The Amalgamation of the English Mercantile Crafts

IN 1363, because of 'the great mischiefs which have happened as well to the King as to the great men and commons of that the merchants called grocers do ingross all manner of merchandise vendible and suddenly do enhance the price of such merchandise within the realme,' putting it to sale 'by covin and ordinance made betwixt them,' it was enacted by parliament that thereafter 'no English merchant shall use no ware nor merchandise . . . but only one which he shall choose betwixt this and the feast of Candlemas next coming.' And as a corollary it further ordained 'that artificers, handicraft people, hold them every one to one mystery which he shall choose betwixt this and the said feast of Candlemas, and two of every craft shall be chosen to survey that none use other craft than the same which he hath chosen.'¹ To students of gild history this parliamentary measure is extremely significant, first of all, because it shows the immense strides taken by industrial organisation since the days of the gild merchant's régime. That once favoured association was evidently superseded in its own sphere of activity by the craft gilds which had risen into ascendancy. The act has an additional significance for our subject, because it clearly shows that a distinct merchant class had differentiated itself from the handicraft, and as we gather one of its number, the grocers, had already come into collision with the trading rules of the times. It appears that in 1345, but eighteen years before the passage of this act, the London pepperers, canvas dealers, and spicers²—a group of trades under the leadership doubtless of the pepperers, a gild of considerable standing

¹ 37 Edward III. c. 5, 6. 'And such as have other wares or merchandises in their hands,' continues the act, 'than those that they have chosen, may set them to sale before the feast of the nativity of Saint John next ensuing; and if any do the contrary of this Ordinance in any point and be thereof attainted in the manner as hereafter followeth, he shall forfeit against the King the merchandise which he hath so used against this Ordinance; and moreover shall make a fine to the King according to the quantity of the trespass.' *Rot. Parl.* ii. 78.

² At that time it was agreed 'by assent that no one shall be of the Fraternity unless he be of good condition and of their mystery That is to say Pepperer of Sopars Lane, canvas dealer of the Ropery, or spicer of Chepe or other person of their mystery in whatever part he may live.' Kingston, *The Worshipful Company of Grocers*, pt. i. p. 9.

in the community³—succeeded in combining their gild fortunes, and used them to so good purpose as to earn for them, as we learn from the above-quoted act, the name of grocers.⁴ In sanctioning this alliance the powers in authority gave public evidence that they were not inclined to place any great obstacle in the way of these merchants, who by amalgamating did their utmost to check the tendency of the times to insist upon a too rigid division of labour. It is of special importance, therefore, to notice at this point that simultaneously with the emergence of a distinct class of English merchants, a most significant fact in English social history, we find that they had initiated a new movement in industrial association. This we know as the amalgamation of the English crafts.

But in spite of the grocers' misdeeds, which were sufficiently obnoxious to provoke parliamentary censure, at a time when they were very influential in public affairs,⁵ nevertheless they succeeded in obtaining within a year a repeal of so much of the act as had aimed at restricting them to the use of but one kind of merchandise.⁶ Merchants however were still to remain a class apart from handicraftsmen, and those who had not already done so hastened to secure a royal charter protecting them in their special monopoly. In this way the London vintners and drapers took their place side by side with the grocers, mercers, fishmongers,⁷ and the rest of the

³ We find the 'Gilda Pipariorum' among the eighteen gilds amerced as 'adulterine' in the later years of Henry II. As early as 1316 the pepperers had become known as 'the good folk of Sopercolane,' from which centre they apparently regulated the sale of eastern produce: extract from Letter-Book E, fol. 58, Kingston, *Worshipful Company of Grocers*, pt. I. p. 1.

⁴ By 1365 the society seems to have reckoned apothecaries among its members: *ibid.* p. 7.

⁵ Miss Alice Law, in an article on 'The English Nouveaux-Riches in the Fourteenth Century' (*Trans. Royal Historical Soc.* n.s. vol. ix. p. 70), calls attention to the significance of the relation which the union of the pepperers and spicers bears to the failure of the Bardi and Peruzzi, the king's Florentine bankers, which had occurred just four months before. She claims that the object of their incorporation was doubtless to qualify as a large banking establishment. It may indeed be that by taking the place of the Italian bankers these London merchants secured royal support in their ambitious mercantile projects.

⁶ 38 Edward III, c. 11. 'To that which was ordained at the last Parliament of living and of apparel, and that no English merchant should use but one merchandise; It is ordained, That all people shall be as free as they were (at all ancient times) before the said Ordinance . . . and that all merchants as well aliens as denizens, may sell and buy all manner of merchandises, and freely carry them out of the realm, paying the customs and subsidies thereof due.'

⁷ The vintners were incorporated in 1364 and the drapers about a year later. From the preamble of the letters patent granted to the fishmongers almost immediately after the passage of this act of 1363, it would seem that these merchants had been instrumental in securing its enactment. After reciting the clause of the statute which required merchants to follow only their own branch of trade, the document proceeds to tell how it had been shown to the king in council (presumably by the fishmongers) that 'all sorts of people as well non-freemen and aliens as freemen of

greater metropolitan trading companies previously founded; and the majority of the twelve great livery companies were now in existence.

Let us consider, then, in what form of organisation these merchants were usually to be found. Whereas London and certain of the larger boroughs were able to support guilds of special merchants, or in some instances organisations which were limited to dealers in but two or possibly three species of trades, as was the case at certain epochs in Bristol,⁸ Beverley,⁹ Oxford,¹⁰ and Tewkesbury,¹¹ the great majority of English towns encouraged but one organisation for their pure traders. Thus from the later fourteenth or the early fifteenth century consolidated mercers' and merchant companies, comprising often the local grocers, haberdashers, ironmongers, apothecaries, goldsmiths, and sometimes even drapers, were growing up at York,¹² Shrewsbury,¹³ Coventry,¹⁴ Chester,¹⁵ Worcester,¹⁶ Hereford,¹⁷ Winchester,¹⁸ Southampton,¹⁹ Lincoln,²⁰ Northampton,²¹ Gloucester,²² Rye,²³ Kendal,²⁴ Bath,²⁵ Sandwich,²⁶ Salisbury,²⁷ Nottingham,²⁸ Durham,²⁹ Derby,³⁰ Lichfield,³¹ Preston,³² Wells,³³ Warwick,³⁴ Morpeth,³⁵ Doncaster,³⁶ Carlisle,³⁷ Alnwick,³⁸ Leeds,³⁹

other mysteries' engrossed the greatest part of the fish brought to the fairs in those parts of the kingdom where fish was sold, thereby raising the price of that commodity so that the fishmongers could no longer profitably deal in it: Herbert, *Tewkes Great Livery Companies*, vol. ii. p. 20. * *Little Red Book*, vol. ii. p. 51.

⁸ *Beverley Town Documents* (Selden Society), p. 74.

⁹ Turner, *Records of Oxford*, p. 331. ¹¹ Bennett, *Hist. of Tewkesbury*, p. 199.

¹² Drake, *Floracum*, vol. i. p. 52.

