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ALIEN MERCHANTS IN ENGLAND IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

BY MONTAGUE S. GIUSEPPI, F.R.HIST S.

THE purpose of this paper is not to discuss in detail the trade relations of England in the fifteenth century with other nations of Europe, but to endeavour to arrive at some conclusion as to the political and social standing of alien merchants in this country during the century by a consideration of the chief measures adopted to regulate their dealings. The insight which this consideration will give us into the nature and motives of the attitude then generally held by Englishmen towards these merchants will assist us greatly in arriving at some definite acquaintance with the economic theories of the period.

How important was the part played by the foreign trader and capitalist in English political history of the fourteenth century is now generally known. Mr. E. A. Bond's article in Vol. XXVIII. of the 'Archæologia' has shown us what vast sums of money were borrowed by Edward III. and his predecessors, as far back as Henry III., from the Bardi, the Peruzzi, the Frescobaldi, and other Florentine firms of money-lenders. The attempt to repay them by assignments on the customs revenue of London and other ports must have been totally inadequate; we know, at any rate, that these firms ultimately became bankrupt, and that their bankruptcy involved Florence in well nigh total ruin. Yet the merchants of the Teutonic Hanse were ready to take their place and minister to the exigencies of the royal

expenditure. The privileges to be obtained thereby were great. We find one, for instance, of these merchants, Tide-mann von Limberg by name, in possession, during several years, of the valuable tin-mines of Cornwall.¹

But although the presence of the foreign merchant had become more and more a necessity to the Crown, the jealousy of the towns, particularly of London, increased in proportion. Mr. Riley's edition of the 'Munimenta Gildhallæ' gives a sufficiently lively picture of the attitude of the Londoner towards the foreigner. The Rolls of Parliament for the period contain a multitude of petitions to the Government urging the enactment of various regulations intended to restrict the liberties of alien merchants. Above all, it was sought to limit the duration of their stay in the country, to prohibit them from direct dealings with other aliens and from all retail trade, and to deny them the privilege of owning houses of their own. On the whole, the executive was able to keep the townsmen at bay, but the accession of the Lancastrian dynasty, with its greater dependence on Parliament and its particular indebtedness to the citizens of London, corresponded, as we should have expected, with a great development, in the fifteenth century, of the restrictive policy favoured by the burghes.

Not only were better facilities thus afforded by the weaker position of the monarchy to the carrying out of this policy of restriction, but Englishmen were prompted to a greater zeal in their efforts in this direction by the steady growth of their own trade during the century, with the result that it appeared both possible and desirable to the native to keep to himself whole new departments of trade, to the exclusion of the foreigner. The rise of the English foreign trade and the consequent interest taken in the national shipping are the distinguishing features of the commercial history of the fifteenth, as apart from the fourteenth and preceding centuries. The fourteenth century was drawing to its close before we find passed, in 1381 to wit, the first of those laws which, by

Pauli, *Pictures of Old England*, chap. vi.

anticipation, we may call Navigation Acts, whereby it was sought to limit the import and export of commodities in foreign bottoms. The king's subjects were forbidden to ship any merchandise except in English vessels. The statute was certainly premature, for in the following year it was necessary to add a saving clause exempting merchants from the obligation to comply with the law in cases where English ships could not be obtained. The weakness of England in suitable sea-going craft thus indicated is illustrated during the fifteenth century in a variety of instances, especially in the dependence of the Government on foreign ships for transport service of troops destined for France. To take one instance: an entry on the Norman Roll of the fifth year of Henry V., releasing those masters of ships who had been chartered to convoy the English soldiers to the Agincourt campaign, gives the names of one hundred and sixteen Dutch vessels as against one hundred and twenty-two English ones. Nevertheless, the belief of the Englishman in his nation as not only a possible but even an actual naval power did not diminish. 'The king and his progenitors,' say the Commons in a petition of 1420, 'have from all time been lords of the Sea.' In 1436 the writer of 'The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye,' though fully alive to the difficulties of putting his policy into effect, urged the necessity of keeping the 'narrow sea' between England and France. The great increase in the business carried on by the English traders who formed the society known as the Merchants Adventurers, must have resulted in a corresponding increase of English shipping, and Henry VII., if we may judge from the complaints of the foreigners affected, was able far more effectively to enforce those Navigation Acts which had been little better than a dead letter at the commencement of the century.

Such, then, was the spirit which guided English trade policy of the fifteenth century. In endeavouring to estimate its effects on the position held by alien merchants in England, I shall consider:

- (1) Those laws which affected the business relations of

aliens in this country, especially those which were designed to enforce the principle that no more of the precious metals should be carried out of this realm than had been brought in ;

(2) The various regulations by which it was sought to carry these laws into effect ; and

(3) Such historical materials as we may have to help us towards forming an estimate of the numbers of alien merchants who at one time or other during the century visited our shores and to whom these restrictions applied.

