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Walter Mucklow

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# The Herrings and the First Great Combine

THE MIDDLE-MEN OF THE MIDDLE-AGES

BY WALTER MUCKLOW

In a hall, brilliantly lighted, a great singer had held the audience spellbound and, in response to urgent calls, she sang one more song and sent the words "Caller herring" to the furthest corner of the chamber.

Among the listeners was one who was fortunate enough to have been born in the North Country and was learned enough to know that his native tongue, the speech of the East Riding of Yorkshire, can be, and is to-day read, and understood, by the Danes of Jutland. To him there came echoes, not from the encircling walls, but from the mountains bordering the northern seas: not from the rounded throat of a fair woman, but from the bearded mouths of rough sailors whose hands held no handkerchief of lace, but were rough, hard and red from the handling of their oars and ropes.

How many of us, when enjoying the roe of a bloater or a kipper, remember or realize the important part which the herring has played in the commerce of the world. Poor little herring! Wonderful little fish—said to be the most numerous of all the kinds of fish swimming in the sea; known to be the cheapest of all fish eaten on the land; enjoyed by the epicurean alderman, who calls it "whitebait"; bought by the credulous housewife under the name of "sardine" and found on the tables of all classes.

Much has been said, written, and sung of the fish, the fishers and the fisheries, but does the fish receive its full meed for having been the direct cause of the earliest, the most enduring and the most powerful of all commercial combines, to which emperors, kings, princes, merchants, soldiers, sailors and statesmen paid tribute in one form or another? Yet there is no escaping the fact that this great organization, known as the Hanseatic League did, in Elizabethan phrase, spring from a herring.

The story should be interesting, not only because it deals with the birth and death of a great power, but because it is full of action: it takes us for long journeys by land and by sea: it tells of seizures by pirates—and not the modern pirate of finance or com-

merce, but the real honest-to-God, blood-thirsty, throat-cutting, hard-swearing men of blood.

The true picture is a panorama painted in the vividest colors from the painter's palette: the search for the silver fish led to the thirst for gold, the stealing of jewels, the outpouring of blood and the shedding of tears. If this picture could be presented on the screen of to-day it would be accompanied by the shouts of the sailors, the war cries of the warriors, the shrieks of the tortured, the petitions of the politicians and the speeches of princes. It would show how a small partnership gradually grew into a world-wide power; how it became so haughty to those outside its membership and so autocratic to those within that the former combined against it and the latter withdrew from it, causing it gradually to disintegrate until nothing of it remains but a name used only in legal documents.

If history repeat itself, does not the history of the league indicate clearly the inevitable fate of any "combine" when it becomes too serious a menace to the public welfare? In more senses than one is it a moving picture, for it travels from the west of England to central Russia—no mean distance even to-day—and it includes action of all kinds, often rude and harsh, always persistent, and continually working towards one end. It includes some natural history, for we can not omit the humble herring and its vagaries, and it touches all the countries of northern Europe; it extends from the days of feudalism, through revolutions of all kinds, until, as we shall see, the story ends in the calm of the Victorian era.

It is not intended to write a history of the league, which lived for centuries and covered a continent—that has already been done by Germans and by English: it requires volumes and no amount of compression could reduce it to the compass of an essay, even if facts were packed as closely as herrings in a barrel. Therefore, it is proposed to sketch the origin and some of the more outstanding historical events which illustrate the dealings of its members, and their manner of living and of conducting business, for these things affected the course of the league and have left their mark on the commerce of the English-speaking people.

#### THE NATURE AND SIZE OF THE BUSINESS INVOLVED

In these days, when there is a tendency to judge things by their size, and to think that in former times all things were in

miniature, it is well to remember that many of the authentic figures regarding business of the middle ages are surprisingly large.

For example, in 1080 the "Doomsday Book" itself contains the names of 600 barons and 60,000 knights. In the fourteenth century merchants from seventeen kingdoms lived in Bruges. In the Elizabethan days the merchant adventurers employed 50,000 people in the Netherlands and the annual trade reached twelve million ducats—and a ducat was worth over two dollars.

