure the utmost advantage for their own interests, and all this had been completed just before the discovery of the Cape route gave to Portugal its enormous naval importance and threw Eastern commerce into a new channel. The quarrel with Venice inspired the English with increased ardour in their friendship for the new masters of the spice trade; and when Portuguese dealers invited English merchants to make their bargains for Eastern wares in Lisbon instead of journeying to Venice, these gathered in such numbers to the new emporium of Indian goods that their own shipping failed to carry the wealth offered to them and the merchants had to hire Portuguese vessels.[224]

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[220] In 1475, 1486, and 1495. (Schanz, i. 299-304.) In 1475 a proclamation in Cinque Ports forbade Englishmen to buy Gascon wine of an alien. (Hist. MSS. Com. v. 494.)

[221] An interesting trace of foreign connections is given in the will of Wm. Rowley, who left money to a parish church and a nunnery at Dam in Flanders, and to two places in Spain. (Hist. MSS. Com. v. 326.)

[222] Schanz, i. 275-7.

[223] Ibid. i. 285-90. The Portuguese were among those who were allowed to export woollen cloths under Henry the Sixth. (Proc. Privy Council, v. ii. 11.)

[224] Notices of English trade with Portugal in the second half of the fifteenth century may be found in the complaints of the

Thus it was that in the face of the powerful confederations that held the trade of the Northern and the Southern Seas English merchants were laying violent hands on the commerce of the world. They had vanquished their rivals in the north, while in the south they had firmly planted themselves in every important trading port along the western coast of Europe, and competed with the Italian Republics not only for their own carrying trade but for that of the Netherlands as well. If in the reign of Edward the Third practically the whole of the foreign commerce of England was carried in foreign vessels, in the reign of Henry the Seventh the great bulk of the trade had passed into English hands. British merchants were to be found in every port from Alexandria to Reykjavik, and wherever they touched left behind them an organized and firmly established trade. As we have seen, their battle for supremacy in commerce had in its beginnings been fought by free-traders and pirates warring against the orderly forces of organized protection; but the final victory was awarded to them in their later stage of a company of monopolists sustained and cherished by the State. The question, indeed, of how far protection contributed to the success of the English or to the loss of the foreigner is far from being a simple one. For in its first stages the work done by protection may possibly consist for a time mainly in the *abolition* of privilege, and this process may pass by very slow and imperceptible degrees to its last stage, that of *conferring* privilege. It is, therefore, hard to decipher the lesson when we are studying a commerce where protection has but begun its work in conflict with a commerce when that work is perfected. In the history of the later fifteenth century, moreover, the problem is yet further complicated by the present working of those vast forces which make or unmake the fortunes of continents, and before which the wisest policies of States, policies of protection or of free-trade or of any other elaborate product of human intelligence, are powerful as an army of phantoms.

merchants; Schanz, ii. 496-524. For Portuguese in Lydd in 1456, Hist. MSS. Com. v. 521.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMMON LIFE OF THE TOWN

We who have been trained under the modern system have forgotten how people lived in the old days, when the necessity of personal effort was forced home to every single member of the fellowship of freemen who had life or liberties or property to protect. For in spite of the vigour and independence of our modern local administration every Englishman now looks ultimately for the laws that rule his actions, and the force that protects his property, to the great central authority which has grown up outside and beyond all local authorities. He is subject to it in all the circumstances of life; whether it exercises wholly new functions unknown to the middle ages; or takes over to itself powers which once belonged to inferior bodies, and makes them serve national instead of local ends; whether it asserts a new direction and control over municipal administration; or whether, instead of replacing the town authorities by its own rule, it upholds them with the support of its vast resources and boundless strength. By whatever right the State holds its manifold powers, whether by inheritance, or purchase, or substitution, or influence, or the superiority of mere might, he feels its working on every hand. It is to him visibly charged with all the grand operations of government.

But to a burgher of the middle ages the care and protection of the State were dim and shadowy compared with the duties and responsibilities thrown on the townspeople themselves. For in the beginnings of municipal life the affairs of the borough great and small, its prosperity, its safety, its freedom from crime, the gaiety and variety of its life, the regulation of its trade, were the business of the citizens alone. Fenced in by its wall and ditch[225]– fenced in yet more effectually by the sense of danger without, and the clinging to privileges won by common effort that separated it from the rest of the world – the town remained isolated and self-dependent. Within these narrow borders the men who went out to win the carrying trade of the world learned their first lessons in organization, and acquired the temper by virtue of which Englishmen were to build up at home a great political society and to conquer abroad the supremacy of the seas – the temper which we recognize in an early confession of faith put forth by the citizens of Hereford as to the duties which a man owed to his commonwealth and to its chief magistrate. “And he to be our head next under the King, whom we ought in all things touching our King or the state of our city to obey chiefly in three things – first, when we are sent for by day or by night to consult of those things which appertain to the King or the state of the city; secondly, to answer if we offend in any point contrary to our oath, or our fellow-citizens; thirdly, to perform the affairs of the city *at our own charges, if so be they may be finished either sooner or better than by any other of our citizens*.”[226] Public claims were insistent, and under the primitive conditions of communal life, in small societies where every man lived in the direct light of public opinion, no citizen was allowed to count carefully the cost of sacrifice, or stint the measure of his service, when the welfare of his little community was at stake. His duties were plainly laid down before him, and they were rigidly exacted. According to the accepted theory it was understood that all private will and advantage were to be sacrificed to the common good, and Langland speaks bitterly of the “individualists” of his day.

