



CHICAGO JOURNALS



England's First Attempt to Break the Commercial Monopoly of the Hanseatic League, 1377-1380

Author(s): Hyman Palais

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Jul., 1959), pp. 852-865

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of the [American Historical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1905119>

Accessed: 02/03/2012 23:45

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press and American Historical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The American Historical Review.

<http://www.jstor.org>

England's First Attempt to Break the Commercial Monopoly of the Hanseatic League, 1377-1380

HYMAN PALAIS

DURING the second half of the fourteenth century English traders first seriously threatened the Hanseatic League's commercial monopoly in the Baltic. The League, attempting to defend its monopoly, treated the English unjustly, whereupon in 1377 the English Parliament rescinded the charter that granted the League important concessions and privileges in its English trade. Parliament refused to return the charter until English merchants received the same rights to trade in the districts of the Hanse that it enjoyed in England. Finally, in 1380, the Hanse agreed to the English proposal, and the charter was returned to them.

Throughout the greater part of the Middle Ages, nearly all of England's foreign trade was in the hands of merchants from other countries, particularly Italy, the Low Countries, and the Hanse towns. The king, Parliament, and even the English merchants acknowledged the usefulness of foreign merchants to the realm and encouraged them as importers and exporters in order to profit from them politically and financially. In return for their valuable services alien merchants received many important privileges and concessions.¹

German merchants were among the most favored of all the foreigners in England. As early as the ninth century merchants of Cologne were mentioned as living in Dowgate and already complaining against interference with their privileges.² Successive English kings confirmed their privileges and granted many new concessions.³ Germans from the Hanse towns had

¹ Many royal charters and especially the *Carta Mercatoria* of 1303 conferred on foreign merchants valuable exemptions from customs tariffs. Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (12 vols., Glasgow, 1903), I, 316, 319, 333; J. M. Lappenberg, *Urkundliche Geschichte des Hansischen Stahlhofes zu London* (2 vols., Hamburg, 1851), II, 1-17.

² The London Hanse in the Middle Ages has been the subject of the investigations of Daenell, Kunze, Lappenberg, and other contributors to the *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*. For an excellent survey and bibliography see also Michael Postan's article in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. H. Clapham and Eileen Power (2 vols., Cambridge, Eng., 1941-52), II, 223 ff. See also Cornelius Walford, "An Outline History of the Hanseatic League," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (London, 1881), IX, 82-136.

³ Lappenberg, *Urkundliche Geschichte*, II, 3 (Henry II); 5 (Richard I); 8 (John). Hakluyt,

the right to engage in wholesale trade in all the markets in England without paying such customary taxes as wharfage, pontage, or pannage. They were also granted many privileges, among them those of denizenship, freedom from arrest, speedy justice and recovery, and standard weights.⁴

In London the Hanse had its own guildhall and "Hanshouse," which protected its goods from weather and thieves.⁵ The buildings, including a dyehouse, wine cellar, and gardens "planted with vines and fruit trees stretching down to the riverside," were located at the corner of Cosin Lane and Windgoose Alley on the Wallbrook in Thames Street. In 1320 the Hanse merchants rented additional houses in the area east of Windgoose Alley in the Steelyard, where the goods of the Hanse merchants were displayed when there was no room in their guildhall. Later they occupied rooms and cellars in the area adjoining the Steelyard, which was next to their old guildhall. All the Hanse towns were represented at this depot, and every member had to abide by the common rules and pay his share of the expenses. Women of loose morals and barbers and goldsmiths' apprentices were forbidden entrance to their yard, and no one was allowed to leave straw, "or mess, or other foulness about," under penalty of a fine. No fighting or ball playing was allowed, and none of their English friends could be brought in, lest they learn some of the Hanse trade secrets.⁶

From the thirteenth century on, after an official of the Hanse became an alderman of London, the Hanse shared municipal authority in the city of London. Its representative had to be a freeman from London and take an oath before the mayor and aldermen of the city that he would maintain justice in the courts and behave himself according to the customs of the city.⁷

From the middle of the fourteenth century the Hanse had two aldermen,

Principal Navigations, I, 319 (John); 321 (Henry III); 333 (Edward I). *Calendar of the Patent Rolls*, 1216-1509 (Rolls Series, London, 1894-1916), 1324-27, p. 269 (Edward II). Hereafter cited as *CPR. Statutes of the Realm, 1101-1713*, ed. T. E. Tomlins, Alexander Luders, John Raithby, et al. (12 vols. plus index, London, 1810-28), I, 270 (Edward III).

⁴ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, I, 333-36.