While there exists no complete list of the member cities of the league at its height, several writers mention 80 or 90, and one goes as high as 130, and the "factories" or "kantors" were large; that at Bergen contained 3,000 men.

Early in the fifteenth century Pope Pius II traveled through Germany before his election as pope and, writing of the wealth of the towns, of Danzig he says, "It was so prosperous and well equipped that it could call under arms at least 50,000 men."

In 1474 three hundred sail passed in and out of Danzig harbor every day. Many of these were large ships, such as the *Peter of Danzig*, which carried a crew of 400 men.

Many another instance could be given, but these suffice to show something of the size of the forces which were operating.

I propose to sketch the growth of the league in Europe and then to follow its history in England, where it had one of its largest depots and where it has left its ineradicable mark.

To dispose first of our fish, which is at once the *raison d'être* of our league and the *casus belli* of so many quarrels—it is dignified by naturalists by the name of *clupea harengus*, and it is so closely allied with the sprat, the sardine and the pilchard that one is frequently substituted for the other. Before the days of the league the herring frequented the eastern end of the Baltic sea, but those waters gradually lost their saltiness, owing to the influx of fresh water rivers, and the herrings moved westward. For some centuries the fish favored Scania, and the herring of Scania was then as highly prized and as well known as is its lineal descendant, the bloater of Yarmouth, for the Danes had developed an excellent method of curing the fish and used the salt from the Baltic salt deposits.

The headquarters of the fishing were at Scania on the southwest corner of Sweden: usually a sandy waste, but from July 25th to September 29th of each year it became a roaring fair and a mov-

able town of boats and stalls. The league controlled it and, even in the busiest rush no Hanseatic might help an outsider or hire out his services to him.

Later, about 1425, the herring decided to move to the Dutch coast, where, as we shall see, trade followed.

The reason for this close connection between fish and finance becomes clear when we remember that all Europe owed allegiance to the Roman church or to the Greek church, each of which had its fasts, its weekly Fridays; its annual Lents. The eating of meat, of eggs and of milk was not only forbidden by the ecclesiastical law but by statute, and this was enforced until the reign of William III. Therefore, fish was a principal article of diet, and, of all varieties, the herring was the most plentiful and chief favorite. At the battle of Herrings in 1429 the besieged had meat in abundance, but were starving, for it was Lent. The salted herring became a recognized form of tax and tribute, and was a recognized medium of exchange. For centuries, when a charter was granted to a seaport, it was customary to require that there be furnished to the king a stipulated number of herrings.

#### CONDITIONS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE LEAGUE

In order to understand the situation clearly, we must recall some of the facts we learned at school and must remember that prior to and at the formation of the Hanseatic League, feudalism prevailed throughout Europe, and although some may regard it as an unmixed evil, its origin had much that was both practical and alluring. The king was the fount of honor, he gave his protection to his great lords, who, in turn, rendered him essential services of various kinds. The same exchange of benefits took place between them and those immediately under them; and this exchange continued from rank to rank down to the serf. However, Germany early showed a certain individuality among her population, one of the most striking examples of which was the independent development of the merchant and, as his business naturally drew him to the city, the acquirement by the cities of wealth and the power which accompanies it.

When, as time passed, jealousies and feuds arose, when kings feared their nobles, when nobles were jealous of each other and feared their dependents—then the rulers sought alliance with the cities and relied upon their aid to subdue rebellious nobles, in return for which the cities received many franchises, rights and privileges.

In the city of the middle ages there lived three classes: first, the nobles—originally the owners of the burgs around which cities were formed—second, the citizens, who were allowed to live and to flourish on the condition that they supported, even to the death, the nobles; and third, the slaves who supplied the wants of both.

