

SHORT ABSTRACT OF M.A. THESIS.

"Petitions in Parliament under the Lancastrians  
from or relating to, Towns."  
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One of the "Special Collections" of documents preserved at the Public Record Office is known as "Ancient Petitions"; it contains the majority of those petitions which were addressed in the XIII, XIV and XV centuries to the king or certain high officers of state. This thesis represents an attempt to consider in detail a small section of these petitions, namely, those which were sent up by towns to the Lancastrian kings when they were holding their council in parliament.

They have been studied with reference to the following questions.

In the first place what light do they throw on the conduct of parliament under the Lancastrians? What was the formal procedure in connection with their submission and the constitutional significance underlying it?

Secondly, what conditions of "town life" in the first half of the XV century do they reflect? This point has been considered under two heads, first the more domestic preoccupations of towns and secondly their wider relations with trade.

Thirdly, what evidence do these petitions contain as to the particular relations between boroughs and parliament of which

the borough representatives were one of the constituent elements?

Finally, in exactly what direction does the bearing of these petitions, thus considered, render them valuable as an historical source? In this connection their literary interest has also been discussed.

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University of London

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"PETITIONS IN PARLIAMENT UNDER THE LANCASTRIANS  
FROM, OR RELATING TO, TOWNS."

Thesis submitted for the Internal M.A. Examination  
in History, December 1926

by

Miriam A. Rose.

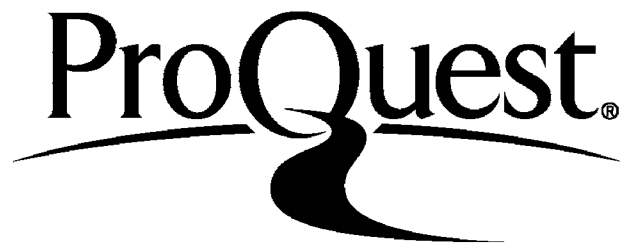
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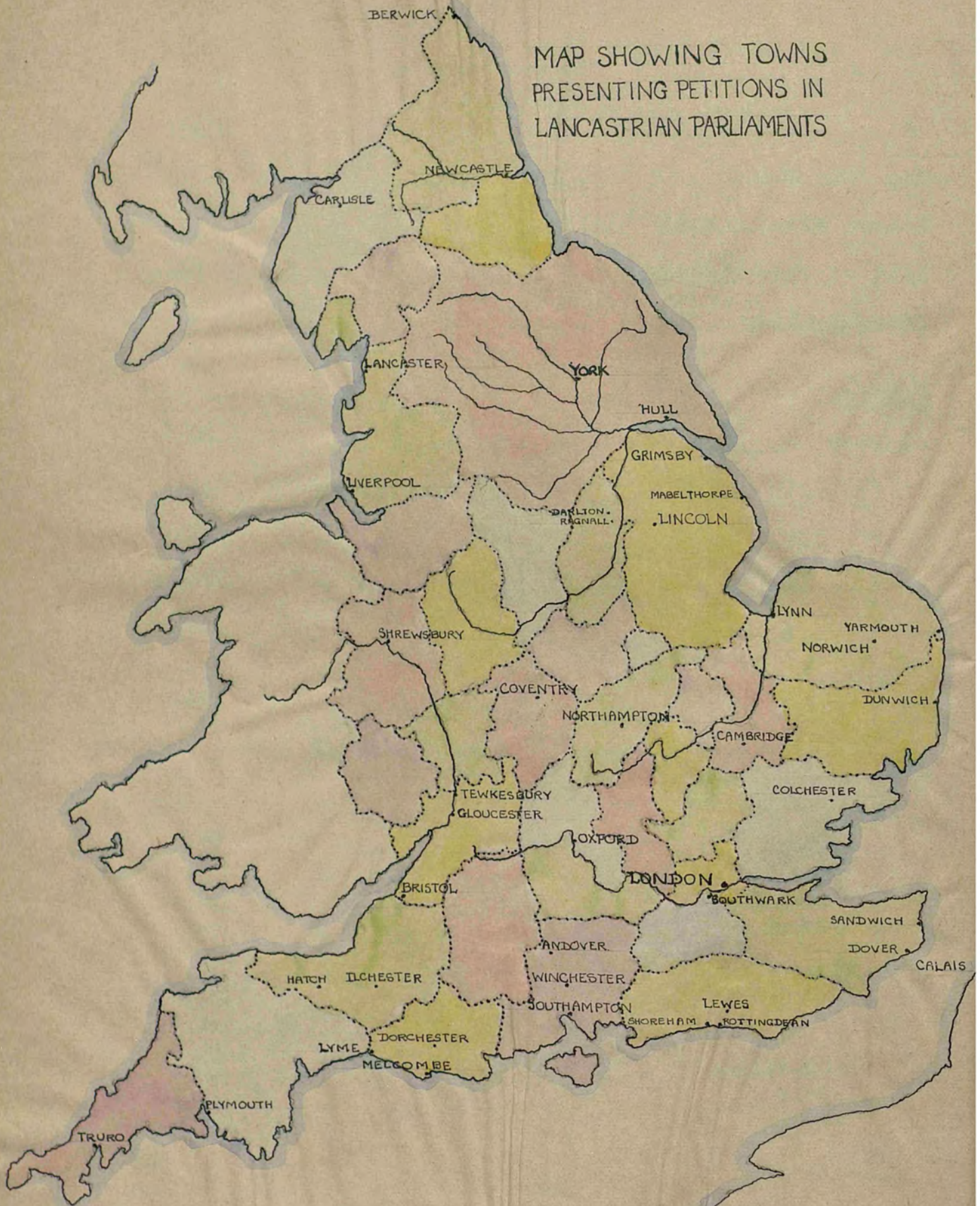
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MAP SHOWING TOWNS  
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