⁵ The guildhall of the Teutonic or Hanse merchants (Gildhalle Teutonorum) is sometimes erroneously regarded as also the guildhall of the Cologne merchants (Gildhalle Colonien-sium). The two were probably distinct establishments. Each was a separate organization and owed separate dues to the city of London. The distinction and antagonism between the two groups of merchants apparently diminished in the latter half of the fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries, but was still alive or was revived in the late fifteenth century. *Munimenta Gildhalle Londienses, Liber Albus, Liber Custumarum, et Liber Horn*, ed. H. T. Riley (Rolls Series, 3 vols., London, 1859-62), I, xcvi. Hereafter cited as *Liber Albus* or *Liber Custumarum* or *Liber Horn*. The Gildhalle Teutonorum at the corner of Cosin Lane and Upper Thames Street was also distinct from the original "Stahlhof" or Steelyard, which was on the east of Windgoose Lane. Lappenberg, *Urkundliche Geschichte*, I, 56, 72-73; II, 96, 142. Later, however, the term Steelyard was applied to the entire property.

⁶ Lappenberg, *Urkundliche Geschichte*, I, 24-25, 32-34, 58, 60, 71, 73, 124; II, 117, 120-21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 13, 15; *Liber Albus*, ed. Riley, I, 485-88.

one German and the other English, because a German who became a citizen lost his membership in the Hanse.⁸ The English alderman, often the Mayor of London, acted as intermediary between the city authorities and the Hanse and looked after its interests.⁹ The German alderman was the actual head of the Hanse. Responsible to both the city and the Hanse, he exercised certain important judicial powers at least as early as 1282.¹⁰ He administered the law in the mornspeech (the periodical assembly that the guild held the day after the guild feast), heard cases between members of the Hanse, and also cases between Hansards and Englishmen when the former were defendants. Only when a creditor could not collect his debt in the alderman's court was he free to have recourse to the city or higher courts.¹¹ The Hanse factory enjoyed certain privileges, and while benefiting by English law, was quite independent of it. Everything, therefore, was favorable to Hanseatic commerce, and German merchants were hampered by no such restrictions as weighed, not only upon other foreigners, but upon the English themselves.¹²

German merchants also engaged in many financial activities that resulted in further privileges.¹³ The failure of Edward III's Italian financiers, the Bardi, Frescobaldi, and Peruzzi,¹⁴ and the inability of English merchants immediately to take their place gave these merchants of the Hanse the opportunity to become financiers of the king and of the English merchants in whose names some of the great loans of the period were made.¹⁵ For several

⁸ Karl Engel, "Die Organisation der deutsch-hansischen Kaufleute in England im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert bis zum Utrechter Frieden von 1474," pt. 1, *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, XIX (no. 2, 1913), 499.

⁹ *Calendar of Letter Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall, A-L*, ca. 1275-temp. Henry VII, ed. R. R. Sharpe (8 vols., London, 1899-1912), H, 158 (hereafter cited as *Letter Book*); *Hansisches Urkundenbuch, 975-1500*, ed. Konstantine Hohlbaum, Karl Kunze, Walther Stein (10 vols., Halle, 1876-1907), IV, no. 709. Hereafter cited as *HUB*.

¹⁰ Engel, "Deutsch-hansischen Kaufleute," pt. 1, *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, XIX (no. 2, 1913), 508; pt. 2, *ibid.*, XX (no. 1, 1914), 176; *Liber Albus*, ed. Riley, I, 485-88.

¹¹ *HUB*, II, no. 31, par. 8; Friedrich Schulz, *die Hanse und England von Eduards III. bis auf Heinrichs VIII. Zeit*, Abhandlungen zur Verkehrs und Seegeschichte, ed. Dietrich Schäfer (8 vols., Berlin, 1911), V, 187.

¹² Hubert Hall, *A History of the Custom-Revenue in England* (London, 1885), 24, 26; John Wheeler, *A Treatise of Commerce* (New York, 1931), 63.

¹³ Joseph Hansen, "Der englische Staatskredit unter König Eduard III. (1327-1377) und die hansischen Kaufleute," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, XVI (no. 2, 1910), 323-415.

¹⁴ W. E. Rhodes, "The Italian Bankers in England and Their Loans to Edward I and Edward II," *Historical Essays of Owens College, Manchester*, ed. Thomas F. and John Tout (Manchester, 1907); Charles Johnson, "An Italian Financial House in the XIV Century," *Transactions of St. Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society* (n.s., St. Albans, 1903), I; *Frazer's Magazine*, LXXIV (Oct., 1866), 418-19; *Calendar of the Close Rolls, 1343-46* ([London], 1904, 45-46 (hereafter cited as *CCR*); *CPR, 1343-45*, pp. 156-57; *ibid.*, 1345-48, pp. 13-14; *Calendar of the Fine Rolls, 1337-47* ([London], 1911-13), 2-3 (hereafter cited as *CFR*).