The cities had seen how the nobles, when they thought it necessary or advantageous, had combined and so overcame opposition from above and crushed that coming from below. The citizens took a leaf—many leaves, in fact—from the book of the nobles. The cities combined and with the money of the merchants were able to and did assemble armies and create fleets so powerful that, in some cases, they named the sovereigns who should rule in Scandinavia. With such success achieved, can one wonder that nobles, princes and powers finally sought the league's alliance?

The origin of the Hanseatic League is lost in the mists of time; we do not know with any certainty how the name arose. Its birth is as unnoticed as is the sprouting of the acorn and probably, like it, occurred out of sight and below the surface. Ancient records are not only brief but are broken; writers do not mention it in the twelfth century, but in 1241 it suddenly appears and the word "Hansa" becomes a dominant note in the discord of nations.

The very name of "Hansa" has something of mystery about it; in its earliest use in the Gothic Bible, it signifies a society, especially of combatants, and is applied to the band who went to capture Jesus in Gethsemane. Later, it implies a tax on commercial transactions and the sums the various cities paid as entrance fee to the association.

In days when wrecking was both legitimate and gentlemanly, when many a lord of the land lived on the spoils of the seas (for shipwrecked goods belonged to him on whose land they rested) it was natural that the profit-yielding herring presented to the plunderer as great a temptation as did the gold of California in '49, and it was equally natural that these plunderers should be of the sea—pirates, dare-devil Scandinavians, sailors by heredity, direct descendants of those who had raided and settled on the east coast of England, fearing nothing, almost forced to seek a livelihood elsewhere than on their own somewhat inhospitable land, and of allied blood to those Normans who were such a scourge

in northern Europe that a clause in the old litany read "A furore Normanorum, libera nos, Domine."

The Hanseatic League presents curious contrasts, for its general organization was of the loosest: there was no regular meeting place, nor time for meeting; entrance fees were low; it had no seal; it was formed solely to foster trade and to subdue all opposition from all outside its ranks, and it produced nothing. Its funds were used as needed for common requirements—no continuous records appear to have been kept and no list of all its members appears to have existed, although contemporaneous writers place the maximum membership at from 70 to over 100 cities. On the other hand, the internal rule was of the strictest and individual members were bound by laws as numerous, as rigid and as severe as those of the most austere monastic order.

The extent of territory covered is remarkable, for it extended from Bristol in England on the West to Novgorod in Russia on the east—not the Nijni Novgorod of to-day, but old Novgorod, some hundred and twenty miles south of St. Petersburg and some fifteen hundred miles from Bristol. Russian trade always worked northward and Novgorod was one of the centres, with 80,000 inhabitants and many beautiful buildings.

Trade was beset by many difficulties and delays; for example, the dangers of navigation led to a rule that no vessels might sail between Martinmas and Candlemas—that is from November 11th to February 2nd—except when they carried the two chief necessities of life—herrings and beer!

There are German authorities who state that Bruges was chosen as a station because it formed an entrepot between the Baltic and the Mediterranean and a voyage from one sea to the other and back was too arduous an undertaking to be accomplished in one season. All action was necessarily restricted and all movements were limited. Those of commerce were as much confined by difficulties of transport as were those of men by their armor and of women by their stays. Now, all things are looser, except, perhaps, morality, which, even then, was a somewhat loose and easily fitting garment.

#### HISTORY

The written history of early trade in the Baltic has disappeared, as have some of the principal cities, the chief of which, Winetha, or Julin as the Danes called it, has been so completely destroyed

that we do not know even its site, although a writer of the eleventh century declared it had been "The greatest town of heathen Europe." Tradition compares it with Sodom and declares the inhabitants became so rich that they despised God.

Both the volume and the value of this trade were great, for the Far East found an outlet through the rivers flowing northward to the Baltic ocean, and Wisby became the chief meeting place. Situated on the island of Gotland, it is now almost deserted and seldom heard of, except in maritime circles, where the laws of Wisby, or Visby, still command respect. It was wonderfully prosperous from the 11th to 14th centuries and had been a notable trade centre from the stone age and through the ages of bronze and iron, as is clearly proved by the large quantities of Arabic, Anglo-Saxon and other coins which have been found there. Naturally, it became a leader in the league. Its reputation was carried in all directions and of it an old ballad said "The Gottlanders weighed out gold with stone weights and played with the choicest jewels. The swine ate out of silver troughs and the women span on distaffs of gold."