(1) To take, then, the first part of my subject—namely, those laws which affected the internal trade carried on by aliens in this country. I have already spoken of the efforts of the townsmen under the Edwards to restrict the dealings of foreigners with each other and to prohibit them from all retail trade. I have said, too, that the weaker position of the monarchy in the following century permitted the greater success of these efforts. The varying conditions of parties in the reign of Richard II. were attended by corresponding variations in the trade laws. In 1387 aliens were restricted in retail dealings to victuals, spices, and such commodities as were included in the term ‘small wares.’ Nine years later, however, Edward III.’s policy of encouragement was revived, and foreigners were permitted to engage in both wholesale and retail trade in ‘all things vendible,’ the only prohibition being on the export of wines. But in 1392 the townsmen gained the upper hand. By the statute of that year (Stat. 16 Ric II., c. 1), it was expressly forbidden to aliens to retail any merchandise save articles of food. This policy the Commons were determined to carry to still further lengths under the Lancastrian kings. In the fifth year of Henry IV. they obtained the enactment of a law which prohibited aliens from all dealings with each other. In the same statute the principle was enunciated that foreign merchants were to be treated in England in the same manner as Englishmen were in other countries—a principle persistently put forward during the century as a justification for the most stringent measures against alien traders.

There was one class of commodities on the supply of which it was always felt to be necessary that no restriction should be imposed. We have seen that in 1392, when the laws against the retail trade carried on by foreigners were the severest they had yet been, one exception and one only was admitted—namely, the trade in articles of food. In 1435 it was further enacted that any interference with aliens bringing in such goods would render the perpetrator liable to a penalty of ten pounds. On the other hand, the exercise of the right claimed by the citizens of London to fix the prices of victuals was one of the annoyances to which foreign dealers were subjected. In 1473, while the negotiations with the Hanse for the treaty concluded the following year were still pending, the merchants of the league asserted their privilege to sell their goods at their own prices. To this it was answered that this privilege had never included victuals.¹ Nor, apparently, did it include wines. In 1491 the same merchants complained that the Mayor of London set such low prices on Rhenish wines that their sale could bring no profit.²

The jealousy with which the Londoners guarded their privileges, and the consequent severity of the restrictions they imposed on outside traders, formed the subject of frequent complaint. It was not only aliens on whom this severity pressed hard. A number of English drapers and other merchants presented a petition in 1406 to Parliament praying that the disabilities under which they laboured in London in being permitted to deal directly with none but citizens might be removed. The request was granted,³ but in the following year the Crown was unable to resist the appeal of the Londoners that the old order of things should be restored.⁴ This interference of the citizens in every commercial transaction that took place in London appears as one of the many grievances set forth in 1485 in a petition of the merchants of Antwerp to the Archduke Maximilian.⁵

¹ Cotton MS. Nero B. IX. fo. 68.

² Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*, ii. 402.

³ *Rot. Parl.* iii. 598.

⁴ *Ibid.* iii. 613.

⁵ Schanz, ii. 184.

The power that the Londoners possessed to oppress foreign merchants was further illustrated by the fact that they managed to obtain laws for the protection of a special industry which had been started in their city. The development of an industry in wrought silk carried on by women of the capital led, in 1456, to an Act, which was continually renewed, prohibiting for a period of five years the importation of foreign silks. The Hanse merchants put forward privileges exempting them from this Act, and their infringement of it led, on their own showing, to considerable ill-feeling. It seems to have been the motive for one at least of those not infrequent attacks on their London factory. In October 1493, the Steelyard was invaded by a mob of some five hundred Londoners, who, after wrenching open the doors and wounding several of the inmates, set fire to the building, and would have plundered the merchants had not better counsels prevailed. A week later, the customs searcher entered the Steelyard and confiscated some silks of Cologne which he found in the chests, thereby damaging the merchants to the total amount of 210*l*.¹

A successful encounter with a Londoner in an action at law within his own city bounds must have been an undertaking of no little difficulty for the foreigner. The difficulty would seem to have been recognised by the Crown in the statute of 1435, imposing a ten pound penalty on the interference with aliens who imported articles of food ; for a provision was added that in suits for offences committed in London, action might be brought in any of the surrounding counties of Middlesex, Hertford, Essex, Kent, and Surrey. Again, in the twenty-eighth year of Edward III., it had been enacted that in cases where an alien was one of the parties to a suit the jury was to be composed half of natives and half of aliens. But in 1491 the Hanse merchants complained that the cloth-cutters of London had so far set at nought the spirit of this law that in a certain suit in the Exchequer they had succeeded in electing on the jury aliens of various nations,