¹⁵ Georg Grosch, "Die Geldgeschäfte hansischer Kaufleute mit englischen Königen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," pt. 1, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, II (no. 2, 1904), 121-71; pt. 2, *ibid.* (no. 3, 1904), 265-95. See also William Cunningham, "The Commercial Policy of Edward III," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (n.s., London, 1889), IV, 197-216.

years one of these German merchants, Tidemann von Limberg, possessed the valuable tin mines in Cornwall.¹⁶

In order to protect their interests when dealing with citizens of foreign ports, the German merchants banded together into independent corporations, *Hansae*, which in the fourteenth century were eventually combined in a somewhat loose and ill-defined organization called the Hanseatic League.¹⁷ The League was formally established after the successful conclusion of its great war against Waldemar Atterdag of Denmark in 1370.¹⁸ The German towns were distributed into four districts. Lübeck, head of the first, had under it Hamburg, Bremen, Rostock, Wismar, and others; Cologne, head of the second, had twenty-nine towns under it; Brunswick, head of the third, led thirteen towns; Danzig, head of the fourth, led eight neighboring towns as well as various others more remote.¹⁹

After the formation of the Hanseatic League, German merchants continued to aid the needy English kings and thus retained their many rights and privileges.²⁰ The merchants of the various English towns, of course, especially those of London, resented these privileges. They did not seek to prevent alien merchants from coming to England, because there was no one else able to take over the carrying trade by which they exchanged native produce for foreign wares. Foreign merchants, however, with the exception of the Hanse, were restricted to wholesale dealing with enfranchised traders, and were not allowed to trade among themselves or to have retail dealings with the body of English consumers.²¹ The English kings opposed any attempt to curtail the Hanse merchants, and increasing strife developed between the burgesses and aliens. As English trade expanded and English merchants grew more prosperous, ill will and jealousy against the Hanse merchants increased. They were accused of evading even the small import

¹⁶ *Register of Edward the Black Prince, 1346-1365* (4 vols., London, 1930), I, 23. A biography of Tidemann von Limberg is included in Hansen, "Englische Staatskredit," 402 ff. Grosch, "Geldgeschäfte hansischer Kaufleute," 156, 171, 271; *CPR, 1358-61*, p. 228.

¹⁷ The organizations of German merchants in Visby and London were the first to bear the name "Hansae." The evolution of the term "Hanse" is discussed by Renée Doehaerd, "À propos du mot 'hanse,'" *Revue du nord*, XXXIII (no. 129, 1951). See also Karl Koppmann's introduction to Volume I of *Die Recesse und andere Akten der Hansetage, von 1256-1430*, ed. Karl Koppmann (8 vols., Leipzig, 1870-97). Hereafter cited as *HR*.

¹⁸ *HR*, I, 372 ff. War was declared on February 5, 1368. *Codex Diplomaticus Lubecensis. Lübeckisches Urkundenbuch* (11 vols., Lübeck, 1843-77), III, no. 638, p. 684. Hereafter cited as *LUB*. For a discussion relative to the declaration of war see D. K. Bjork, "Peace of Stralsund, 1370," *Speculum*, VII (Oct., 1932), 457, fn. 1.

¹⁹ There is a list of ninety-six towns in "Nachrichten vom hansischen Geschichtsverein," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, I (1871), xxxi. See also *HR*, I, no. 413; *LUB*, viii, no. 437; Johann A. von Werdenhagen, *De Rebus publicis Hanseaticis Tractatus generalis* (2 vols., 4 pts., Leiden, 1631), II, pt. 4, chap. xxvi, 89.

²⁰ *CPR, 1358-61*, p. 228.

²¹ *Liber Albus*, ed. Riley, I, 493.

duties they had to pay and of obstructing English trade in the Baltic. Hence quarrels and complaints arose.²²