We find that our ancestors were not unacquainted with many modern trade practices, for among these old coins are some of copper thinly covered with silver, while weights have evidently been shaved down.

When commerce was young, it was usual for the merchant to take his own goods abroad and sell them. Later, trade was largely conducted between cities—rather than by persons or nations—and under Teutonic law a city was held liable if a trader suffered malignant shipwreck or was robbed within its territories. Harsh as were the conditions of commerce, we find that women were allowed to, and did, play an active part and old records mention, as an example, a "femme Neuser" and others.

Let us picture to ourselves two or three merchants who had set out on journeys, who had been robbed and forced to return home, chastised of body, chastened in spirit and chagrined at loss. Naturally, they would suggest the formation of parties, even as did American immigrants to the west, and these proving helpful, the cities followed the example of their citizens and formed unions among themselves. While none can say when these merchants first banded themselves together for material aid and protection, we do know that such unions, well established in the eighth century, were known as "the emperor's men" and, as we



shall see, maintained headquarters in various and widely separated places.

We do know, too, that as long ago as 978 a body of German merchants traded in England, and they were accorded the same rights as were English merchants; and in 1237, the Gotland Association acquired rights to trade there. But herrings moved westward; the Baltic trade spread; Wisby lost its preëminence, and control passed to what is known as the "Wendish" group, which included Lubeck, Hamburg, Luneburg and other cities to the eastward.

Cologne appears to be the first city which obtained the right to form a Hansa and became closely connected with London; but other cities followed its example. In 1226 and 1227 Lubeck and Hamburg received the right to establish Hansas similar to that of Cologne, and in 1241 they agreed to defend jointly that narrow passage—the Sound—which connects the Baltic and the North Sea and formed the only marine outlet for the commerce of northeastern Europe.

The date usually assigned to the birth of the Hanseatic League is 1239. It then included only three cities and its creation was due to an agreement between the merchants of Hamburg and Lubeck to establish a guard for the protection of their merchandise from robbers and pirates during carriage between the two cities. It is to be noted that these robbers were not footpads or beggars, but men of position, and we find a count was hanged for violating the public peace and are told that finally the "nobles deserted from robbing on the highway."

In the next quarter century, other towns joined and the Hanseatic League became a fact. Its original purpose was purely economical or commercial, rather than political, and from this it never swerved, for, although it obtained immense political power, that power was used to strengthen the trade of its members, for whom it sought a world-wide monopoly—the phrase "Deutches uber alles" is no new cry. The formation of any such association as the "Hanseatic League" was a direct violation of German law and at the Diet of Worms, in 1231, the princes expressed their disapproval of the league, but the cities disregarded this action and the only effect was to force the cities to bind themselves still closer together. It has been suggested that this illegitimacy may afford the reason why there exist such meagre records of the league's proceedings.

The league grew and reached the height of its power in the latter half of the fourteenth century, when all matters were referred to Lubeck, but it must not be supposed for one moment that this great combine obtained its dominant position without fighting. Its fights were as furious as have been those of any other combine of recent times, but, instead of occurring in a court of law, they took place on the field of battle—battles by sea and by land.

The immense quantities of herrings caught in the Baltic caused much merchandise to be gathered there, but German merchants could realize nothing on it until it reached their ports, and this entailed a voyage through the bottle-neck of the Sound, the strait between Denmark and Sweden, which in its narrowest part is only three miles wide. The control of this strait carried with it a control of shipping and led to much of the fighting.

The power of Denmark was great in the twelfth century; it owned not only Denmark on the south of the Sound, but also Scania on the north side, thus having control of the waters. The three Scandinavian powers all desired to plunder the wealthy German merchants, but they quarrelled among themselves so constantly that their powers were weakened.