¹³ *Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Trans.* vol. viii. p. 269.

¹⁴ Poole, *Hist. of Coventry*, p. 33.

¹⁵ Harleian MS. 2054, f. 55.

¹⁶ Green, *Hist. of Worcester*, vol. ii. p. 42.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Ancient Customs of Hereford*, p. 118.

¹⁸ Bailey, *Transcripts from Municipal Archives of Winchester*, p. 68.

¹⁹ Davies, *History of Southampton*, p. 275.

²⁰ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* xiv. app. viii. p. 80.

²¹ *Records of the Borough*, vol. ii. p. 279. ²² Fosbrooke, *Hist. of Gloucester*, p. 404.

²³ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* xiii. app. iv. p. 55.

²⁴ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* x. app. iv. p. 300.

²⁵ King and Watts, *Municipal Records*, p. 45.

²⁶ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* v. app. p. 569.

²⁷ Hoare, *Hist. of Modern Wills*, vol. vi. p. 475. ²⁸ *Records*, vol. iv. p. 311.

²⁹ Fordyce, *Hist. of Durham*, vol. i. p. 345.

³⁰ *Derbyshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Journ.* vol. xv. p. 115.

³¹ *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc. n.s.* vol. vii. p. 109.

³² Abram, *Memorials of the Preston Guilds*, p. 41.

³³ *Municip. Corp. Comm. Rep.* 1835, p. 1858.

³⁴ Kemp, *The Black Book of Warwick*, p. 159. The records of certain of these boroughs, notably Coventry, Winchester, Southampton, and Lincoln, give us no specific information concerning their mercers' societies, so that we cannot tell how far they represented amalgamations of different species of trading crafts. We have no reason however to suppose that the mercers' companies recorded in these four communities differed materially from those established in the other boroughs.

³⁵ Mackenzie, *Northumberland*, vol. ii. p. 192.

³⁶ *Records of the Borough*, vol. iv. p. 204. ³⁷ *Municipal Records of Carlisle*, p. 89.

³⁸ Tate, *History of Alnwick*, vol. ii. p. 321. ³⁹ Wardell, *Hist. of Leeds*, p. 24.

Gateshead,⁴⁰ Richmond,⁴¹ Pontefract,⁴² Reading,⁴³ Ripon,⁴⁴ Buckingham,⁴⁵ and Evesham.⁴⁶ In certain of the smaller towns, towards the latter part of the sixteenth and the succeeding century, all the crafts were being drawn into definite gild groups, the number of which was determined by the authorities. In these instances the company headed by the general traders included not only merchants but occasionally different handicrafts as well. The mercantile fraternities favoured at Dorchester,⁴⁷ Ipswich,⁴⁸ St. Albans,⁴⁹ Kingston-upon-Thames,⁵⁰ Gravesend,⁵¹ Axbridge,⁵² Andover,⁵³ Abingdon,⁵⁴ Ludlow,⁵⁵ Wallingford,⁵⁶ and Faversham⁵⁷ are interesting examples of this type. We are on the whole justified, therefore, in assuming that by the middle of the sixteenth, or the beginning of the seventeenth century, an amalgamated company of mercers and ordinary merchants, more or less comprehensive in character, became a practically universal institution in the English boroughs.

In connexion with the English merchant companies we have to consider those which the haberdashers formed apart from the general traders. It is true that very frequently the haberdashers merged their gild interests in the general mercantile fraternities, but they did not always thus lose their separate identity. In some instances they formed on their own account an association in conjunction with other naturally connected trades. Even the

⁴⁰ *Municip. Corp. Comm. Rep.* 1835, vol. iii. p. 1525.

⁴¹ *History of Richmond*, printed by T. Bowman, p. 121.

⁴² *Collections towards a Hist. of Pontefract*, vol. i. *The Books of Entries*, p. 375.

⁴³ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* xi. app. vii. p. 224.

⁴⁴ *Harrison, Ripon Millenary Record*, p. 48.

⁴⁵ *Willis, History of Buckingham*, p. 166. ⁴⁶ *May, History of Evesham*, p. 241.

⁴⁷ *Hutchins, History of County of Dorset*, edited by Shipp and Hodson, vol. ii. p. 338.

⁴⁸ *Wodderspoon, Memorials of Ipswich*, p. 174. ⁴⁹ *St. Albans Charters*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ *Genealogical Magazine*, vol. iii. p. 242.

⁵¹ *Cruden, History of Gravesend*, p. 194.

⁵² *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* iii. app. p. 303.

⁵³ *Willis Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Mag.* vol. xxi. p. 306. Although the mercers seem most frequently to have given their name to these large federations, in many localities the haberdashers, grocers, or even drapers, enjoyed that distinction. Andover, as we here see, encouraged her trades and handicrafts to incorporate themselves as the haberdashers.

⁵⁴ *Selections from the Municipal Chronicles*, p. 159. The members of this great trading society were united under the patronage of the grocers. Moreover, an account of various specimens of tokens, which were circulated by tradesmen of many of the smaller Yorkshire towns at the Restoration, proves that the grocers of Cranswick, Hatfield, Heptonstall, Kilham, Sheffield, Skipton, and Wakefield, were influential enough to give their name to the all-inclusive commercial company established within the boundaries of those towns. *Smith, Old Yorkshire*, vol. v. pp. 122-134.

⁵⁵ *Journ. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.* vol. xxiv. p. 237. By 1710 Ludlow had incorporated a curious combination of federated trades as the Stitchman's Company.

⁵⁶ *Hedges, Hist. of Wallingford*, vol. ii. p. 234. This is an instance where the drapers held together a large combination of trades and handicrafts.

⁵⁷ *Kent Archaeol. Soc. Trans.* vol. ix. p. lxviii.

London haberdashers, who for a long time were content to keep their own gild, finally followed the example of amalgamation set them by the grocers, and in the very beginning of the sixteenth century absorbed the hatters' and the cappers' gilda.⁶⁰ On the other hand, in the smaller boroughs the haberdashers appear to have joined with the hatters, cappers, and occasionally with the feltmakers, in forming gilds in which the last-named trades retained their identity, as appears from accounts from such places as Bristol,⁶¹ Exeter,⁶² Kendal,⁶³ and Ripon,⁶⁴ although doubtless similar gilds existed also in many other towns. Chester seems to have varied the customary arrangement by incorporating together the haberdashers and the skinnners.⁶⁵ In the communities which supported only a limited number of gilds the haberdashers instead of the mercers gave occasionally their name to the complex trading company. The haberdashers' company of Andover, for example, one of the three large gilds in that town, included the milliners, grocers, innholders, vintners, bakers, brewers, smiths, cappers, hatmakers, barbers, painters and glaziers.⁶⁶

The drapers, likewise, instead of joining the mercers' association, combined sometimes in a close union with kindred occupations. Of this nature were the gilds of drapers and tailors established at York,⁶⁷ Oxford,⁶⁸ Northampton,⁶⁹ Bye,⁷⁰ Durham,⁷¹ Doncaster,⁷² Pontefract,⁷³ Warwick,⁷⁴ or that at Tewkesbury.⁷⁵

⁶⁰ Herbert, *Twelve Great Livery Companies*, vol. ii. p. 537.