Relations between England and the Hanseatic League deteriorated rapidly in the second half of the fourteenth century when English merchants began to penetrate into areas that Germans had hitherto monopolized. By the end of the century the English formed a numerous and influential foreign colony in Danzig. Here they traded with the natives and foreigners, sold their goods both wholesale and retail, owned the houses in which they lived and the warehouses where they stored their goods, and organized themselves into a communal body.²³ As long as English commercial activity was confined largely to the export of wool, English merchants transacted their business without venturing any great distances, since the cloth-manufacturing centers were mainly in the Low Countries. In the latter half of the fourteenth century, however, English manufacturers, aided by low wages, an export tax on wool, and an influx of skilled Flemish clothworkers, began to produce large quantities of cloth, and English merchants, who acquired a large share of this export trade, began to venture forth in every direction to seek new markets.²⁴ It was not a propitious moment, unfortunately, to expand into Hanseatic territory. Internal and external changes threatened the very foundations of Hanseatic prosperity. Northern Europe's system of trade routes extended from Novgorod in the east to Bruges in the west and from the principal ports of Scandinavia in the north to the agricultural areas of Germany in the south. It was to their position on the trade routes that the German towns owed their prosperity. Several factors threatened the monopoly of the Hanseatic League in this area: the swiftly growing competition in the carrying trade from the Dutch and English in the Baltic, the increasing spirit of nationalism of the Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians, and the decline of the Flemish cloth industry, which was rapidly being overtaken by the English. Internally, a conflict of interests arose to weaken the harmony and cohesion that had kept the League together. As the towns of the Zuider Zee established direct contact by sea with the Baltic, Lübeck and its neighbors gradually lost their position of importance as carriers and traders and as the geographical link between the eastern and western sections of the great trade route. The Prussians availed themselves of the opportunity offered by the English and Dutch to ship their bulky goods to the west. As the German expansion

²² *Letter Book, H*, 53.

²³ *HR*, II, no. 169, par. 3; no. 236; no. 318, par. 3; nos. 402-406; V, nos. 547, 548, 643; *HUB*, IV, no. 888.

²⁴ H. L. Gray, "The Production and Exportation of English Woollens in the Fourteenth Century," *English Historical Review*, XXXIX (Jan., 1924), 13-35; Schulz, "Die Hanse und England," 11.

to the east came to a close, the free trade era also ended, and the Wendish and Saxon towns turned their emphasis from international to local trade, with a growing tendency to exclude all outsiders from local markets.²⁵

The appearance of the English in the Baltic region at this inopportune time resulted in a long and bitter struggle with the Hanseatic League, and in the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries the English held the advantage. In the English towns only a few merchants engaged in the Baltic trade, but they received the support of the other anti-Hanseatic English merchants who were not only jealous of the special privileges that the Hanse enjoyed, but were anxious to exclude the foreigners and retain the new departments of trade that had developed during the previous century.²⁶ On the other hand, the lack of unity among the Hanse towns weakened German opposition. Cologne and the towns of the western district were very active in the English export trade and were not concerned with the dangers of English competition in Prussia. Danzig and the eastern towns wanted to keep the English out of the local markets, but they also hoped to continue their valuable commercial connections with England. Their indecision very frequently prevented them from taking any drastic action against their English competitors. Even Lübeck from time to time counseled moderation and made numerous concessions to the English. The Hanseatic League, divided within itself, was unable to organize a war or a successful blockade against England.²⁷

The anti-Hanseatic movement in England grew stronger as returning English merchants reported injustices inflicted on them in Prussia, Norway, Sweden, and other areas where the Hanseatic League monopolized trade.²⁸ Such grievances provided fuel for anti-Hanseatic agitation. Petitions were presented to the government urging enactment of measures to protect English merchants traveling abroad, and restriction on privileges of alien merchants in England unless English merchants received similar privileges in foreign ports.²⁹ Londoners demanded regulations to prohibit the Germans from dealing directly with other aliens, prevent them from engaging in retail trade, limit their stay in the country, and deny them the privileges of owning houses of their own.³⁰

²⁵ Walther Stein, "Die Hansestädte," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, XIX (no. 1, 1913), 233-94; XIX (no. 2, 1913), 519-60; XX (no. 1, 1914), 257-89; XXI (no. 1, 1915), 119-78; Fritz Rörig, "Aussenpolitische und innerpolitische Wandlungen in der Hanse nach dem Stralsunder Frieden," *Hansische Beiträge zur deutschen Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Breslau, 1928), 144-46, 149; *id.*, "Die Hanse und die nordischen Länder," *ibid.*, 162-65.

²⁶ *Letter Book*, H, 86.

²⁷ Rörig, "Die Hanse und die nordischen Länder," *Hansische Beiträge*, 162-65.

²⁸ *HR*, III, nos. 317, 318, 319; II, nos. 210, 211, 212; III, nos. 102, 103. *HUB*, IV, no. 600.

²⁹ *HR*, II, no. 212, par. 1.

³⁰ Walter Besant, *Medieval London* (10 vols., London, 1906), I, 80.