In the first half of the thirteenth century the Hanseatics obtained a succession of victories and finally sacked Copenhagen in 1249, but in the fourteenth century Waldemar III became king of Denmark. He determined to make his country the leader and proceeded against the Hanseatics. King Waldemar was an outspoken gentleman and, when the officers of the league complained of interference with their rights, he told them, and none too politely, that their wishes were of no interest to him and they had better seek work elsewhere than at the fisheries of Scania. He demanded high tolls for fishing, he sent home the merchants' ambassadors unsatisfied, and finally, in 1361, suddenly and without warning, attacked, seized, sacked and plundered Wisby, the Hansa's northern emporium, where he "took from the burghers of the town great treasures in gold and silver, after which he went his ways."

Waldemar's success hurt the league in its pocket, its pride and its position: it could not be suffered in silence. The league's first step was to declare an embargo on all Danish goods and to forbid all intercourse with Denmark on pain of death and loss of property. Next, it approached Norway and Sweden and, as each of

these countries was at feud with Denmark, each promised its assistance to the league—a promise poorly kept. As usual, the expenses of the war were to be met by taxation; in this case by a poundage tax on all Hanseatic goods imported. A fleet was equipped, fighting men were put on board and in May, 1362, Copenhagen on the south side of the Sound was attacked, captured and plundered under the leadership of the burgomaster of Lubeck, Johann Wittenborg.

However, when attack was made on Scania on the northern shore of the Sound, the Norwegian and Swedish allies failed to appear: Wittenborg was obliged to use his sailors to fight on land, and while his ships were thus weakened, Waldemar appeared, surprised the weakened crews and forced Wittenborg with the remnant of his force to return to Lubeck. Again the conduct of Lubeck was typical of the league: failure was a crime and the poor burgomaster was deprived of his honors, imprisoned and finally deprived of his head.

An armistice followed, and negotiations ensued, but Waldemar was determined to break the power of the league. He delayed negotiations, he misled representatives; he seized vessels and finally he married his only child Margaret to Hakon, heir to both the Norwegian and Swedish thrones, thus preparing for a union of the three Scandinavian countries. The league then realized that it was engaged in a fight to the finish, and in November, 1367, it called together its 77 member cities to meet at Cologne, and for the first time there was prepared an act which was the fundamental basis of the league.

Each member city was compelled to take its share; those too weak or too distant to fight were to contribute money and if any failed in its duty, such city was held to be outside the league, and none of its merchants might buy from or sell to them, nor might their vessels enter Hanseatic ports, nor could their goods be unladen there.

When the league exhibited its inherent strength, it was still further strengthened by many a noble who had a private grievance and it set up a rival king over Sweden. In April, 1368, the first fleet was ready for its attack, when King Waldemar fled without warning. During the summer the fleet harassed town after town. When winter came it followed custom and retired, but resumed activities in the spring. By the end of 1369 the Danes were weary and pleaded for peace. They obtained it,

but at a price! The league claimed various revenues, taxes and privileges, but, chief of all, it insisted that for fifteen years no ruler should rule in Denmark unless he had been approved by the league. The treaty was finally signed by Waldemar in 1371, Scandinavia was subdued, the league was established and with the peace of Stralsund a new era commenced.

The league had now reached man's estate, and it presents a curious similarity to the present-day bootlegger, for its very existence was illegal under the laws of the empire—that Holy Roman Empire which Voltaire said was not holy, not Roman and not an empire—yet the league was so powerful that it was accepted, welcomed and dealt with.

The league not only possessed power, but it used it. It dealt with rulers of states as with equals, however politely its demands might be worded, and its members were compelled to obey every order or to be commercially excommunicated. A couple of outstanding instances are typical. In Bremen there lived a merchant who traded with Flanders during one of the quarrels, when the Hansa had outlawed all of Flanders. Bremen was called upon to punish him, but preferred to uphold him, whereupon the city was promptly "unhansed," was declared taboo in 1356 and remained so for thirty years. Its business withered, grass grew in its streets while "hunger and desolation took up their abode in its midst" and only when Bremen undertook heavy responsibilities in atonement was it pardoned.