¹ Schanz, ii. 410, 411.

who would, as they had reason to expect, be favourably inclined towards them.¹

I have selected London and the disabilities there imposed on alien merchants for special remark, partly because that city was the chief centre of all the internal trade carried on by them in England; partly because the special position occupied by the citizens in the state, and their exclusive privileges, enabled them so greatly to increase those disabilities. Of the difficulties with which foreigners had to contend in the other ports of the kingdom we can form some idea from the oppressive powers exercised by the officials who were connected with the collection of the customs revenue. It is against these powers that many of the complaints set forth in the memorials which precede some of the numerous commercial treaties of the latter part of the fifteenth century are directed. Many of these memorials, existing only in continental archives, have been printed *in extenso* by Dr. Georg Schanz in the appendix to his 'Englische Handelspolitik.' The grievances seem to us often petty enough, but their very pettiness must have aggravated the sense of the injustice which they excited in the alien. One of the most ordinary complaints is the extortion of a variety of small fees. The Antwerp merchants complained, in 1485, that they were forced to pay threepence at Calais and another threepence at Dover 'pour argent capital et pour rachapt de leurs testes,' sixpence for the execution of the bond into which all aliens had to enter that they would purchase English commodities to the value of their imports, and sixpence on each piece of their merchandise 'visited' by the searchers. To prevent the possibility of prohibited articles being inclosed, they were compelled to carry all goods intended for export to officials appointed to superintend their packing. This meant the exaction of further fees, amounting, it was said, to six or seven shillings a package. Nor could they altogether avoid these fees by exporting only those goods which required no further packing than that in which they had been purchased,

¹ Schanz, ii, 401.

Among such goods were beer, tin, and butter, and on these, in consequence, additional export dues had been imposed.

The customers were also accused of using to their advantage the declaration which foreign importers were required to make of the value of their commodities. While they could refuse to accept this declaration as a basis for the assessment of the customs duties, they could, so the merchants complained, insist on purchasing any of the goods at such valuation. The representatives of the Hanse in 1491 complained of collusion between the customs officers and English merchants to profit by the information thus obtained as to the original cost of production of goods imported by aliens. Not only this, but the former were charged with intentionally delaying the issue of the cockets or official discharges for customs paid, and thereby enabling the native merchant to anticipate the foreigner in the market. The same representatives have a special complaint to make against the practices of the customers. They were in the habit, they say, before sending over any goods, of writing to their factors in England informing them of their quantity and value and of the name of the vessel in which they were shipped. This intimation the factors communicated to the customers, and when by some accident the goods did not arrive by the ship named, the duties were nevertheless demanded, and the merchants were thus held liable to a double payment.¹

As coming from the injured parties themselves, we might perhaps be inclined to regard these complaints as in some degree exaggerated. Yet the fact that they could be urged in all seriousness is no doubt an indication of the spirit in which foreign trade was then carried on. That foreign merchants were a class of men but little inclined to consider the interests of the nation from whose needs they reaped such benefits, and consequently to be treated with suspicion, was the belief which dictated most of the commercial legislation of the century. The conviction that they would, if not prevented, engross and forestall every commodity in the country prompted those

¹ Schanz, ii. 403.

vexatious enactments which prohibited them from dealing with each other and compelled them to put their goods to sale within a certain limited period after their arrival. Such suspicions were not likely to be diminished by the discovery of the means employed by aliens to obviate the increasingly oppressive export duties. Did they cut up the bales of cloth on which the duties were great and make them into garments, on which they paid nothing, the grievance was one which called for redress. The garments must be taxed according to the amount and quality of the cloth they contained. This was not all. They hid, or were suspected of hiding, prohibited articles of export in the folds of these garments. Hence the necessity for the official packer. The foreign intermediary or broker, whose services aliens were accustomed to employ in their transactions, was especially singled out for suspicion. Frequent petitions are to be found in the Rolls of Parliament praying that only men of English birth be employed in these offices. The charges against the alien broker are set forth by the Commons in 1422: 'Several aliens, under the name of brokers, do use and exercise "chevance de usure," and do inform merchants alien of the privy of the realm, and of all the ways and means by which they may enhance the price of their merchandise and abate the price of the merchandise of the realm.'¹

But by far the most stringent restrictions on the liberty of alien merchants in the fifteenth century resulted from the attempt to put into practice those theories of trade which belong to what is commonly known as the Mercantile System. The deficiency in the national coinage, and the dependence on foreign traders for the supply of the precious metals, led to the formulation in England of these theories for the first time, apparently, in the reign of Richard II. In the following century scarce a Parliament was held but the effects of the theory can be seen in one way or another in the laws therein enacted. The impediments presented by these laws to the gaining by aliens of any great benefits