The English kings, on the whole, in the belief that the coming of aliens was good for the realm, withstood for many years the pressure of the townsmen to curtail the Hanseatic League's activities. The accession of weak kings in the late fourteenth century, however, permitted the townspeople to gain supremacy. Moreover, the merchants of London, steadily gaining both wealth and power since the middle of the fourteenth century, had improved their status and consolidated their position by acquiring royal charters. In a period when they attained a position to force their wishes upon the crown, the kings were dependent on parliamentary support and indebted to the city of London. The result was a restriction of the Hanseatic League's privileges.³¹

With the accession to the throne of the eleven-year-old Richard II in 1377, the antiforeign element gained the upper hand.³² Hardly had the London factory received the customary confirmation of its privileges from the new king, when Parliament forced it to return the document.³³ There were two reasons for this unprecedented action. The immediate occasion was the city of London's detailed list of complaints against the liberty allowed to foreigners. The Londoners charged that, contrary to the law, foreign merchants were living on premises hired for merchandise storage, were acting as brokers, and were doing retail as well as wholesale business. The specific cause of the complaints against the Hanse, however, was that the League did not allow English merchants to trade in German territory as freely as the Hanse traded in England under the royal charter of privileges.³⁴

A kind of anarchical state thus developed. "We don't know on the strength of which privileges you may send goods into this country," the Hanse merchants in London wrote to Lübeck.³⁵ Moreover, the new liberties and rights that London won in the Good Parliament of 1376, and from which only the Hanse had been exempted, were now to be applied to them also. In addition, the Hanse had to pay a considerably higher duty on the cloths and other goods that they exported. The government, however, agreed to accept security in lieu of the higher duties for the time being, perhaps an indication that they did not actually intend to abolish the privileges of the Hanse.³⁶

The League immediately asked the king and Parliament for the restitu-

³¹ *HR*, II, nos. 102, 210, 211, 212; Schulz, *Die Hanse und England*, 33-35; *Hanseakten aus England, 1275 bis 1412*, ed. Karl Kunze (Halle, 1891), doc. no. 327, pars. 1-2.

³² William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England* (3 vols., Oxford, Eng., 1800), II, 478.

³³ *LUB*, IV, no. 343.

³⁴ Petitions in Parliament (*Rotuli Parliamentorum, ut et Petitiones et Placita in Parlamento, 1278-1503* [6 vols. plus index, London, 1767-77]), II (1376-77), 367, item 33. Hereafter cited as *RP*.

³⁵ "Unde wy ouch nicht en weten, up wat vryheyt gy ofte de jive gud hir int lant sendin mogin. . . ." Apr. 10, 1378, *HR*, III, no. 103.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

tion of their privileges.³⁷ Parliament, however, dominated by the powerful antialien victualling guilds, refused to return their charter unless English merchants were given as much freedom to trade in the districts of the Hanse as the League enjoyed in England.³⁸

This demand for reciprocity eventually became the basis for all negotiations between the Hanse towns and England. It pleased not only the English merchants trading in Prussia and other Hanseatic areas, but also the London retailers, who found it a convenient formula to use when reciting their grievances against the Hanse.³⁹ On May 30, 1378, the General Assembly of the Hanseatic League met at Stralsund to discuss the problem of Hanseatic-English relationship. In letters to King Richard and to London, it asked for the return of former privileges and reimbursement for losses incurred on land and sea through actions of Richard's subjects. The letter ended with the reminder that if no compensation were made, the Hanse merchants would not trade with England.⁴⁰

The Hanse's letter to London was a triumph of diplomatic artfulness. Without stating that the city of London had instigated the trouble, it indicated that it knew very well who the real culprits were. In terms of exaggerated politeness the League then asked the mayor, council, and citizens of the city of London to request Richard to return its privileges.⁴¹ The subtlety, however, was wasted, for the Londoners replied in very formal language that the sagacity of the Hanse merchants should enable them to recognize the glory of the royal hierarchy and its sublime justice, and that they should not demand of his royal highness a return of privileges that had rightly been withdrawn. On the strength of complaints from all over England, Parliament had suspended the privileges of the Hanse merchants because of the frequent outrages done to Englishmen in Skåne and other Hanse regions as well as for the frequent and extreme abuses of their privileges, which impoverished the whole country. The Hanse could by no means deny or justify the charges. The English, moreover, were surprised at the Hanse's complaints, considering the very amiable treatment that had been given them. Nevertheless, they hoped that their old friendship would continue.⁴² Another letter from the Londoners to Grand Master of the Teutonic Order Winrich von Kniprode was almost literally the same, but lacked the glorification of Richard.⁴³

³⁷ N.d., *ibid.*

³⁸ *Letter Book*, H, 101.

³⁹ *HR*, II, no. 212.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, no. 156; General Assembly to King Richard II, May 30, 1378, *ibid.*, no. 159; no. 160.

⁴¹ General Assembly to Londoners, May 30, 1378, *ibid.*, no. 160.

⁴² Letter from London to merchants of German sea towns, Aug. 13, 1378, *ibid.*, no. 162.

⁴³ London's answer to Grand Master, Aug. 13, 1378, *ibid.*, no. 163.