⁶¹ Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 28.

⁶² *Western Antiquary*, vol. iv. p. 188.

⁶³ *Books of Record*, p. 67.

⁶⁴ *Ripon Millenary Record*, p. 65. By 1662 the haberdashers and feltmakers had apparently admitted the maddlers and joiners to membership in their gild. In that year we find the town issuing a decree to the gild to devise new orders and regulations for the government of its members.

⁶⁵ *Mansc. Corp. Comm. Rep.* 1835, p. 2633. Traces of a consolidated gild of haberdashers and brewers are found in the records of Gloucester's gild history: Walford, *Gilds*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ *Wills Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Trans.* vol. xxi. p. 206. The haberdashers of small wares were sometimes called milliners (millianers) from their dealing in commodities imported chiefly from Milan: Herbert, *op. cit.* vol. ii. p. 533. The Dorchester haberdashers appear to have divided themselves into two camps the haberdashers of small wares securing membership in the mercers' company, while the haberdashers of hats joined forces with the clothiers' company. Hutchins, *History of Dorset*, vol. ii. p. 288. A tankard bearing the arms of the Haberdashers' Company, under date of 1620, is still preserved at Guildford: Williamson, *Guildford in the Olden Times*, p. 33. It is quite probable that this company then represented an association composed of many different trades and handicrafts.

⁶⁷ Drake, *Eboracum*, vol. i. p. 321.

⁶⁸ Turner, *Records*, p. 333.

⁶⁹ *Records*, vol. ii. p. 225.

⁷⁰ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* xiii. app. iv. p. 59.

⁷¹ Fordyce, *Hist. of Durham*, vol. i. p. 345. ⁷² *Records*, vol. iv. p. 301.

⁷³ *The Books of Entries*, p. 19.

⁷⁴ *The Black Book*, p. 117.

⁷⁵ Bennett, *History of Tewkesbury*, p. 199.

which included the dyers as well.⁷⁴ Occasionally, as at Chester⁷⁵ and Hereford,⁷⁶ the drapers and hosiers found it to their advantage to form a gild alliance. We notice, too, that the drapers sometimes gave their name to one of the complex trading associations which later developed in the smaller communities, as in the case of one of the four companies found at Ipswich⁷⁷ and Kingston-upon-Thames,⁷⁸ or of one of the three at Devizes,⁷⁹ Axbridge,⁸⁰ and Andover.⁸¹ The membership of the drapers' company, which towards the close of the seventeenth century appears to have been the one trading gild permitted at Wallingford, in Berkshire,⁸² was more complex.

The gilds formed by the mercantile crafts appear, then, for the most part under three main divisions, according as these crafts grouped themselves under the patronage of the mercers and merchants, the haberdashers, or the drapers. Whereas the London merchants, the pepperers, canvas dealers, and spicers appear to have originated the idea of combining their corporate forces, the merchants of the provincial cities and corporate towns were not slow in following their example. As we have seen, in many cases they carried the plan of association much further, establishing trading societies composed practically of all the ordinary dealers of their particular town. In the smaller communities the movement was developed still further, the traders enlarging the membership of their gilds until they included many different handicrafts. Finally, in at least two communities—namely, Faversham and Wallingford—the mercantile fraternity became so comprehensive as to include within its ranks not only all the merchants, but all the local handicrafts as well.

We have next to inquire into the conditions in the English economic scheme which made the movement towards amalgamation possible, in order that we may determine the causes which underlay its growth. We have to look further afield than the act of 1868 to discover why the state considered it expedient to bind the handicrafts to their chosen craft. But we need not go outside London to perceive that the authorities were obliged to do something to allay the general discontent which had arisen because

⁷⁴ At Ripon in 1662 the drapers headed a company which included the dyers, apothecaries, and barber surgeons: *Millenary Record*, p. 66.

⁷⁵ *Municip. Corp. Comm. Rep.*, 1835, p. 2652.

⁷⁶ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* xlii. app. iv. p. 300.

⁷⁷ Wodderspoon, *Memorials of Ipswich*, p. 174.

⁷⁸ *Genealog. Mag.* vol. iii. p. 342.

⁷⁹ *Wilt. Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Trans.* n.s. vol. iv. p. 162.

⁸⁰ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep.* iii. app. p. 303.

⁸¹ *Wilt. Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Trans.* vol. xxi. p. 306.

⁸² Hedges, *Hist. of Wallingford*, vol. ii. p. 234.

craftsmen were everywhere disregarding their neighbours' peculiar rights. The London handicrafts were seething with discontent. Time and again the town council tried to keep the peace among the disaffected craftsmen by defining in gild ordinance the duties peculiar to each craft.³² This condition of affairs sufficiently explains why parliament in the act of 1363 included provisions which aimed at checking the aggressions of the crafts on one another's special field. Yet while state and municipality alike insisted that townsmen should keep within their separate spheres of industry, consolidated companies were springing up both among trades and handicrafts. Where, then, shall we seek for the explanation of this tendency towards amalgamation? Was the repealing act too late? Had the grocers already too well pointed out to their fellow-merchants the larger opportunities for commercial expansion which they might all enjoy by amalgamating with each other? To be sure the action of the grocers, who were the first of the gilds to profit by permission to amalgamate, had provoked the act of 1363, in which parliament, by requiring English merchants to 'use no ware or merchandise' except the particular one which they should publicly select, directly forbade the grocers to do what had been made possible for them when, only eighteen years before, they had been allowed to establish their organisation. The important point however is that the attention of the state was at this time directed against the monopolising practices of the grocers, and that the act of 1363 was the first of a series of legislative measures aimed against them.

Albeit the superior commercial advantages enjoyed by the London companies made separate gilds of general traders possible, and doubtless profitable, the purely merchant traders in the other English centres were compelled for the most part to combine their gild interests. Thus the merchants' and mercers' companies became one of the most, if not the most, important of all the gilds in the localities which fostered their growth. Shrewsbury supplies the first account we have of the internal economy of this species of gild. The first articles of incorporation, issued in 1480, are indubitably based on a much earlier foundation,³³ and

³² For example, it seems to have been especially difficult to limit the farriers and smiths to their own work, the farriers vehemently denouncing 'those who kept forges in the city and intermeddled with the works of farriery by reason whereof many horses had been lost to the great damage of the people.' Riley, *Memorials of London*, p. 292. The authorities had also to admonish the shoemakers and cobblers not to work at each other's trade: 'If any one has to do with old shoes he shall not meddle with new shoes among the old in deceit of the people and to the scandal of the trade,' say the articles of the London cordwainers drawn up in 1375: *ibid.* p. 292.