¹ *Rot. Parl.* iv. 193.

from their trading pursuits must have been enormous. In 1390 it was ordered that foreign merchants were to purchase, within three months of making any exchange in England, English commodities to the value of that exchange, the total amount of such commodities purchased by them to equal at least half the value of their imports. The period of three months thus fixed proved too short, and on petition to Parliament in 1421 it was extended to nine months; but the attempt made the following year to still further extend it to twelve months failed. By the statute of 1400 foreigners had been permitted to carry out of the realm one-half the money they obtained. Two years afterwards, however, on the petition of the Commons, they were limited to such an amount only as was thought necessary to meet their reasonable expenses. This amount is stated towards the end of the century by merchants of France to have been held at ten *écus*,¹ and by the merchants of Antwerp at two pounds sterling.²

Much of the want of money in England had been attributed in 1390 to the vast sums which left the kingdom to swell the papal revenues. A series of enactments followed which required all future payments of this nature to be met by the export of English goods. A more direct expedient for swelling the quantity of bullion available at the Mint was adopted by Parliament in 1420. In answer to a petition it was directed that those merchants (the merchants of Genoa, for instance, and all those who passed through the Straits of Morocco) whose privileges exempted them from the obligation to visit the staple at Calais after their departure from England should hand over to the Master of the Tower Mint a certain quantity of gold or silver bullion for every sack of wool and every three 'pieces' of tin which they proposed to export.³

(2) So much for the motive. We have now to consider the means by which it was attempted to carry into effect the policy of the burgesses towards alien merchants. The

¹ Schanz, ii. 526.

² *Ib.* ii. 184.

³ *Rot. Parl.* iv. 126.

successful expression of this policy could only be achieved by an exercise of the strictest surveillance over their doings while in the country. It was necessary that the customs officials should be entrusted with the most unlimited powers of examining the goods intended for exportation. This examination was not restricted to goods. Merchants complained that their persons were searched to their shirts. Special officials were appointed to assist in these duties. Foreign merchants were required on their arrival in the kingdom to enter into an obligation with the customers that they would observe the statutes forbidding the export of money and bullion or to bind themselves in the Chancery to this effect.

But the chief remedy against the infringement of these statutes was sought in the practice of 'hosting' all alien merchants, or compelling them to live during their sojourn in the country with Englishmen, who were to be cognisant of all their dealings. This practice was not a new one, but the stricter trade theories of the fifteenth century made its observance more and more necessary. Galling as it was to his sense of liberty, the foreigner must have resented it strongly, and its enforcement have thus become all the more difficult. Petitions, indeed, were frequent, complaining that it had never been carried out. At last, in 1439, Parliament resorted to more effectual means than had ever been adopted before, in order to secure the full observance of the 'hostage' statutes. It was enacted that all alien merchants should, within three days of their arrival in any town or port within the realm, report themselves to the mayor or chief authority, who was within four days of this notice to assign them suitable hosts. By writs afterwards directed to these authorities they were required to certify into the Exchequer a complete return of all the aliens who had applied to them during their year of office and of the hosts who had been assigned. The hosts were also directed by the Act to send transcripts from the registers they were to keep, setting out all the contracts entered into by the merchants under

their supervision. For their trouble they were to receive twopence on the pound value of all merchandise bought and sold by these merchants. Severe penalties were decreed for infringement of this statute: in the case of merchants refusing to put themselves under governance, of imprisonment and fine at the king's pleasure; in the case of mayors or other authorities, a fine of twenty pounds for every alien merchant suffered to go at large, and in the case of hosts refusing to perform their duties when called upon, a fine of ten pounds for every refusal. The Hanse merchants were excepted from the obligation of this statute, and, in the case of others, the king reserved his discretion to exempt merchants with whose nations he had made or might make alliances.

In accordance with the regulations thus laid down, there exists among the miscellaneous records of the Exchequer a quantity of documents which throw considerable light on the numbers of alien merchants who annually visited this country and on the nature of their transactions. These documents consist of two classes: first, the certificates of the mayors, in which were set out the merchants' names and the dates of their application, together with the names of the hosts assigned them; secondly, the accounts rendered by these hosts of all the business done by the merchants under their supervision.

The mayors' certificates were sent in to the Exchequer in obedience to special writs issued therefrom. The only ports for which I have been able to discover these certificates are London and Southampton. That foreign merchants visited Kingston-on-Hull we know from the fact that there exist a few accounts of hosts from that port. That they also visited and resided in Sandwich is certain, not only from some of the entries in the Calendar of Venetian State Papers, but from the alien subsidy returns of which I shall speak later.