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R.P.	.....	Rotuli Parliamentorum.
A.P.	.....	Ancient Petition. (The number in brackets after that of the petition itself, is the number of the file in which it may be found).
Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.)		Parliament and Council Proceedings (Chancery). (The numbers following. e.g. 19/25 = File 19, number 25).
C.P.R.	.....	Calendar of Patent Rolls.
C.C.R.	.....	" " Close "
C.Ch.R.	.....	" " Charter "
C.F.R.	.....	" " French "

INTRODUCTION.  
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"..... almost every phase of mediaeval life, public or private, is illustrated by some petition." <sup>i</sup> This was Professor Maitland's dictum on one of the "Special Collections" of records preserved at the Public Record Office, known as "Ancient Petitions." It contains the majority of petitions which were addressed in the XIII, XIV and XV. centuries to the king or certain high officers of state. The following pages are the result of an attempt to consider in detail a small section of these petitions, namely those which were sent up by towns to the Lancastrian kings when they were holding their council in parliament.

Research on these documents is handicapped by the fact that numbers of them are undated. This is due to the unfortunate circumstance of this collection having suffered "more than most other classes from the mangling reconstruction of successive generations of archivists and from extensive but incomplete additions from other classes." <sup>ii</sup> Professor Maitland stated that "with very few exceptions these petitions have no dates." <sup>iii</sup> Since the time when his remarks were written, however, the laborious task has been undertaken of investigating the contents and result of each

- i. F. W. Maitland. "Introduction to "Memoranda de Parlamento" (Rolls Series 1893) p. xxvii.
- ii. R. L. Atkinson. "Interim Report on Ancient Petitions. December 1924" (Inserted in the Index to the Ancient Petitions at the Public Record Office)
- iii. "Memoranda de Parlamento" (ut supra) P. XXVII

petition with a view to establishing the dates of them all. By the end of 1924 just over half of them had been provisionally or<sup>i</sup> definitely dated.

The material for the following essay was collected as follows. Most of the town petitions in question are printed in the "Rotuli Parliamentorum" (1767-77). This work includes not only the parliamentary petitions which were actually entered on the rolls but also a selection from those which were merely<sup>ii</sup> preserved in bundles. It is guilty, however, of inaccuracies both of commission and omission. For instance a batch of ten<sup>iii</sup> petitions, including requests from Ipswich, Yarmouth and Lincoln, which it ascribes to the year 1399 was actually sent up in 1397.<sup>iv</sup> This is made clear by petitions which it is certain that Lincoln and Yarmouth really did submit in 1399 as these are entered on the<sup>v</sup> parliament roll whose date is established; and these petitions refer to the former supplications as having been dealt with in 20<sup>vi</sup> Richard II. Further, as has already been indicated, the

- i. 'Interim Report' (ut supra)
- ii. The question of how these petitions were distinguished is discussed in Chap. I. of the thesis.
- iii. R.P. III. 447-8.
- iv. F. Palgrave. "Report on Public Petitions" (Parliamentary Papers 1833. vol. xii).
- v. R.P. III. 438.
- vi. For further instances of inaccuracy see Chap. I. of the thesis.

editors of the printed rolls did not use all the now available material for their additions from the bundles of Ancient Petitions. They also used Sir Matthew Hale's transcripts of these documents in preference to consulting the original material.<sup>i</sup> Consequently it has been necessary to check the dates of the additional petitions printed in the "Rotuli Parliamentorum" by the results of later research, and also, by means of the Index to the Ancient Petitions (1892), to examine every petition from a town included in this collection, in case it should prove to have been submitted in one of the Lancastrian parliaments and to have been omitted from the above edition of the parliament rolls. The burden of this task was immeasurably lightened by the great kindness of Mr. R.L. Atkinson of the Public Record Office who lent the manuscript index to the Ancient Petitions which he is preparing in connection with the work of dating these documents, referred to previously. As a result of this examination, sixteen petitions were added to the list compiled from the printed rolls. A selection of these is given in Appendix I.