These letters from London were accompanied by a letter from the German merchants in London reporting the delivery of the Hanse letters to London.⁴⁴

Richard's reply assured the League that the royal council was favorably inclined toward the Hanseatic merchants and would return their privileges to them. The council, however, told the Hanse that only Parliament could return their privileges, and it did not know when Parliament would convene again. It was clear that London was opposed to them as much as ever.⁴⁵

In October, 1378, Lübeck invited the other Hanse towns to meet with her and discuss the English situation. The League feared that the Prussian towns, which had become definitely protectionist and antiforeign, would take drastic action against the English. The Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, who was the protector of the Prussian towns, had already threatened to arrest all the English merchants in his territory, and Lübeck feared that such action would result in severe reprisals against the Hanse merchants in England.⁴⁶

Because of other interests, none of the invited delegates appeared at the meeting scheduled for November 25, 1378. Lübeck again invited them, still more urgently, to a conference on March 13, 1379, or earlier, with the request to restrain the Grand Master from any attacks on the English. The Prussian cities replied that they had succeeded in delaying any action by the Grand Master against the English, but that because of bad roads, their campaign against the Lithuanians, and several other reasons, they preferred not to appear for a meeting until the next regular conference on St. John's Day, June 24. Lübeck then sent them a report from the London factory calling their attention to the great danger to which the lives and the property of the Hanse in England would be subjected if the Grand Master did anything to the Englishmen in his district.⁴⁷

On April 17 the Prussians met at Marienburg and instructed their envoy to the Hanse assembly to break off all negotiations with the English until the Hanse merchants received the restitution of their privileges. Outraged by the news from the Bruges factory that the English were guilty of several additional robberies and piracies, the Prussian towns reiterated that they would not permit any of their privileges in England to be curtailed in any respect.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ German merchants in London to General Assembly of Hanse towns, Aug. 13, 1378, *ibid.*, no. 164.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 170; General Assembly at Lübeck to Prussian towns, Oct. 9, 1378, *ibid.*, III, no. 113; General Assembly at Lübeck to Prussian towns, Nov. 25, 1378, *ibid.*, no. 116.

⁴⁷ N.d., *ibid.*, III, nos. 113, 116; Prussian towns to General Assembly, Jan. 16, 1379, *ibid.*, no. 118; General Assembly at Lübeck to Prussian towns, Feb. 8, 1379, *ibid.*, no. 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, no. 174, pars. 6, 7, 15, 16, 17; III, no. 120; German merchants at Bruges to Prussian towns, Mar. 14, 1379, *ibid.*, no. 122.

After many delays, the Hanse towns met at Lübeck on June 24. The Prussian towns urged the League to take strong measures against the English, but the other cities, whose greater interests in the English trade made them more cautious, suggested moderate action. It was apparent that the Prussian towns did not see eye to eye with the rest of the Hanseatic League regarding trade with England. The trade between England and Prussia, a recent development, was largely carried on by the English, so that the Prussian towns were in the same position in relation to the English as London was to its German guests. Finally, Lübeck and the other cities may have felt that a procedure appropriate in dealing with the barbarians in the east and the despots of the north was quite unsuitable to the advanced culture of the west, especially to a country that possessed so highly developed a system for the administration of justice as did England.⁴⁹

The Hanse assembly decided to ask the English king and the royal council again for the return of the old privileges, the abolition of the new duties which had just been placed upon their commodities, and compensation for past damages. At the continued urging of the Prussian towns, the Hanseatic League concluded the letter with the threat that if the complaints were not considered within a year, nothing would be sold to the English in the cities east of the Sound after Shrove Tuesday, February 8, 1380. Also, nothing would be bought from them except what was needed to eat and drink, and after Easter, nothing at all. Only in Flanders could the English buy anything; even there nothing could be sold to them. No merchandise purchased from them could be brought to a Hanse city for the purpose of resale. If the Hanseatic merchants did not get a favorable reply to the letter, moreover, they would leave England and remain away until further notice. Wool might still be bought in Calais, but only with the "loss of honor and ten gold marks fine."⁵⁰ At the same time the governor in Helsingborg was told not to protect any Englishman or anyone not a Hanse member in Skåne against murder, homicide, theft, or robbery. Fortunately such extreme measures, which would have done a great deal of damage to both sides, did not become necessary.⁵¹

In the meantime the Steelyard was not idle. Because of the disturbances

⁴⁹ From General Assembly's archives at Lübeck, June 24, 1379, *ibid.*, II, no. 190. See also Theodor Hirsch, *Danzigs Handels-und Gewerbsgeschichte unter der Herrschaft des deutschen Ordens* (Leipzig, 1858), 99.