³³ The earliest book of the company apparently begins in 1424, in the third year of King Henry VI. *Trans. Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.* vol. viii. p. 260.

show that the organisation which contained the mercers, goldsmiths, and ironmongers²³ had developed solely for the purpose of regulating in the interest of its members the conditions for the purchase and sale of the articles handled by them. We learn from their by-laws²⁴ that if a person absented himself from the celebration of the Corpus Christi festival, because of his attendance at the Coventry fair or elsewhere, in order 'to buy or sell,' he was to pay a fine. Searchers were appointed to take care that 'anything appertaining to the said crafts' should 'be bought and solde' in the town, and that franchises should 'be able, sufficient, and lawful.' These supervisors were also empowered to 'make

²³ At this time the gild appears as a developed corporation; its members were undoubtedly guilty of practising the abuses characteristic of gildsmen of the period. Indeed, from the preamble of the charter conferred upon the company by Edward IV one might infer that the gildsmen had petitioned for incorporation solely to reform one of the more serious of the abuses, namely, that of charging apprentices excessive fines for entry into the gild: *Trans. Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.* vol. viii. p. 270.

²⁴ It is surprising to find this Shrewsbury mercers' company already in 1424-5 receiving new members who were practising various other occupations. Besides a number of goldsmiths, that year's calendar registers a tawerner, a capmaker, a farrier, several cardmakers, a 'fletcher,' a smith, several shearmen, a draper, and a furbisher. What do such entries signify? Why are townsmen who are neither mercers, nor goldsmiths, nor ironmongers permitted to join the company to exercise presumably their own branch of trade? It is true that by 1515 the company speaks of its membership as composed of pewterers, founders, cardmakers, and cappers as well as the three other trades, but this by no means accounts for the presence of the many other tradesmen just enumerated. Furthermore, we come upon some curious entries which prove that new members were permitted upon the payment of a double fine to exercise more than one trade at a time. For example, the year 1477-8 contains the following entries: 'Geoffrey Powys with Cappers only, making of cappe, bying of cappe, and sellying of cappe, fine xxs. If he use any other trade then xxs. more.' In the twentieth year of the reign of Henry VIII. 'Robert Lee presents to Willm Edwards mercer and capper made freeman for xxs.' It is an ordinary occurrence to find an item stating that a capper becomes a member 'with cappers only,' or that a man is made a freeman with 'pewterers crafts only,' or with 'goldsmiths only.' Obviously the company was careful to restrict new members to the use of their immediate branch of industry unless they would pay an additional fee for further privileges. See *Trans. Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.* vol. viii. pp. 300-11 for the list of members chronicled in the records of this gild. As late as 1665 we find a townsman of Buckingham receiving the freedom of the local mercers' company, which at that time included ironmongers among various other trades, upon the understanding that he was 'to follow the trade of an ironmonger.' Six years later a brother of this man was also admitted to membership in the society 'to follow only ye trade of an ironmonger.' Noble, *History of the London Ironmongers' Company*, p. 6. The fifteenth-century account of the Shrewsbury mercers' company gains an additional interest from the fact that a full half-century before, if not indeed much earlier, the old gild merchant had apparently become nothing more than an organisation for enrolling the names of those who desired to become burgesses of Shrewsbury. It looks very much as if the mercers' company was established to take the place of the gild merchant among the general traders of the borough. See my *English Craft Gilds and the Government* for an account of the relation between the gild merchant and the craft gilds in Leicester, pp. 21-6. Mr. Drinkwater has published the fourteenth-century rolls of the Shrewsbury gild merchant in the *Trans. Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.* 3rd ser. vols. iii. and iv.

serche upon the Occuypyers of the said Crafte within the Town . . . that none of theym occupie any false Balaunce Weight or measures, wherebie the Kynges People in any wise myght be hurt or dysseyved,' on pain of forfeiting the balances and paying a fine. Nor should any person belonging to the gild, on pain of forfeit, sell or 'make to be solde any maner of merchaundyce or ware belongyng to said Crafte or eny of theym purposely standing in the stretys, hyghe Way or pawment of the said town for to have better sale then eny of Combrethyrn or make noe boothes uppe Boordes Racks or eny other suche instrument without theyre Bulkes but onelie in tyme of Fayre.' So well, too, did the Shrewsbury organisation demonstrate its worth as a civil institution that from time to time it received recruits from other trades, until by the early sixteenth century it numbered among its members pewterers, founders, cardmakers, and cappers.⁸⁷

We are fortunate in possessing at this distance of time details of this associated mercantile company. Very often we have to depend upon the most fragmentary evidence to convince us that similar societies were performing similar functions elsewhere. At Southampton, for instance, in 1486 the mercers' craft levied fines upon an alien mercer 'for that he went with his fardell up and down the town hawking his wares,' contrary to the rules of the mercers' gild,⁸⁸ and about the same period the Nottingham mercers supervised the sale of their wares by hawkers.⁸⁹ The Northampton records however give us the clearest idea of the purpose which a mercers' company served in a community in the later Elizabethan period. The society included at that time the mercers, haberdashers, linendrapers, grocers, apothecaries, upholsterers, and salters, besides 'tryers of honye and waxe'—in all, nine different branches of trade. The town experienced so much trouble in controlling the freemen of those occupations that it was forced at last to assert its authority by requiring them to meet lawfully thereafter at St. Katharine's Hall 'without any confederacie, conspiracio, mutinee, or tumulte.' It also ordered that no 'foreigne chapman or unfranchised person' should sell within the town 'anie drinckinge glasses or woollen cardes,' and that no persons whatsoever not being free of the said town should sell to any foreigner or unfranchised person any kind of merchandise or wares pertaining to those trades within the town.⁹⁰ It would be extremely interesting to know certainly the occasion of this stringent order, and to learn why these townsmen had been holding tumultuous meetings. It looks very much as if their gild rules had been for some reason in abeyance, and that the

⁸⁷ *Trans. Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, vol. viii pp. 271-80.

⁸⁸ Davies, *Hist. of Southampton*, p. 276.

⁸⁹ *Records of the Borough*, vol. iii. p. 104. ⁹⁰ *Borough Records*, vol. ii. pp. 276-7.

members had held an indignation meeting with the view of compelling the town to uphold the authority of the merchants' gild.²¹ From this time onward there is plenty of evidence bearing on the specific object of these associated mercantile fraternities.