"The mangling reconstruction" undergone by the Ancient Petitions did not only serve to update the majority of them. In 1890, when one of the most drastic rearrangements which this

i. 'Interim Report' (ut supra).



collection has yet suffered took place, a number of petitions originally belonging to it were transferred to other classes of records.<sup>i</sup> Among those thus removed were some parliamentary petitions which were grouped with other documents in a collection known as "Parliamentary and Council Proceedings" (Chancery and exchequer) to which a manuscript index has been made. This collection has therefore been examined and two more petitions were added from it to those already taken from the "Rotuli Parliamentorum" and the class of 'Ancient Petitions' in its present form.

The work done in these two classes of records was not limited merely to a search for unprinted material. Wherever it was possible the originals of printed petitions were consulted and any discrepancies between the two were noted.

A list was thus compiled of petitions in Lancastrian parliaments either sent up by towns or very closely relating to town affairs, Their contents was then considered as follows.

In the first place what light do these municipal petitions throw upon the conduct of parliament under the Lancastrians? This question is dealt with in Chapter I of the thesis.

i. Index to the Ancient Petitions (Lists & Indexes No. I. 1892) introduction p. iii.

Secondly, what conditions of "town life"<sup>i</sup> in the first half of the XV century do they reflect? Chapters II and III are given up to an analysis of the information afforded on this head. In Chapter II the more domestic preoccupations of towns are considered while in Chapter III their wider relations with trade are reviewed.

Thirdly, what evidence do these petitions contain as to the particular relations between boroughs and parliament of which the borough representatives were one of the constituent elements? This point is discussed in Chapter IV.

Finally, in exactly what direction does the bearing of these petitions, thus considered, render them valuable as an historical source? This aspect of the petitions is summed up in Chapter V which also includes a note on their literary interest.

Altogether it will be found that these town petitions in particular<sup>liament</sup> amply justify in their particular sphere Professor Maitland's remark about Ancient Petitions in general.

i. A. S. Green. "Town Life in the Fifteenth Century" (1894).

CHAPTER I.

PROCEDURE ON PARLIAMENTARY PETITIONS.

The dispensation of justice was one of the chief functions of the mediaeval parliament. As a result, early attempts were made to achieve some organised method of dealing with the petitions which implored its exercise. The main object of these efforts was to prevent the high ministers of state from being overburdened with matters of private interest, so that, as an ordinance of 1280 puts it "the king and his council may be able to attend the great affairs of his realm and of his foreign lands without charge of other affair."<sup>i</sup> The necessity for taking some action in this matter will be better realised when it is understood that "ninety-nine out of every hundred (petitions) presented by individuals related to individual grievances."<sup>ii</sup>

By about the middle of the XIV century the arrangements had become more or less fixed as follows. At the opening of a parliament two sets of officials were appointed, in the first place, two groups of "receivers" and secondly two committees of "auditors" or "triers." All petitions had to be handed by a certain date (usually within a week) to the receivers by whom

i. C.C.R. 1279-1288. p.56.

ii. F. Palgrave. "Report on Public Petitions." (Parliamentary Papers 1833. vol. xxii) p.19.

they were roughly classified. The petitions were then sent up  
to the auditors who examined and determined them, invoking the

i. This is a disputed point and is discussed later pp.18,19. It may be noted here that the following formulae used in declaring the appointment of auditors contradict Sir Matthew Hale's assertion that after 28 Edward III these officials were depressed to the position of "triers" only.

"The Jurisdiction of the Lords' House." Chap. XII.

R.P.II.	283.	1364-5	oier et respondre		
" "	299.	1369	respondre.		
" "	316	1373	trier et terminer.		
" III	71.	1379-80	oier, discuter et terminer.		
" "	98.	1381	veer, oier, trier et determiner.		
" "	122.	1382	trier et terminer.		
" "	257.	1389.	oier et respondre.		
" "	277.	1390.	" " "		
" "	284.	1391	trier et respondre.		
" "	309.	1393-4	" " "		
" "	329.	1394-5.	" " "		
" "	337.	1397	" " "		
" IV	62.	1415	" " "		
" "	106.	1417	" " "		
" "	116.	1419	" " "		
" "	129.	1421	" " "		
" "	150.	"	" " "		
" "	169.	1422	trier et repondre.		
" "	367.	1430-31.ad...	triandas et terminandas.		
" V	278.	1455.	" " "		

aid of the chief officers of state if necessary. Petitions were handed to one or the other group of receivers according to the part of the king's dominions in which they originated, and the committee of auditors divided their work on the same basis. The latter were composed of lords in parliament together with a number of judges while the receivers were clerks in chancery.