From the certificates relating to London we learn that from Easter to Michaelmas 1440, two hundred and forty-seven applications were made to the mayor, Robert Large. In addition to these there were some galley-men ('galeotti')

whose numbers and names are not given. Some of these galley-men and other mariners are, no doubt, included in the names that are given, for we find that one host, Stephen Stychemerssh, had no less than one hundred and twenty men assigned to his care, probably because their business transactions were not considered of a nature to give him much trouble. A few of the names occur twice, the merchants presumably absenting themselves from London for a short time to visit some not far distant town or fair. Except in the case of the merchants of Genoa, the nationalities are not given, and the varieties in the spelling of the names make it often a difficult question to decide whence particular merchants came. Including the mariners above mentioned, probably about one hundred and eighty-five were Italians, of whom thirty were Genoese. The remainder seem to have been merchants from the Low Countries, from France, or from such German towns as were not included in the Hanseatic League.

John Pattlesley, who succeeded Robert Large in the mayoralty, in his account for the year, commencing on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude (October 28) 1440, gives the names of one hundred and eighteen merchants who were still residing under the care of hosts assigned by his predecessor. From April 18 to October 6, 1441, there were, exclusive of the galley-men, applications from thirty-four merchants. Similarly, Thomas Catworth, appointed mayor in 1443, accounts for seventeen merchants remaining under the hosts assigned them by Robert Large, and one each under hosts assigned by this mayor's immediate successors Pattlesley, Clopton, and Hatherley. He had himself, during his year of office, to answer applications from one hundred and eighty-five.

At Southampton, from Easter to Michaelmas 1440, there were nineteen applications; for the year from Michaelmas 1442, twenty-eight; the number rose in the following year to fifty-one, but fell the next year to fourteen. Here, again, we find the same names occurring twice in the year. We may gather from the hosts' accounts that the merchants of Italy,

after landing their goods at Southampton, would sell what they could there and transport the remainder to London, whence they would return to freight their vessels with their new commodities.

The hosts' accounts are usually made out on a uniform system. The heading gives the names of the merchants and the date of their sojourn under the host's supervision; then follows a list of the merchandise found in their possession when the host undertook his duties and the account of its disposal. If any goods subsequently arrived by sea, they are next accounted for. Finally comes the account of the purchases made of English commodities. If these latter do not balance or exceed the former, the host sometimes explains that the remainder of the money resting in the merchant's hands has been expended on such charges as freightage, crantage, and the like, or has been employed to meet the payment of the king's customs and subsidies, or of certain local dues.

It is therefore possible to make out a list from these accounts of the chief commodities sold and bought by foreign merchants, and this list may be given as an interesting supplement to the articles enumerated by the writer of 'The Libelle of Englishe Polycye.' We find the merchants of Italy importing fine cloths of silk and gold, such as baudekyn, cloths of Damascus, satin, velvet, and tarterin; gold of Venice and Genoa; wines, ginger, pepper, cinnamon, and all other spices; sugar and sugar-candy, woad, alum, and paper. A considerable trade also was carried on by the merchants of Lucca in armour manufactured at Milan. In exchange for these commodities the merchants purchased English cloths of almost every variety, principally cloth of Southampton, 'westerns,' kerseys, 'bastards,' and Suffolk 'streits'; Cotswold and other wools, woollfells and worsted; leather, tin, and pewter vessels. Merchants who came presumably from the Low Countries brought with them herrings, eels, and other fish, madder and teasils, useful in the cloth manufacture, iron and copper, oil and soap, onions and garlic, paving-stones,

nails, glass, felt hats, and other haberdashery wares, and purchased cloth, leather, sheep and rabbit skins; wines, oats, barley and pease, beef and pork, butter, tallow-candles, and grindstones. Merchants of Spain or Portugal imported iron, kid and beaver skins, red wine of Biscay and liquorice, and bought ungrained cloth. In the account of the dealings of certain merchants of Brittany we find them exchanging wine of Rochelle for a couple of horses, for which they paid ten pounds, and for the king's customs and Southampton dues fifteen shillings.

Another question upon which these records will throw light is as to the position held by the hosts in their city or town. By previous legislation, customs officials and merchants carrying on the same trade as the foreigners in their charge had been declared ineligible for the performance of these duties. But it was necessary that the hosts should be responsible men who would have the interests of their community at heart. In the mayor of London's certificate for the year 1440, we find a Robert Clopton appointed host to two Genoese merchants and their clerks. This was probably the same Robert Clopton who became mayor in 1441. Similarly at Southampton, Peter Jamys, mayor in 1442, acted as a host in the years 1440, 1444, and 1445, and his immediate predecessor, John Emory, renders his account in the year of his mayoralty as a self-appointed host to some merchants of Spain or Portugal. Only in two instances have I found the occupation of the host given, and this was when it was necessary to distinguish two Londoners of the same name, John Welles, the one a fishmonger, the other a grocer and an alderman.