⁵⁰ League to Richard II, June 24, 1379, *HR* II, no. 190, par. 7. The staple for English wool was located in Calais. The entire wool trade, including the collection and administration of the custom and subsidy on wool, was regulated at this emporium. Georg Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik gegen Ende des Mittelalters* . . . (2 vols., Leipzig, 1881), I, 351.

⁵¹ *HR*, II, no. 190; report of Hanseatic envoys, *ibid.*, II, no. 210, pars. I, II.

in London, the Parliament met at Gloucester in the fall of 1378, remote from London's influence. Here the Hanse merchants, referred to this session of Parliament by the royal council, asked for the return of their charter of privileges, or at least for an answer concerning their request.⁵² This Parliament decided that the foreigners were too useful to the kingdom to be deprived of all their liberties. As a result, almost all the previous restrictions were removed, and the Hanse merchants given permission to move about anywhere in the country for an unlimited period. Foreign merchants were also granted privileges of wholesale trade in wine, linen, cloth, and canvas; retail trade in these goods was to be reserved for local merchants. The Hanse merchants, however, were permitted to do retail as well as wholesale business in the buying and selling of grain, meat, fish, fruit, furs, and dry goods. London was explicitly warned not to interfere with or hinder the activities of the merchants on pain of severe punishment by municipal authorities. Under these new regulations, however, the Hanse did not regain all of its former privileges and monopolies. Their old charter of privileges would be returned to the German merchants, Parliament said, only if English merchants were permitted to visit all the Hanse markets and allowed to come, go, act, and stay as they pleased, without disturbance or hindrance of any kind, and that the Hanse should assist them in every way possible and see that no harm came to them in Prussia, Denmark, Norway, or any other area in which the Hanse traded.⁵³

From these records we learn that the English government was not willing to sacrifice the general economic welfare of the country to the special interests of a few large cities such as London, and that the greatest advantage for the country lay in as unlimited a trade as possible, and in the favorable treatment of the foreigners. On the other hand the English government stressed a point important to the Londoners: that the foreigners were to be kept strictly to the letter of their privileges and that the English must be given as much freedom to trade in Hanse districts as the League enjoyed in England. This was the policy of reciprocity that continued to dominate the relations between the Hanse cities and England. For the first time in the history of trade between England and the Hanse, the commercial monopoly at home and the English penetration abroad were accepted as complementary parts of the same program. The members of the London Steelyard reported to Lübeck February 8, 1379, that Parliament had put the new regulations into effect. They also transmitted a list of four requests from the English merchants for consideration by the Hanse: to allow the English to trade in Hanse regions

⁵² *RP*, III, 32, 33, 35, 52, par. 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 47, par. 74; 52, par. 6; *Statutes of the Realm*, II, 6; III, 52, par. 6.

as freely as the Hanse traded in England under the royal charter of privileges, to give the English similar rights in Skåne, to relieve the English of collective responsibility, and to specify the names of the towns composing the Hanse confederacy. The Hanse refused to accede to these demands, and the old charter of privileges remained suspended.⁵⁴

Archbishop Simon Sudbury of Canterbury, who was to become chancellor in 1380, assured the Hanse in a friendly letter that if the German merchants would allow the English merchants to enjoy their old privileges in the German provinces, he would recommend to the English king that the Hanse merchants should have their old privileges restored in England.⁵⁵ The matter came up for consideration by the League in November, 1379. At the request of the London Steelyard, the League sent two envoys to London from Flanders, demanding the restoration of the ancient rights. The two men, Councilor Jakob Pleskow of Lübeck and Councilor Johann Cordelitz of Thorn, left Bruges on November 11 and arrived at Calais three days later. Here the governor, the Earl of Salisbury, received them cordially. Because of a heavy wind, they could not sail from Calais until November 18, and only arrived in London on November 21. They went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and on November 25 presented their requests. The next day they talked with the mayor and aldermen. As might have been expected, these men only made excuses when asked to help the envoys to obtain a restoration of the old charter.⁵⁶ They said that they had many complaints against the Hanse about which they must consult others. The messengers suggested that this could be done privately without involving the government, but as the English contended that they could not finish presenting their complaints within the previously set time limit of eight days, the envoys turned to the most influential men of the council, the Duke of Lancaster, the Earls of Northumberland, Stafford, and Suffolk, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Winchester, Bath, and Exeter, and the Chancellor, Sir Richard Le Scrope.⁵⁷ The ensuing negotiations occupied many days. Part of the discussion was carried on with the royal council, and part, as the royal council was very busy, with a committee of four men taken from the council. The committee from the council received advice from the London merchants, while the Hanse envoys consulted with the merchants of the Steelyard. The envoys answered the specific complaints of the English as best they could, and again asked for the return of their privileges. If the English had been

⁵⁴ Demands of the English merchants, *HR*, II, no. 212. For reasons, see no. 174, par. 6, Apr. 17, 1379.