In the Lancastrian period the regional grouping of the petitions was always on the one hand those coming from England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and on the other those from Gascony and other lands and countries in parts beyond the sea. When parliament sat at Westminster the committees of auditors met in the Chamber of the Chamberlain near the Painted Chamber and the Chamber Marcolf respectively.

The number of receivers in each group varied from two to three. That appointed for Great Britain and Ireland consisted of three from 1399 to 1425; after this it was occasionally reduced to two up till 1449 when it was raised again to three and so continued to the end of the period. The group for parts beyond the sea numbered three from 1399 to 1416 and two from 1416 to 1432; it varied from two to three between 1433 and 1449 and then remained constant at three.

The average number of auditors appointed for the home parts was about twelve up to the close of the first ten years of

Henry VI. after which it rose to fourteen or fifteen. However the quorum of necessary attendance which was always given as well averaged six for the whole period. Twelve auditors for parts beyond the sea were always appointed under Henry IV. with a quorum of six, but under Henry V, and in the first ten years of Henry VI. the numbers sank to an average of six appointed with a quorum of three. During the remaining years of Henry VI. the average appointed rose to about twelve and the quorum became fixed at four. In practically every case a few judges were appointed to each committee; under Henry IV there were always three, but after this on the average only two. The quorum of necessary attendance always consisted entirely of lords spiritual and temporal. These committees might call in the help of the high officers of state if necessary. Up to 1414 these were specified as the chancellor, treasurer, seneschal, chamberlain and sergeants of the king, but subsequently the seneschal and chamberlain were omitted.

The petitions which were thus dealt with were sent into chancery for writs to be issued according to the replies which they had received and were then preserved in bundles of parliamentary petitions.

It must here be noted that great personages and the representatives of important institutions frequently ignored both receivers and auditors and brought their petitions straight before the king

and his council in parliament. These petitions and their answers were entered on the parliament roll among the ordinary business of the session.

Private petitions however did not remain alone in the parliamentary field. Towards the close of Edward II's reign and in the beginning of that of Edward III there began to appear the common petition of the knights and burgesses which was "the root of the house of commons as a separate legislative assembly."<sup>i</sup> By the XV century it was fully developed. Common petitions were always presented and were entered with their answers in a schedule at the end of the parliament roll. There is practically no clue as to the existence of any formal machinery in connection with their submission. Solitary references in 1346<sup>ii</sup> and 1348<sup>iii</sup> record that in those years they were to be handed to the clerk of parliament. One thing about the common petitions however, is certain - they received no replies until the last day of parliament when all business, including the making of a grant, had been transacted. They were then read aloud with their answers.

To the commons' petition in 1400 for an alteration in this mode of procedure the king replied that it was not his wish to change

i. A. F. Pollard. "The Evolution of Parliament" (1926) p.120.

ii. R.P.II. 160.

iii. R.P. II. 201.

good and ancient customs.<sup>i</sup>

The question remains of what was the precise constitutional significance of these arrangements. How far did the auditors take over the complete determination of petitions and what was their exact relation to the rest of the king's council in parliament? As a matter of fact, precision on these points is impossible for research discovers that there probably were no very definite rules of procedure. It has been said that "the hearers were different from the council in that they were for the most part bishops and barons with only a few of the judges and officers to aid them."<sup>ii</sup> But in the Lancastrian period the council itself was largely composed of bishops and barons so that the majority of the men appointed as auditors were identical with those whose presence is endorsed on petitions determined in council. For instance on April 27, 1423 a petition from the company of merchant staplers at Calais concerning the custody of their prisoners was answered in a council at which were present the Duke of Gloucester, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops of London, Winchester, Norwich and Worcester, the earl of Warwick, and the lords Cromwell, Tiptoft

i. R.P.III. 458.

ii. J. F. Baldwin. "The King's Council in England during the Middle Ages" (1913) p.324.



and Hungerford.<sup>i</sup> Subsequently, in the parliament which opened on October 20th, the archbishop, the bishops of Winchester and Norwich and the earl of Warwick were appointed among the auditors for the home parts, and the bishop of Worcester and lord Cromwell among those for parts beyond the sea. With the exception of two judges on each committee whose presence was not considered essential, there were, beyond these regular councillors, only two other men appointed to the first and one other to the second.