Before the period of these documents, it had been sought to compel foreign merchants to dwell and carry on their business in the houses of their hosts and not in their own. A petition presented by the merchants of Italy in 1404, praying that they might take their own hosts and dwell in their own houses, had been rejected. But it is evident, from the hosts' accounts of 1440 and the subsequent years, that this

matter had been conceded to the foreigners, or was, at any rate, connived at. Thus Richard Riche describes himself as surveyor and host over the merchandise being in the house of John Michell, probably an anglicised form of Michaeli, and others, merchants of Lucca, and this is only one instance out of many.

Sometimes, when all the formalities had been observed and the host assigned, the merchants never appeared, and in lieu of his account the host had to certify to the Exchequer that he had seen nothing of his charges. The merchants of Genoa resolutely refused to submit to the regulation, claiming the king's letters patent of exemption to all merchants of their nation. When the hosts, in obedience to their summons, repaired to the houses of these merchants, they found them obdurate, 'although,' to translate the words of the record, 'they were inflicted with the corporal punishment of imprisonment by the mayor and with other monitions.' This probably accounts for the fact that in the first certificate rendered by the Mayor of London after the date of the statute, the nationality of these merchants was the only one which it was thought necessary to state. They probably gained their point, for they do not appear in any subsequent certificate, nor have I succeeded in discovering any hosts' accounts of their trade dealings.

The statute of 1439 was to continue in operation for eight years. At the end of this period it was not renewed. Indeed, I have been unable to discover evidence that it was strictly enforced beyond, at most, the first six years. It seems to have been the last serious attempt made to enforce the old 'hosting' regulations, although occasional references to the system show that it had not been altogether lost sight of even towards the close of the sixteenth century. But in the first year of Richard III., when the grievances against the Italian merchants in the kingdom reached such a climax that severe measures were specially imposed in their case, there is only one regulation which can possibly have reference to the practice of 'hosting'—namely, the order that foreign

merchants shall not be hosts to other foreigners save of their own nation. Here, however, in all probability the idea of the host is not that of an overseer, but a reference is made to the practice we have seen existed of several foreign merchants residing together under the roof of one of their number.

(3) The remaining point I proposed to discuss was the total number of alien traders in England. The mayors' certificates of the hosts they had assigned to the foreigners enable us, we have seen, to form some estimate of the number of alien merchants who were accustomed annually to visit this country. A few years later the evidence furnished by these certificates is supplemented by the returns made by the sheriffs to the poll-taxes, which were a new imposition on foreigners. I have prepared tables setting out the numbers and nationalities of all the merchants whom I could find thus returned, but some explanation is necessary here as to the nature and incidence of these taxes.

The claims of the burgesses that the foreigners who dwelt within their walls, and shared many of their privileges, should share also some part of the taxation to which they themselves were subject were of long standing. In 1343 Edward III. had so far yielded to their wishes in this matter as to enact that all foreign merchants who resided in the kingdom for a longer period than the then regulation forty days should forego their freedom from taxation.¹ But nearly a century elapsed before we have, in 1439, the first attempt to exact a poll-tax at special rates on aliens. In this year the king was granted a subsidy, to be collected for three years, of 16*d.* a year on every alien householder, and of 6*d.* on every alien not a householder. In 1441 this subsidy was renewed for a further term of two years. From the first grant natives of Wales, foreign women married to Englishmen or Welshmen, children under the age of twelve years, naturalised foreigners, and foreign professors of religious orders, were alone exempted. To these exemptions were

added, in the second grant, natives of Ireland, Jersey, and Guernsey. The Parliament of 1448-49 again granted these subsidies. But for the first time alien merchants were included, higher rates being levied on them. From every merchant being a Venetian, Italian, Genoese, Florentine, Milanese, Lucchese, Catalanian, Albertine, Lombard, Hansard or Prussian, and residing within the realm, the sum of 6*s.* 8*d.* was exacted, and from all foreign clerks or factors employed by these merchants 20*d.* On the other hand, further exemptions were made from these taxes in the case of natives of the king's duchies of Normandy, Gascony, and Guienne. This subsidy was to continue in force for three years. Soon after its expiration it was revived by the Lancastrian Parliament held at Reading in 1453, when, although the rates on all other aliens remained the same, the rates on merchants were increased to 40*s.* a year for every householder and to 20*s.* for every other alien merchant or factor, or clerk of an alien merchant. Residence within the kingdom for a longer period than six weeks subjected these merchants to the tax. This subsidy, to be raised by half-yearly payments at the two feasts of Easter and Michaelmas, was granted to the king for his lifetime, a provision which Edward IV. accepted to the letter by continuing its exaction until the death of Henry VI., on May 22, 1471.