⁵⁵ Oct. 9, 1379, *ibid.*, II, nos. 210, 211.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 210, pars. 2, 3, 4.

⁵⁷ Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, II, 458.

ill treated, the Hanse envoys said, they would bring the matter before the next Hanse assembly and would assist the English in getting back their rights and privileges. The complaints of the Hanse merchants in England should be handled in the same manner. The Hanse towns wished only to renew the peace and friendship that had existed between them in previous times. The common advantages from the trade ought to be evaluated by everyone concerned, and common talk by those who would like to have the Hanse merchants permanently expelled from England ought to be discouraged. If, however, the English did not consider the trade with the Hanse advantageous to them, or if the German merchants were no longer welcome in England, despite the fact that the Hanse cities had always given friendly treatment to the English, then English merchants would not be welcome in the Hanse provinces. They ought to consider whether this was to their advantage or not.⁵⁸

This ultimatum seemed to make a definite impression. The royal council assured the envoys of its sympathy, but asked them to wait until the next Parliament, three weeks after Christmas, at which time they would receive a definite answer. As the envoys said they could not wait, the council suggested that they add a supplementary article to their charter, according to which the English would be treated in a friendly manner in the Hanse regions, particularly in Skåne and Norway, and would be allowed to trade with the Hanse towns without hindrance, according to the ancient customs of both countries. The charter would not be valid unless the Hanse approved the supplementary article. The messengers, of course, had no authorization to grant such important concessions, but they assured the English that they would bring the matter before the next Hanse assembly, which would probably meet on June 24. Besides, they said, the English were already more free in the Hanse towns without privileges than the League merchants were in England with all their privileges, for which they paid about fourteen hundred pounds per annum, as the copies of their letters could prove. If the English wanted to travel to the German provinces as much as the Germans did to England, then the Hanse would probably grant them the same rights for a corresponding amount of money.⁵⁹

The English, however, did not consider this satisfactory, because they had not asked for anything more than they had previously possessed, according to the old custom. Besides, they criticized the Hanse towns only for their actions in Norway and Skåne.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *HR*, II, no. 210, especially pars. 5, 10, 11; report of Hanseatic envoys, n.d., *ibid.*, no. 192; *ibid.*, no. 210.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 210, pars. 11, 12, 13, 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 14.

The parties separated after the English promised to intercede for the Hanse in Parliament for ratification of Hanse privileges and compensation for damages, a list of which the envoys registered. On their part, the English asked the Hanse towns for the same service regarding the supplementary article that they had requested, and, on December 23, the two envoys returned to Bruges.⁶¹ On September 23, 1380, Archbishop Simon Sudbury of Canterbury, who had succeeded Sir Richard Le Scrope as chancellor in January, 1380, returned the former charter to the Hanse merchants in the presence of the treasurer Bishop Thomas Brantingham of Exeter and other influential men,⁶² but only on the condition that the English merchants would be treated as fairly in the districts of the Hanse as the Germans were treated in England. Otherwise, the privileges would be forfeited forever.⁶³

Half a year had elapsed between the close of Parliament, March 3, 1380, and the return of the charter of privileges to the German merchants.⁶⁴ Neither the cause of the delay nor the immediate occasion for the final return of the privileges is known. The two envoys from Lübeck and Thorn had presented their case in a dignified and persuasive manner that overcame all the major obstacles to a settlement. The gentlemen with whom they had to negotiate were sympathetic to the Hanse, but they desired on one hand to secure for their countrymen all the advantages possible, and on the other, and above all, to settle the quarrel with the Hanse in order to promote the true welfare of both parties. The envoys of the Hanseatic League acted as representatives of a power with equal rights, and the English admired their calm and firm conduct.

Thus King Richard II's government confirmed the Hanse's charter of privileges, but only after the Hanse had formally recognized the rights of Englishmen to trade in its territories. By this act English merchants, supported by the English government, succeeded in penetrating into areas hitherto monopolized by the Hanseatic League. The monopoly of the Hanse had been broken by restricting Hanseatic rights in England, and a program of reciprocity had been instituted between the Hanseatic League and English merchants. Thus, once again, comparative peace reigned between the Hanse towns and England.

Humboldt State College

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, par. 15; no. 192, par. 9.

⁶² Archbishop Simon Sudbury was killed by rioters on June 14, 1381. Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, II, 498.

⁶³ Parliament to German merchants concerning the return of privileges confirmed Nov. 6, 1377, and terms connected with it, Sept. 23, 1381, *HR*, II, no. 225.

⁶⁴ Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, II, 487. Parliament met from January 16 to March 3, 1380.