Valuable testimony to the importance attached to amalgamations of traders both by municipal and gild authorities in the seventeenth century is furnished by the publication of the ordinances of the Lichfield mercers' company. In the early part of that century the city had received letters patent granting it, among various things, permission to make laws forbidding non-freemen to retail within its precincts any wares or merchandise except victuals, and to keep any shop or use any trade or manual art without being specially licensed for the purpose by the bailiffs. Accordingly, after the bailiffs and their brethren had duly considered how 'mightilie decayed' the estate of the 'Mercers, Grocers, Lynnen Drapers, Woollen Drapers, Silkemen, Hosiers, Salters, Apothecaries, and Haberdashers of small wares' appeared to be, not only for want of good orders for the better governing of the trades, but also 'for that many strangers and young men which haue not served their apprentishipp within the said Cittie and manie other which haue shifted abroad in the Countrie and haue not orderlie served any apprentishipp in any one place haue hither repaired and sett vpp all or some of the aforesaid trades,' they devised certain ordinances which should guide the tradesmen for the future in the sale of their commodities. The master and wardens of the company were granted authority to 'enter from tyme to tyme into any house or howses, shop or shoppes of any of the offenders,' and 'to take and

²¹ At Warwick, the borough records of 1575 show the municipality issuing a 'declaracyon of the constitucyons Ordynaunces and decrees of the misteryes and crafts of mercers haberdashers Grocers and Fishmongers . . . from henceforth justly and truly to be observid fulfilled and kept of them and eury of them and their Successors.' Among these 'Ordynaunces' we find one stipulating that no 'forrener of the said Artes or crafts' should in 'any wise uppon the market dayes holden in the said borough tyll over his or their benches or make any back shewe in any parte of the markett place (except it be in the booths halle). And if they or any of them doo contrary to this ordynaunce to forfeit for evry tyme to the master and wardens the some Ten Shillings.' The 'maister' and wardens might also lawfully 'enter the houses shoppes closes or fields within this borough or liberties of any such offender or offenders and there to take some parte of his goods and catalles in the name of a distres and the same to detayne untill such tyme as he or they haue paid the money or some so forfeitid or lost by breaking any the said orders or agreements.' *Black Book*, pp. 138-43. Although we cannot positively say that the Windsor mercers, drapers, haberdashers, and grocers were ever actually associated in a gild, we know that upon

'Information' furnished in 1576 by townsmen using those occupations 'of the great decay and poverty already growen by reason that forraigne Retaylers' were allowed to come into the borough upon market days, the authorities decided to ordain 'for a law' that from henceforth no 'Draper Mercer Haberdasher Hatseller Grocer petty chapman or other Retailer and Victualler of all sorte (the like whereof are not made or traded in this Towne only excepted) shall shew or sell upon the Market (except faire dayes) any of the before mencioned wares.' Tighe and Davis, *Annals of Windsor*, vol. i. p. 642.

carrie away goodes or chattells of everie such offender and the same to detayne and keepe to the vse of the said company vntill the forfeiture and forfeitures for which they or any of them shalbe so taken shalbe trewlie paid.' They were also given power to supervise 'all weights and measures as are used by any of the said Company and the same to trie by the King's standard.' The seventeenth-century by-laws of the Lichfield mercers follow, seemingly, pretty much the same direction as the fifteenth-century set given to the Shrewsbury corporation.

Another example may serve to bridge the gap between the accounts of the Shrewsbury company and those of the Lichfield company, and may help to explain why in the later period it was thought necessary to emphasise the particular rights of the town's ordinary traders. This is the Preston mercers' company, which included in 1628 the drapers, grocers, salters, ironmongers, and haberdashers of the borough. In that year the members based their petition to the town council for incorporation upon the failure of alien traders to obey not only a statute²² of the previous century which had forbidden countrymen to 'sett on saile or sell by retaile any manner of woollen cloth, linen cloth, mercery wares, haberdasherye wares, grocery wares or saltery wares except it bee in open

²² *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.* n.s. vol. vii. pp. 110-119. One of the orders promulgated in 1613 by the Salisbury traders' association, comprising the merchants, grocers, apothecaries, goldsmiths, drapers, upholsterers, and embroiderers, authorised the wardens, with the assistance of one or two of the 'antient and most discreet of every trade' of the company, to 'view, see, and search the wares, Merchandise, weights and measures of every brother and sister of the company' and to fine those whom they should find using unlawful wares, weights or measures: Hoare, *Hist. of Modern Wiltshire*, vol. vi. p. 340.

²³ 1 & 2 Philip and Mary, c. 7; see Abram, *Memorials of Preston Guilds*, p. 41. Archdeacon Cunningham seems to have missed the point in connexion with these mercers' organisations. He presents the laws of the Lichfield company, which in the seventeenth century appears to him to be a new institution, as typical of the ordinances which were made for industrial regulation in the seventeenth century contrasted with the ordinances of three centuries earlier. The great contrast which Dr. Cunningham finds in the tone of the two centuries' rules is that in the later period they have to do not with the making of goods, but with the condition of goods as sold. He fails to notice that the Lichfield company contained merchants only, whose sole concern was naturally the condition of goods as sold. Nor, as we have shown, did their laws differ in any respect from those issued by a similar society which existed at least two centuries earlier at Shrewsbury. That guilds which concerned themselves with the supervision of the quality of materials and the process of manufacture still existed Dr. Cunningham himself proves in telling how, in the later sixteenth and the following century, the Lichfield tailors, the saddlers, the smiths, and the dyers were all doing business organised separately as of old. See *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.* n.s. vol. vii. pp. 109-11 for these ordinances of the Lichfield mercers. Professor Ashley, on the other hand, quotes the Preston mercers' society to show that the one purpose of the gild system, so far as it survived from the seventeenth century on, was, to use his own words, 'the protection of the interests of the craftsmen of the several localities by ensuring to them a monopoly of the industry of their own town:' *Economic History*, vol. ii. p. 164. Yet the Preston consolidation of 1628 was also one of mere traders.

Faires,' but also the Elizabethan statute of apprentices, which had required that craftsmen should serve an apprenticeship of seven years preliminary to mastership in any trade. Notwithstanding these enactments the complaint avers, 'divers handicraftsmen and servants at husbandry leaving their own occupations seeking not only to live easily but rather idly, had taken upon them within this town of Preston to set up and live by trade of buying and selling of divers wares and merchandise contrary to the law.' There was nothing new in complaints that strangers were coming into corporate towns to sell their wares, but the practice must have grown apace to warrant the central government in interfering to strengthen the authority of the municipalities over their own commercial concerns.

We have quoted at considerable length from the records of these three mercantile societies in order to show that they existed in the seventeenth century with precisely the same duties and functions as in the fifteenth.²⁴ The only appreciable difference seems to be that the membership even of the Shrewsbury company had increased considerably by the early sixteenth century, which, no doubt, may be taken as testimony to the fact that townsmen who may earlier have been able to maintain gilds of their own had finally been obliged to give them up and seek membership in the general trading company.