In considering the returns, so far as they relate to merchants, furnished by the exaction of these subsidies, it is necessary to remember that the merchant who came over only for a period of a few days or weeks is not included. We find no names of merchants of Holland or Flanders. Merchants of France, in common with other natives of that country, were exempted from the last two subsidies. The returns, therefore, do not enable us to form a complete estimate of all the foreigners trading in England. Nor do they seem to be complete as to the numbers of merchants actually resident in this country within the terms of the grant. In the Pipe Roll for the twenty-ninth year of

Henry VI., the sheriffs of London give the names of two Lombards, one Genoese, two Venetian, and three Easterling merchants who had not paid the tax of 6s. 8*d*. The names of these merchants do not appear in the inquisitions, which, taken yearly, profess to give a complete return of all aliens resident in the city and subject to the payment of the subsidy. Six of these merchants are finally relegated to the desperate debts entered on the Exannual Roll of the Exchequer, while one of them, an Easterling, would appear from the Pipe Roll of 32 Henry VI. to have at last paid the tax.

Only in the three towns of London, Southampton and Sandwich do alien merchants appear to have been resident; excepting that, in the year 1451, we find five Italian merchants and their six clerks dwelling elsewhere in Hampshire than in Southampton. In this town and in Sandwich, the merchants all belonged to Italy and for the most part in London also, where never more than one German merchant was returned as a householder. He was probably the alderman of the Gildhalla Teutonicorum, the other German merchants being regarded as his guests. Of these there were as many as forty-six in 1456 and twenty-eight in 1468.

Although the names of the alien merchants continue to appear in the inquisitions until near the expiration of the subsidy in 1471, in the last years of Henry VI., and in the reign of Edward IV., the taxes of 40*s*. and 20*s*. on them were remitted by royal writ. While the sheriff renders his account of receipts from other aliens, he merely charges himself with the sums due from merchants, explaining usually that these had not been collected by virtue of the king's special writ.

In the last year of Edward IV., another alien subsidy was granted by Parliament. The assessment was calculated on a slightly different basis, although the rates of 40*s*. and 20*s*. on merchants still remained. All merchants of Italy, however, were exempted by a subsequent provision. The inquisitions

taken in the several wards of London during the short reign of Edward V. show the names of fourteen German merchants (Teutonici), all of whom are described as householders. No other merchants were specified. The return to a tax of 20s. on alien brewers and keepers of beerhouses the same year reveals the fact that there were then eight Germans pursuing this industry in London.

From this time on, aliens were generally included in the ordinary subsidies, but were compelled to pay double the rates paid by natives.

It would appear, therefore, that Italians formed the largest class of foreign merchants resident in England. This perhaps will explain to some extent the special bitterness of the citizens of London towards them. The merchants of the Hanse were not secure, as we know, from attacks on their London factory, but from the proceedings in Parliament it would appear that the antiquity of the privileges possessed by these merchants in this country rendered them too sacred to be tampered with by the Commons. It was rather at sea or on the shores of the Baltic, at Dantzic especially, that difficulties arose between them and the English traders. On the other hand, in the greater number of those grievances against alien merchants which found expression in Parliament, special reference is made to the merchants of Italy. So strong was the feeling against them that in 1456 a petty brawl, in which one of these merchants was concerned, led to the expulsion for some months of the whole of their number from the capital. In the first year of Richard III. a special statute was enacted dealing with them, but was repealed two years later by Henry VII.

The account thus given of the trade carried on by alien merchants, and of their standing in England during the fifteenth century, is necessarily imperfect. Diplomatic relations with foreign countries, the king's indebtedness, and, lastly, local jealousy, were the chief factors in regulating their position. Only of the last of these factors, local jealousy, have I here attempted to describe the directing motives and effects.

While I can claim to have put forward no new theory, I may perhaps be permitted to hope that the results which I have here embodied of a study of documentary evidence, to the best of my belief hitherto neglected, will help to elucidate much of what is already known of the subject.

APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF THE RETURNS OF THE SUBSIDIES ON ALIEN MERCHANTS GRANTED 27 & 31 HENRY VI.
LONDON.—SUBSIDY OF 27 HENRY VI.

A.D.	Merchants paying 6s. 8d.										Clerks and factors of merchants paying 20d.	
	Mich.—Mich.	Lombards	Florentines	Genoese	Lucchese		Milanese	Venetians	Hansards	Catalonians		Total
1448-9 .	.	18	4	15	3		0	7	0	0	47	44
1449-50 .	.	—	5	9	1		1	6	—	—	28	13
1450-1 .	.	?							2	1	27	27

SUBSIDY OF 31 HENRY VI.