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[225] In Piers Ploughman a graphic illustration is taken from the mediæval borough thus isolated and protected.“He cried and commanded all Christian peopleTo delve and dike a deep ditch all about unity,That Holy Church stood in holiness as it were a pile.Conscience commanded then all Christians to delve,And make a great moat that might be a strengthTo help holy Church and them that it keepeth.”– Pass. xxii. 364-386.

[226] Journ. Arch. Assoc. xxvii. 461.

"For they will and would as best were for themselves,
Though the King and the commons all the cost had.
All reason reproveth such imperfect people."[227]

I. The inhabitants of a mediæval borough were subject to a discipline as severe as that of a military state of modern times. Threatened by enemies on every side, constantly surrounded by perils, they had themselves to bear the whole charges of fortification and defence. If a French fleet appeared on the coast, if Welsh or Scotch armies made a raid across the frontier, if civil war broke out and opposing forces marched across the country, every town had to look to its own safety. The inhabitants served under a system of universal conscription. At the muster-at-arms held twice a year poor and rich appeared in military array with such weapons as they could bring forth for the King's service; the poor marching with knife or dagger or hatchet; the prosperous burghers, bound according to mediæval ideas to live "after their degree," displaying mail or wadded coats, bucklers, bows and arrows, swords, or even a gun. At any moment this armed population might be called out to active service. "Concerning our bell," say the citizens of Hereford, "we use to have it in a public place where our chief bailiff may come, as well by day as by night, to give warning to all men living within the said city and suburbs. And we do not say that it ought to ring unless it be for some terrible fire burning any row of houses within the said city, or for any common contention whereby the city might be terribly moved, or for any enemies drawing near unto the city, or if the city shall be besieged, or any sedition shall be between any, and notice thereof given by any unto our chief bailiff. And in these cases aforesaid, and in all like cases, all manner of men abiding within the city and suburbs and liberties of the city, of what degree soever they be of, ought to come at any such ringing, or motion of ringing, with such weapons as fit their degree."[228] At the first warning of an enemy's approach the mayor or bailiff became supreme military commander.[229] It was his office to see that the panic-stricken people of the suburbs were gathered within the walls and given house and food, that all meat and drink and chattels were made over for the public service, and all armour likewise carried to the Town Hall, that every inhabitant or refugee paid the taxes required for the cost of his protection, that all strong and able men "which doth dwell in the city or would be assisted by the city in anything" watched by day and night, and that women and clerics who could not watch themselves found at their own charge substitutes "of the ablest of the city."[230]

If frontier towns had periods of comparative quiet, the seaports, threatened by sea as by land, lived in perpetual alarm, at least so long as the Hundred Years' War protracted its terrors. When the inhabitants had built ships to guard the harbour, and provided money for their victualling and the salaries of the crew, they were called out to repair towers and carry cartloads of rocks or stones to be laid on the walls "for defending the town in resisting the king's enemies."[231] Guns had to be carried to the church or the Common House on sleds or laid in pits at the town gates, and gun-stones, saltpetre, and pellet powder bought. For weeks together watchmen were posted in the church towers with horns to give warning if a foe appeared; and piles of straw, reeds and wood were heaped up on the sea-coast to kindle beacons and watch-fires. Even if the townsfolk gathered for a day's amusement to hear a

[227] Piers Ploughman, passus iv. 386.

[228] Journ. Arch. Assoc. xxvii. 466.

[229] "And we use that during the siege if the bailiff be an unable and impotent man or unlearned, to choose us one other for the time being; but not a far-dweller unless by the pleasure of the commonalty." (Ibid. 488.) See Proc. Privy Council, iv. 217.

[230] Journ. Arch. Assoc. xxvii. 463, 488.

[231] In Rye there was a tax "from every stranger, as though from a prisoner taken, payment of his finance for his ransom, and when he has entered the fortresses of the port for his passage thence, 3*s.* 4*d.*; he having to pay towards the building of the walls and gates there what pertains to the common weal of the town." (Hist. MSS. Com. v. 490.) For the strengthening of Canterbury wall against the French, (ibid. ix. 141.) It had twenty-one towers and six gates, and mayors in 1452 and 1460 left money for the gates. (Davies' Southampton, 62-3, 80, 105. Hist. MSS. Com. xi. 3, 167.)

play in the Court-house a watch was set lest the enemy should set fire to their streets – a calamity but too well known to the burghers of Rye and Southampton.[232]

[232] Hist. MSS. Com. v. 518-24, 492-3. The Common House at Romney was only provided with bows until in 1475 a gun was laid on it. Burgesses were sometimes driven from towns by the excessive charges of war and of watch and ward. (Owen's Shrewsbury, i. 205.) For Southampton, see Davies, 79, 80, Chester, Hist. MSS. Com. viii. 370.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.