It may be questioned how far the different trades represented in the larger mercantile associations had, previously to their incor-

²⁴ At Ripon in 1662 the mayor, aldermen, and assistants in council assembled delegated to two of the aldermen the duty of summoning 'their Company of Grocers and Mercers,' in order that they might 'consider together how to reduce themselves' and 'to propose what new Rules or Orders' might 'be necessary for the better Regulation' of the company: *Millenary Record*, p. 66. In 1674 the Darby executive body still 'thought fit' to 'constitute, make, and create the Mercers, Apothecaries, Grocers, Ironmongers, Upholsters, and Milliners of this Burrough into a Company . . . finding by experience that the erecting of Companies and Societies for the Inspection and Regulating of trade and Commerce' was the best way to avoid 'fraudes and deceits in the way of trade,' which tend 'much to the impoverishing and damage of just and honest dealers.' And in order that thereafter there might be 'noe fraud or deceit used in any of the said trades to the dishonour of this Burrough' it was decreed that the Company's wardens, 'as often as they shall see occasion,' should 'enter into the shoppes and Warehouses of any person or persons usinge any of the said trades . . . to attest, assay, and try theire weights and Measures and theire goods, Wares, and Merchandizes whether the same be good merchantable and vendible.' *Derbyshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Journ.* vol. xv. pp. 118-23. As late as 1700 the mayor and burgesses of Pontefract unanimously agreed that the 'Merchants, Grocers, Ironmongers, Chirurgeons, Apothecaries, Tallow Chandlers, habbadaubers of hats and small Wares, and Linen Drapers Inhabiting and residing within the Burrough' might be made one company. Their wardens too were 'to search and try all weights and measures in the shoppes, warehouses, and sellers of every or any of the said Company.' Any one of the company who should 'refuse or deny to be searched or doe interrupt the searayers in the discharge of their duty' was to forfeit for 'every default the sume of five pounds' (*The Booke of Entries*, pp. 375-8).

poration in the general society, maintained separate gilds. We know that the York company of mercers, which was organised as early as 1870,⁸⁶ included by the late sixteenth century the merchants, grocers, and apothecaries, and although these three trades had then joined in forming one gild, they were said to 'bear each a distinct coat of arms as several trades.'⁸⁷ The presumption in such a case is that each of these trades had originally been separately organised. We have every reason to believe, too, that the consolidated company of mercers, drapers, and grocers registered in 1612 at Nottingham had not always included all three trades, since we know that in 1484 the drapers were maintaining a separate organisation and demanding all the rights customary to gilds of the period.⁸⁷ Mr. Hodgson says also that the whole tenor of the old books of the Morpeth merchants' and 'taylors' company shows that 'privately' they were two distinct crafts, although united for civic purposes. Such evidence argues strongly for earlier separate incorporation. From all accounts the collective gilds of merchants established in the less important towns were built up by joining together one after another the various gilds of established standing. For example, at St. Albans in 1587 we find the drapers and mercers united in a single company, and taking every precaution to preserve to the fullest degree the commercial rights which had long before been conferred upon its members.⁸⁸ Yet not quite a century later both the drapers and the mercers, with a host of minor crafts, had become members of an extremely heterogeneous society, representing then just half the trades and handicrafts of the town. Undoubtedly the men engaged in all the trades which later swelled the ranks of the mercantile fellowships had previously either maintained individual unions or had been partners of long standing in some limited group of closely allied crafts.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that these gilds of merchants did not all originate in exactly the same way. Naturally the traders of the considerable boroughs and large towns were more numerous and had ampler opportunities to prosper commercially than those who dwelt in the small boroughs. The city merchants could therefore often either maintain single gilds, or gilds which were limited to but two, or possibly three, different groups of closely connected trades, when the country merchants found it difficult to support a single organisation for all. Then, too, the merchant companies often lost a section of their members who withdrew when they wanted to set up a gild of their own. We know that in Beverley in 1446 there was a company composed of the merchants,

⁸⁶ *Antiquary*, vol. xxii. p. 266.

⁸⁷ *Drake, Eboracum*, vol. i. p. 331.

⁸⁸ *Records of the Borough*, vol. iii. p. 6; cf. vol. iv. p. 311.

⁸⁹ *Gibbs, Corporation Records*, p. 16; *St. Albans Charters*, p. 10.

mercers, and drapers, who were using stringent measures to uphold their monopoly, and compelled any person who 'newly sets up shop as a master,' after having served a proper apprenticeship, to make a yearly payment toward the common expenses of the gild. Half a century later however, in 1492, we find this company about to dissolve. The mercers and merchants established themselves in one company, while the drapers, 'newly founded,' registered their statutes 'with the consent of' the twelve governors of the borough.⁹⁹ To all appearances the drapers of Beverley had prospered sufficiently to warrant them in setting up their own gild.

Often, again, the records of some borough show that a merchant gild existed in one form at one time which at another had completely changed its *personnel*. Materials furnished by the gild history of Bristol offer valuable evidence that the pure traders of that city were very differently organised at different periods; but although the relationship which existed between these gilds, established at different times, was doubtless very intimate it is impossible to determine how close it really was. We know however that in 1370 about one hundred and forty of the most worthy men of the city, besides *plusours autres merchauntz et drapers*, met together and formed an organisation.¹⁰⁰ They drew up a set of ordinances regulating, among other things, the sale of cloth, and they agreed upon the policy which should thereafter govern the townspeople in the purchase of various articles coming into the town. We cannot say how long the drapers remained loyal to this gild of merchants. It is now proved that the condition of the Bristol gilds in the seventeenth century was quite different from that in 1370, for in 1647¹⁰¹ there was an associated gild of mercers and linendrapers on the one hand, and a separate gild of woollen-drapers on the other, both existing in the city at the same time. Between 1370 and 1647, the dates of the record of these two gilds respectively, Bristol documents testify to the existence of another fellowship of merchants which, although it did not by 1467 include all the local merchants, yet had authority to compel them when summoned to attend at their hall, and fixed the price to be charged for various kinds of wares. In addition to this fraternity, a fellowship of merchants, separate and distinct from all the craft companies, was organised in 1500, and half a century later the Merchant Adventurers of Bristol secured incorporation upon their 'lamentable representation' to Edward VI¹⁰² that 'divers Artificers and men of manuell arte

⁹⁹ *Beverley Town Documents*, pp. 74, 76, 93; cf. *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep. Beverley*, 1800, pp. 8, 104.

¹⁰⁰ *Little Red Book*, vol. ii. p. 51.

¹⁰¹ *Trans. Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæol. Soc.* vol. xxvi. pt. ii. p. 238 et seq.

¹⁰² Latimer, *History of the Merchant Venturers of Bristol*, p. 42.

inhabitinge the same Citty haveinge alsoe occupacions to gett theire liveinge (whoe were never apprentice or brought upp to or in the recourse or trade of the arte of the marchants aforesaide, nor haveinge anie good knowledge in the same arte) Doe commonly exercise, use and occupie the saide recourse or trade of marchandize to and from the partes beyond the seas in strange shippes or vessels.' ¹⁰³ In order to prevent this, it was ordered that thereafter no artificer or any other person should traffic in merchandise, either in domestic or foreign ports, unless he were admitted into the society.