A.D.	Merchants, householders, paying 40s.										Merchants, not householders, paying 20s.											
	Florentines	Genoese	Luchese	Venetians	Germans, Prussians, or Eastlings	Brokers		Total	Italians						Italian brokers			Germans, &c.	Total			
						Florentines	Venetians		Genoese	Luchese	Milanese	Venetians	Total	Florentines	Genoese	Venetians	Total					
Mich.—Mich.																						
1452-3.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1453-4.					—	—	—	14	—	—	18	6	0	—	56	0	—	—	—	—	46	105
1454-5.	2	4	1	4	1	1	1	14	?	?	10	?	?	?	72	?	?	?	?	3	17	102
1455-6.		4	4	4	1	—	—	13	?	?	9	5	0	0	60	8	4	6	18	—	13	91
1456-7.	3	4	4	4	1	—	—	13	—	—	34	5	0	0	60	—	—	—	—	—	0	59
1457-8.	3	4	4	4	1	—	—	13	—	—	30	4	0	0	59	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1458-9.	2	5	2	4	0	—	—	13	—	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1459-60.		—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1460-1.		—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1461-2.	4	1	1	6	0	—	—	12	—	—	9	9	0	0	46	—	—	—	—	—	—	46
1462-3.	4	1	1	6	0	—	—	12	9	10	9	9	0	0	45	—	—	—	—	—	—	45
1463-4.	4	0	1	3	0	—	—	6	9	3	9	3	0	13	28	—	—	—	—	—	—	48
1464-5.	2	0	1	3	0	—	—	6	9	3	9	3	0	13	28	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1465-6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No return found	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No return found
1466-7.	3	7	2	6	0	—	—	18	—	—	19	18	0	9	54	—	—	—	—	—	—	54
1467-8.	2	4	2	3	1	—	—	12	13	17	13	1	6	15	52	—	—	—	—	—	—	80
1468-9.	3	3	1	2	1	—	—	10	14	19	14	2	0	11	46	—	—	—	—	—	—	55
Mich.—East.		—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found
1469-71.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No returns found

COUNTY OF SOUTHAMPTON (HAMPSHIRE)

SUBSIDY OF 27 HENRY VI.

The account for the year commencing Michaelmas 1450 gives, in accordance with an inquisition taken at Winchester, September 20, 1451, the names of five Lombard merchants and their six clerks. This is the only alien subsidy return for the county wherein alien merchants are found residing outside the town of Southampton.

TOWN OF SOUTHAMPTON

SUBSIDY OF 27 HENRY VI.

A.D.	Merchants paying 6s. 8d.				Clerks and factors of merchants paying 20d.
Mich.—Mich.	Florentines	Genoese	Venetians	Total	
1448-9 .	—	—	—	9	4
1449-50 .	}	—	—	No returns found	No returns found
1450-1 .		—	—		
1451-2 .		4	1		
	1			6	3

SUBSIDY OF 31 HENRY VI.

A.D.	Merchants, householders, paying 40s.				Merchants, not householders, paying 20s.				
Mich.—Mich.	Florentines	Genoese	Venetians	Total	Florentines	Genoese	Venetians	Italians	Total
1452-3 .	}	—	—	No returns found	}	—	—	—	No returns found
1453-4 .		—	—			—	—	—	
1454-5 .		—	—			—	—	—	
1455-6 .		1	4	5	0	5	0	—	5
1456-7 .	1	5	0	6	0	3	1	—	4
1457-8 .	—	—	—	No return found	}	—	—	—	No return found
1458-9 .	1	4	1	6	0	5	0	—	5
1459-60 .	—	—	—	No return found	}	—	—	—	No return found
East.—Mich.	1	2	2	5	1	4	4	—	9
1461-3 .	1	2	2	5	0	2	1	—	3
Mich.—Mich.	1	2	2	5	0	2	1	—	3
1463-4 .	—	—	—	No return found	}	—	—	—	No return found
1464-5 .	—	—	—			—	—	—	
1465-6 .	1	12	0	13	0	0	0	0	0
1466-7 .	1	3	3	7	0	0	0	0	0
1467-8 .	2	8	2	12	0	3	2	1	6
Mich.—East.	—	—	—	No returns found	}	—	—	—	No returns found
1468-71 .	—	—	—			—	—	—	

SANDWICH

No accounts for the Cinque Ports of the alien subsidy of 27 Henry VI. have been found, and three only of the subsidy of 31 Henry VI. Of these ports, in Sandwich alone do alien merchants appear to have been resident.

SUBSIDY OF 31 HENRY VI.

A.D.	Genoese merchants, householders	Genoese merchants, not householders
East.—East.		
1455-6.	5	9
Mich.—Mich.		
1456-8.	3	3
Mich.—Mich.		
1467-9.	2	2