On another occasion some malcontents, apparently of the class now called "reds," acquired power in Brunswick and headed a revolt against several league cities. Brunswick was "unhansed" for six years, during which conditions became so dire that deputies were sent to Lubeck and craved pardon in abject terms. This was not granted until the Emperor Charles IV interceded, and even then the terms were harsh, for two burgo-masters and eight chief citizens were required to march from church to town hall in Lubeck, each being bare-headed, bare-footed and carrying a candle in his hand and then, while on their knees, publicly confess repentance and implore pardon "for the love of God and the honour of the Virgin Mary." In addition Brunswick undertook to build a votive chapel and to send pilgrims to Rome to implore papal pardon for the murder of the councillors killed by the rioters.

We can not follow the quarrels between Christian V of Denmark, Gustavus, king of Sweden and Frederick, later king of Denmark. The last two of them obtained their crowns largely through the assistance of the league in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.

When the Reformation came, we find it played no small part in the final disintegration of the league for the ideas of Wickliffe and Huss were adopted by some cities and rejected by others, a condition naturally leading to doubts and suspicions. Lubeck was one of the last to hold out, but in 1529 the citizens refused to pay taxes until the municipality should permit the introduction of evangelical teaching.

The decline of Lubeck, the leader, carried with it the decline of the league, and its power, so largely maritime, was further reduced when in 1553, Sir Richard Chancellor found an entrance to the markets of Russia through the Arctic Ocean and the White Sea.

The league always believed in the wisdom of using every weapon which came to its hand and during the war with Denmark it encouraged pirates, provided the robbers attacked only its enemies. It was necessary to carry provisions to the Hansa towns in Sweden, and the adventurers engaged in the service quickly became pirates and, copying their employers, themselves formed an organization known as the "Victualling brothers."

The body continued after the war ended and became a menace to all shipping, so the league again resorted to a poundage tax, raised a fleet of 35 vessels with 3,000 men and supplies, and, in 1394, finally broke up the brotherhood, but failed to kill all the brothers, many of whom escaped and continued their operations through small groups.

The chief of these settled in the Frisian islands and in 1400 another fleet was sent against them; many were captured, beheaded and buried. The executioner received eight pennies a head for decapitating them and his servant twenty pennies a piece for burying them.

Still the pirates flourished and the ship *The Colored Cow* and another fleet was sent against them and found them near Heligoland. Fighting was at close quarters, and a favorite means of attack was for one vessel to approach another and pour molten lead on the rudder, loosening it and rendering the vessel unseaworthy. A leader, Stortebeker, and some 70 pirates were

taken to Hamburg and to insure safety they were all tried and all beheaded on one day. Still another thief, Godeke Mechelson, remained, but another expedition captured him and 80 more, all of whom were beheaded in one day by one executioner; and then peace ensued.

About the middle of the fifteenth century Czar Ivan II drove the league out of Moscow and it lost its Russian business. At the opening of the sixteenth century the modern spirit and ideas were replacing the medieval; independence became more general, blind obedience more rare, and through this commenced the decay of the league, which was hastened as the countries England, Denmark, Sweden became active in maritime affairs and sent their ships as carriers of goods, breaking the old Hanseatic monopoly.

One authority writes: "There can be no doubt that the real decline of the power of the league is to be traced to the fact of its having become political and warlike, instead of remaining commercial and peaceful."

"In the early days when they understood commerce better than other nations, they obtained privileges; as other nations became more enlightened these privileges became burdensome, but the league never realized the changes in the times."

The last diet of which there is a record was held in 1628, when the league was beset by enemies without and weakened by irregularities within. Yet, in the face of these difficulties the chief feature of the report of the delegates from Brunswick was that they had not received the usual quantity of wines to drink and of sweet cakes to eat. Could one ask for a clearer sign of deterioration?