What was the connexion between these four companies, all embracing local merchants and mercers? Was the seventeenth-century company a new organisation, ¹⁰⁴ or was it a continuation of the fourteenth-century gild of small merchants whose members, excluded from the Merchant Adventurers' gild, ¹⁰⁵ were forced by alliance with the linendrapers to form a company of their own? Some such inference may be drawn, inasmuch as the mercers and linendrapers of the seventeenth-century company are emphatically styled 'shop-keepers,' while the Merchant Adventurers in forming their fellowship pointed to their interest in commerce 'beyond the seas.' Of course some of the members of this local mercers' company may also have belonged to the Merchant Adventurers' company. We know that the Chester mercers were admitted to membership in the Merchant Adventurers' gild ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ We note that one of the rules enacted by the fellowship of merchants which was established in 1500 was 'for the Wele not oonly of the said marchannts adventurers but also of all other burgeses of the said Toun.' In all probability this company became the chartered Merchant Adventurers of a half-century later. See Latimer, *History of the Merchant Venturers of Bristol*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Trans. Bristol and Gloucester Archæol. Soc.* vol. xxvi. pt. ii. p. 288. Mr. Latimer, who published the account of this company of mercers and linendrapers, says that it was not really established by the civic body until 1647. At that time the company was devoting its energies towards carrying out three main objects which its members had greatly at heart. These were the suppression of interloping tradesmen who set up drapery shops in the city; the prosecution of Londoners who brought down goods to the great Bristol fairs and offered their wares to the public a few days before or after the eight statutory days which they could not be debarred from enjoying; and the rigorous extirpation of hucksters and petty chapman: *ibid.* pp. 288-92.

¹⁰⁵ It is curious to read how in 1571 the Bristol Adventurers sought to justify their right to incorporation on the lines specified in their charter. They naively complained that 'a merchant cannot be a retailer for want of skill and acquaintance of customers, which requires an apprenticeship to bring him to it, neither can he have a fit place to dwell in, for all the houses that stand in the place of retail are already in the hands of retailers.' Latimer, *Hist. of the Merchant Venturers*, p. 51. Later still, in 1618, the Merchant Adventurers made a pretence of compromising with the retailers or artificers, whom they apparently classed together, by inserting in their by-laws the provision that 'Noe Retailer or artificer whilst they remains Retailers or Artificers shalbes receyved or admitted into the Freedome of this Societie for anie fine whatsoever without approbacion and allowance of a special Courte bouden for that purpose.' *ibid.* p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ No person who exercised a manual occupation or who sold by retail could at

established there in Elizabeth's time, while the 'men of the mystery of mercers' of York, even after they had been incorporated as Merchant Adventurers, were spoken of as the merchants, mercers, grocers, and apothecaries of the city.¹⁰⁷ The connexion between the mercers and Merchant Adventurers of London was likewise very intimate.¹⁰⁸

first gain admittance to the Chester company of Merchant Adventurers, much to the chagrin of the tradesmen thus debarred. The mercers in particular seem seriously to have objected to this restriction, for in 1559, within six years of the grant of Queen Mary's charter to the Chester Adventurers, a marginal note attached to a transcript of Elizabeth's charter conferred upon them in that year declares that the 'merciers' were 'to be free:' Harleian MS. 2054, f. 46. This concession may temporarily have pacified the mercers of Chester, although in 1604 we find the men of that occupation associated in a gild with the ironmongers: *ibid.* f. 56. But the retailers of other trades, more especially those interested in exporting calf skins, continued to resent their exclusion from trafficking in foreign lands. They finally appealed to the privy council for redress, and went so far as to ask that the Merchant Adventurers' charter might be annulled. The controversy was settled in 1599, when both sides seemingly gained some advantage from the decision of the arbitrators. This accorded to the Adventurers or 'Meurs' merchants, as they were called, permission to 'make choise of any other trade (beinge not a manuell crafte) as draper, vintner, mercer, ironmonger, and such like,' and to all 'retaylors' liberty to use 'the trade of marchandise together with there retayllinge:' Morris, *Chester*, pp. 464-67.

¹⁰⁷ Drake, *Ribblesdale*, vol. i. p. 321. Miss Sellers claims that the York company of Merchant Adventurers was a specialised branch of the local mercers' company. Its membership, she says, was not limited to one particular body of traders, but embraced the prominent members of all the chief trades as distinguished from the handicrafts of York. Miss Sellers also maintains that so many of the local mercers availed themselves of the extension of privilege afforded them by the passing of the act of 13 Henry VII c. 6 (which granted to every Englishman on the payment of a fine of ten marks sterling liberty to trade to any place within the jurisdiction of the Merchant Adventurers of England), that within a few years a court of Merchant Adventurers was grafted on to the mercers' company; and as all the more important members of the older organisation were connected with foreign trade, the name of what was originally only a section of the society was gradually applied to the whole fellowship. See *The Merchant Adventurers of York* (Handbook for the British Association Meeting held at York, 1906), edited by Mr. George Auder, pp. 212-15. This account of the relations which existed between the York mercers and Merchant Adventurers leads us to suppose that after the latter part of the sixteenth century York did not support a gild of mercers distinct from the Adventurers. If this were so, the situation in York in this respect differed from that which prevailed in Bristol and Chester. We have seen above that in 1647 the mercers and linen-drapers of Bristol were united in an association, while the Chester mercers and ironmongers just referred to continued to maintain an organisation in company with the grocers and apothecaries, but seemingly apart from the local Merchant Adventurers, well into the nineteenth century: *Municip. Corp. Comm. Rep.* 1885, vol. xxvi. p. 2832. We know, too, that the London mercers kept their own gild organisation in spite of their close connexion with the Merchant Adventurers of England.

¹⁰⁸ The very first royal charter granted, in 1394, to the London mercers favours the idea that they were at that time engaged in foreign merchandise. It tells how the mercers had called the attention of the king to the poverty and destitution to which many men of the mystery of mercury in the city had been reduced 'by mischance at sea or by other casual misfortunes,' as a consequence of which they had little or

The Shrewsbury mercers' society has an additional interest because from the very beginning it seems to have included in its membership the goldsmiths as well as the ironmongers, two important crafts in early medieval trading society, which in London and in some other English towns of standing were unquestionably able to maintain their own gilda. It is certain however that in the early fifteenth century Shrewsbury did not possess goldsmiths or ironmongers influential enough to establish their own gilda, and that they accordingly joined with the general merchants and mercers in forming a society.

From the foregoing account of the amalgamations of traders established at Bristol and Shrewsbury we can now easily picture to ourselves something of the way in which these societies grew up in most of the English boroughs. If we may judge from the evidence furnished by the Bristol record of the organisation formed by the merchants, mercers, and drapers of that borough in 1370, which antedates the account of the Shrewsbury mercers' gild by something more than fifty years, there can be little doubt that when the Shrewsbury gild merchant disbanded, the merchant dealers, who must have been prominent members of that body, wishing to carry on worthily the traditions of the gild merchant, sought to embody some of them in an organisation of their own.¹⁰⁹ In this way the various mercantile trades in Shrewsbury and the other provincial towns could still preserve the dignity of their several callings and keep their power and influence in civic life. As time went on new industries developed and old ones declined, so that while the men concerned in forwarding a rising industry were establishing new gilda, those who still kept their interest in one of the waning industries were doubtless compelled gradually to renounce their own organisations. Their interests by that time being largely those of the shopkeeper, they would inevitably join the general trading company. This hypothesis may account for the gradual incorporation with the Shrewsbury mercers of the pewterers, cardmakers, founders, and cappers.¹¹⁰

nothing to live upon but the 'alms of other Christians pitying and assisting them in the way of charity:' *London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc. Trans.* vol. iv. p. 134; see also *Mercers' Charters and Ordinances*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Miss Sellers has found no evidence of any connexion between the mercers and the ancient gild merchant of York: *op. cit.* p. 213.