The Thirty Years' War ended with the peace of Westphalia in 1648, but that war had left Europe devastated; Germany had lost from one third to one half of its population, its cities were ruined and the working class was almost annihilated. The power of the league had gone and practically only three cities, Lubeck, Hamburg, Bremen, remained united, and they were incorporated in the empire by Napoleon I in 1810.

After Austerlitz in 1806 most of the cities of the league fell to one or other of the European powers, nor were they strengthened by Napoleon's declaration that "Holland was declared to be an alluvial deposit which had been formed from the French rivers and was incorporated with France."

Hamburg and Bremen lost their complete freedom under Bismarck in 1888. Lubeck had already lost hers. But each city

remained self-governing, retained some degree of independence and still called itself a Hanseatic town.

For at least four centuries the league played a controlling part, a record unequalled in the world's commerce: it dealt with rulers, it subsidized, and was subsidized by, kings; it financed wars, it organized large armies and fleets and controlled the trade of northern Europe. Yet at the last it proved the truth of the words of Solomon—himself a great trader—"Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall."

#### SIZE AND OWNERSHIP

It is interesting to compare this first great commercial autocracy with its progeny, the monopoly of modern times—and it suffers nothing thereby. We are disposed to connect the word "monopoly," or its synonym "corner," with some one product—oil, wheat, copper, etc., but no such limitation can be applied to the commerce of the league. It included wool from England, fine cloths from Flanders, silks and linens, beer and wines from Germany, with those of Italy, metal objects of all kinds, copper and iron from Sweden, hemp, flax, pitch, tar, masts, pipe staves, granite from Blekingen, limestone from Bornholm, grain from the Baltic, from Russia wax (used in huge quantities for candles), leather, tallow, and above all furs, of which one pious chronicle states "They (furs) are as plentiful as dung there and for our condemnation, as I believe, we strive as hard to come into the possession of a marten skin as if it were eternal salvation"—a condition perhaps not entirely unknown now. Of England the league boasted "We buy the fox skins from the English for a groat, and resell them the foxes' tails for a guilder," and the renowned English crossbows were made from yew grown in Austria and shipped through Dantzic.

The business depended upon marine freights, and the rule was that no city should be admitted which was not situated on the sea or on a navigable river—that did not keep the keys of its own gates.

In nearly all disputes, a commission was appointed to examine and report, and the number of such commissions was such that the merchants of those days commented on them as freely as do our own newspapers upon similar appointments in our own day.

The personal character of the disputes, as distinct from national character, is illustrated in Walford's statement that two

acts approved in 1503 and 1523 by Henry VII "are the only two acts which we find in the statutes book relating to this fraternity."

In addition to trading the league acted as bankers and as pawn-brokers on a royal scale and many of the wars in Europe, particularly some of the English wars, were financed with funds borrowed on crown jewels.

It firmly believed that business should follow the flag and in the thirteenth century ordered that grain from the countries served by the Elba and the Vistula could be sent to other countries only in vessels cleared from a Hanseatic city—an early precedent for later practices by England. Merchants from all parts of Europe met at stated times in certain cities and traded in all the varied products. For centuries Bruges was a principal center, and from these meetings grew the recognized annual fairs, of which the great Leipzig fair was one of the last remaining.

And under all, above all, was the herring: when it moved about 1425 to the coast of Holland it drew trade control with it.

#### ITS GOVERNMENT, ITS PRINCIPLES, ITS HABITS

The affairs of the league were managed by diets, held when required and where convenient, but summoned "in the name of all the cities." A burgomaster of Lubeck was usually chosen to preside and, after the opening, courteous speeches were made, business was discussed, budgets were approved, disputes were adjudged, peace or war was decided and necessary despatches to foreign potentates were ordered.

The members of the league were, generally, God-fearing merchants: church-goers, church-builders and charitable: still they were always merchants. The gold coin was the guilder and their motto might well have been "God and the Guilder" for they managed to serve the one and conserve the other with no mean success.

Their trading was strictly legitimate: they dealt in no uncertainties, in no "futures": they did not speculate and they might not sell the herring until it was caught.

Settlements were made, as now, by exchange in currency or by credit, but in the latter case a surety was required and the bond demanded was such that escape was inconceivable. The league directed when and where credit could be given, and some cities, like Lubeck, were allowed to mint coins.

Apparently disputes as to quality and quantities were unusual, except at Novgorod, where the Hanseatic merchants came in



contact with the Chinese merchants who are said to have cheated them at every opportunity, adulterating their wax, dyeing their furs, selling goods too narrow, too coarse, or not according to sample, and, in addition, made claims against the Hanseatics which would make a twentieth century buyer green with envy. In fact, according to the old records, they were guilty of all the wiles described in *The Heathen Chinees* of the nineteenth century.

The league would have nothing to do with reciprocity, and it was vain for foreigners to plead for permission to found similar settlements in the dominions of the Hansa—for one reason or another such requests were declined, evaded or pigeon-holed, and, as a result, foreign merchants might remain in Cologne, for example, for no longer than six weeks at a stretch and then not more than three times a year.

Although its depots were called “factories” the league manufactured nothing, created nothing: it confined itself to buying and selling that which had been produced by others: and its members were the middle-men of the middle ages.

While the rules governing the different so-called “factories” or “kontors” varied in some details, the basic principles were common to all. Bergen is frequently described as being typical.

The attacks of the “Victualling brothers” and the other pirates had so greatly weakened Bergen that it fell under the control of the league and, as elsewhere, the Hanseatic factory became a state within a state.

The settlement consisted of some 3,000 men—merchants, clerks, apprentices, workmen, sailors—and was directed by a council formed by two aldermen, eighteen members and a secretary.

The factory was divided into some 22 “gardens,” each forming a separate unit and consisting of 10 or more “families,” each of which had its own superintendent and usually represented one town.

Every member of the community was sworn to celibacy during his residence; no women were allowed to enter the gates, and no man was ever allowed to marry, for fear the women might learn and divulge the Hanseatic secrets, or might induce the men to remain abroad permanently. Each member was obliged to begin at the bottom and work up and, after ten years’ residence, was compelled to return to his native place and make room for another.

Membership was not granted until the candidate had passed through a series of ordeals which we should call hazing of the

roughest sort. Applicants were whipped to the sound of music till blood was drawn and until their cries were sufficiently loud to drown the pipes, drums and triangles. They were stripped, plunged in the sea, forced to ascend a chimney while a smoky fire was lighted beneath them. These practices were continued through centuries and until 1671, when the weakening power of the league made it possible for the king of Denmark to stop them.

No inmates were allowed to be absent from the factory at night. The gates were closed at nine o'clock and watchmen and dogs were employed to see that the rule was observed.

While the rules were strict and the life was monastical, the merchants treated themselves to all the good things of the earth and were good trenchmen. An Italian scholar, Marino Sanudo, was sent through Europe to gauge the fighting forces with the view of starting another crusade. He reported as follows to Pope John XXII: "These Germans are enormous eaters, which arouses anxiety in respect to supplies when the fleet shall find itself in the hot regions."

There has been handed down a description of one of the "gardens" in the Kantor at Bergen, from which we learn that the principal room was partitioned so as to form an office: but the principal feature was the "wine cupboard," protected by double doors reaching from floor to ceiling. Behind one door stood rows upon rows of bottles. Behind another door was the master's built-in winter bed placed immediately over the stove—we must remember this was in Bergen. The law permitted no women to enter the gates of the building; but, as it was necessary to provide for the comfort of the master, a door was placed in the outer wall immediately over the bed, so that it could be properly made by a female servant. But the door was really larger than appeared necessary for this purpose and it connected with a secret staircase leading to the outside.

*(To be continued)*