¹¹⁰ On the other hand, did the cappers, who in the early fifteenth century were entering the Shrewsbury gild, never have or contemplate a society of their own? Indeed, the insight which we gain in 1424 into the varied membership of the company leads us to question seriously the relationship which existed between the general mercantile fraternity and the gilda of craftsmen in a town. Did particular groups of tradesmen who could not gather together enough men to form a gild on their own account join the society of mercers because they had to belong to some organisation

Particular stress however ought to be laid on the fact that, with very few exceptions, one of these federated mercantile societies existed among the gilds of practically every town of any size or standing throughout the kingdom. This aspect of the subject has heretofore failed to receive the emphasis due to it. Professor Gross, for example, in discussing these companies of local merchants, claims that they were not very numerous and that their organisations differed very much in different places. We have found however that these companies were exceedingly numerous and that their organisations differed in no essential particulars. Upon a closer study of the point of Dr. Gross's argument, it appears that he has for some reason been led to draw a distinction between mercers' companies and 'companies of merchants.' As far as we can judge however the only difference between the two kinds of organisation is that the so-called companies of merchants, which appear to be associations of ordinary local traders, included a group of merchants apart from the mercers, while the mercers' companies did not apparently include a separate set of merchants. Dr. Gross discusses somewhat in detail, as typical English examples of merchant companies, the organisations found at Carlisle and Alnwick. But the records of the Carlisle company show that its members consisted not only of the merchants, but also of mercers, drapers, grocers, and apothecaries—in fact, of all the traders in the city who were not actual handicraftsmen. In the course of his argument Dr. Gross himself acknowledges that the enactments of the Alnwick company, the members of which are not designated, prove that they were general shopkeepers who dealt mainly in mercery and grocery wares. Why Dr. Gross makes the distinction between ordinary mercers' companies and companies of both merchants and mercers is not clear, especially as he defines the word merchant, in accordance with accepted usage in the fifteenth and the greater part of the sixteenth century, as applying pre-eminently to all who made a business of buying for resale.¹¹ This definition would include

If they wished legitimately to carry on their trade within an urban community? Some such explanation may suffice to account for the different kinds of trades used by the men who were admitted into the Shrewsbury gild quite early in its career. The Beverley records in their turn furnish good ground for the belief that these associations of ordinary traders could often exact tribute from local tradesmen, even though they belonged to some other gild. For example, one of the by-laws of the company of merchants and mercers recorded in that borough in 1583 orders that any one, whether he happened to be a 'brother' of another trade or not, who should exercise any part of the science of a mercer 'to the value of 6*l.* 1*8s.* 4*d.*' a year should pay an annual contribution of 5*s.* to the merchants' and mercers' company: *Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep. Beverley*, p. 83.

¹¹ *Gild Merchant*, vol. I. pp. 129-32, 155. The mercator appears as distinct from the mercer in the very first Gild Merchant Roll of Leicester, under date of 1196. See M. Bateson, *Leicester Records*, vol. I. p. 12.

retailers¹¹³ as well as wholesale dealers, but not handicraftsmen.¹¹³ It is true that many of these mercantile fraternities do not mention a group of merchants as distinct from the mercers, but the inclusion or exclusion of the merchants seems to make no difference in the aim or ambitions of the body.

Mr. George Unwin likewise maintains that these amalgamations of traders were not a general feature of industrial organisation in the English boroughs. On the contrary, he holds that the tendency of the trading occupations to draw together within the limits of a single association, so as to make a sharp distinction between traders and craftsmen, was only a passing phase in the history of the larger commercial centres, and that only in one or two smaller towns did this form of organisation survive as an arrested development.¹¹⁴ Yet we have had abundant proof that the traders in the majority of the boroughs combined thus with the view of protecting their commercial interests. Mr. Unwin, too, sees a difference in the part played by these companies of mercers and merchants in various localities. He argues that the amalgamations headed by the mercers which remained wealthy and influential bodies in such towns as Chester, Shrewsbury, Gloucester, Salisbury, and Durham, possessed no exclusive right to regulate trade, and were often confronted by other combinations more recently formed, and sometimes even more powerful. He refers here to the guilds of drapers or clothiers which, according to his view, by the middle of the sixteenth century 'took the leading part in the local organisation of trade.'¹¹⁵ We

¹¹³ In 1571 the Merchant Adventurers of Bristol speak of the grocers, mercers, haberdashers, vintners, and others as the 'rich retailers' who, 'advanturing themselves, must needs undo all the poorer sort who do not adventure and eat out the meer merchants who have but those to whom they may make their vent.' Latimer, *Hist. of Merchant Venturers*, p. 54.

¹¹⁴ The seventeenth-century records of Cork are significant in this connexion, inasmuch as they throw an interesting light upon the relations then existing between the local merchants and ordinary traders. In 1691 the city encouraged the incorporation of a 'Society of Wholesale and Retayling merchants,' whose membership was to consist of 'all freemen at large trading and inhabiting within the city except such as are free of any other petty Corporation as butchers, masons, etc.' The city did its utmost also to uphold the trading monopoly of this mercantile body by advising the master of the company 'from time to time to shut the shops' of refractory persons and to seize the goods which 'they expose to sell by retail.' Caulfield, *Council Book of the Corporation*, pp. 217, 225.

¹¹⁵ *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 78. Mr. Unwin endeavours to show that the antagonism of interests which developed between the English trades and handicrafts was due to a conflict between commercial and industrial capital, a theme which he discusses at some length (pp. 70-103).

¹¹⁶ The distinction which Mr. Unwin draws between the companies of merchants and those of drapers is that the leading motive of the merchant companies was to exclude the craftsmen, while the drapers' organisations aimed rather at controlling them. There is no evidence, however, which permits us to say that the companies differed in any such respect. Certainly the drapers' organisations never included

have found, however, the general trading societies taking the leading part in the regulation of the local trade. It is true that there is a difference in the constituent elements of the merchant companies which were organised in different towns. For instance, in Carlisle, Preston, and Lichfield, the merchant fraternities included the drapers among their members, whereas in Chester, Shrewsbury, Gloucester, and the other boroughs enumerated by him, they did not, inasmuch as the drapers had gilds of their own. But the mere fact that the drapers maintained gilds apart from the ordinary merchants cannot be taken as proof that they, rather than the merchants, took the leading part in the regulation of all the local trade. Indeed, it is altogether unlikely that the drapers ever took the leading part in the regulation of any trade other than that of cloth; and even if they did, it by no means alters the fact that gilds of ordinary local dealers, whether they included a group of merchants apart from the mercers or not, had a place in all the boroughs and corporate towns.

STELLA KRAMER.

(To be continued.)

craftsmen among their gild members to a greater extent than did those of the mercers and merchants. It would seem that any control which the drapers exercised over craftsmen was exerted altogether independently of their gild relations.