An analysis of the other committees of auditors during the period reveals the same intimate connection between them and the council. It seems therefore, likely, that over a large field these committees would be able to determine the petitions which were sent up to them. Others, containing matters of greater weight and intricacy they would probably bring before the rest of the council in parliament.

The identity of a large number of the members of the ordinary

i. A.P. 10827 (217).

One of the distinguishing features of a parliamentary petition is that the names of those by whose authority it was determined are not endorsed on it. Apparently the public appointment of auditors was considered a sufficient intimation of the king's council on this matter during the time of parliament.

council with the lords in parliament undoubtedly influenced also the procedure on common petitions. Their determination in the lords' house must have been to a great extent directed by those members who were constantly engaged in such work. That the council was considered competent in this respect is shown by the fact that in 1422, 1427 and 1437 common petitions which had not been dealt with during the time of parliament were referred at its close to the council.

It would be interesting to know how the auditors who were also members of the ordinary council and lords of parliament divided their time between their various duties during the session. An early reference confirms the surmise that this was sometimes a difficult matter. In 1373 in order that sufficient counsel might be had in connection with the approaching war, the king ordered "Que toutes maneres de Petitions & autres singulers Busoignes demouergent en suspens tant que ceste soit mys a bon fyn & exploit."<sup>i</sup>

Turning to the selected petitions, it must be remembered that for the most part they had their origin outside the commons' house, that is to say, they were really individual or private petitions. Their evidence upon points of procedure is chiefly

i. R.P. II. 316.

interesting for the light which it throws upon the growing control by the commons of the whole field of parliamentary petitions.

This development was extremely important as by continually intervening on behalf of all petitioners of the crown in parliament, the commons finally established themselves as the only medium of approach to this source of law and justice, so that no parliamentary legislation could be promulgated without their consent.

"The legislative power of the house of commons rests upon the denial of the right of the crown to legislate upon the petition of the individual."<sup>i</sup>

A number of the petitions from towns were actually addressed to the commons. This custom practically began with the XV century. It implied no idea that the commons themselves were capable of determining petitions, but was simply an appeal to them to make the suppliant's prayer their own. "As tres sages & tres nobles Communes en cest present Parlement assemblez..... Qe pleise a vous sages discrecions considerer les grauntz meschiefs ..... et sur ces declarer a notre Seigneur le Roy & as autres Seigneurs de cest present Parlement les meschiefs ..... & ent prier a notre dit Seigneur le Roy qe luy pleise de sa habundante grace grantier & ordeigner....."<sup>ii</sup> Such addresses indicate that the commons'

i. A. F. Pollard. "The Evolution of Parliament" p.264.

ii. A petition from Lyme. R.P. III. 515. A.P. 6030 (121)

assumption of mediatorial functions justified itself by practical efficiency in the eyes of petitioners.

Out of roughly one hundred and seventy selected petitions about one hundred and forty at least must have passed through the hands of the commons. Exactly how did they effect this intervention?

Before attempting to analyse this process it is necessary to point out that the transcripts from bundles of private petitions found in the Tower, which are printed in the "Rotuli Parliamentorum" are sometimes unreliable, especially for the earlier years of the period. In a number of cases the actual body of a petition has been reproduced but important endorsements have been omitted. For instance in 1402 the petitions from Dunwich<sup>i</sup> and Ipswich<sup>ii</sup> were really endorsed "Soit prie a Roy," that from Lyme<sup>iii</sup> "Sue a Roy," that from Truro<sup>iv</sup> "Suz<sup>e</sup> a Roy" and the one from Cambridge<sup>v</sup> "Soit baille as Seigneurs pour parler a Roy." Again the petitions from Bristol<sup>vi</sup> and Dover<sup>vii</sup> in 1426 and 1429 (?) were both endorsed "Soit baille as Seigneurs."

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| i. R.P. III. 514. A.P. 1086 (22).    | vi. R.P. IV. 315. Parl. & Co<br>Procs. (chanc.) 17/5.    |
| ii. R.P. III. 514. A.P. 5609 (113).  | vii. R.P. IV. 364. Parl. & Co.<br>Procs. (chanc.) 19/26. |
| iii. R.P. III. 515. A.P. 6030 (121). |  |
| iv. " " " " 1120 (23)                |  |
| v. " " " " 5169 (104).               |  |

The actual fact of the commons' intervention can be ascertained as follows.

A great number of the town petitions are enrolled among the schedules of common petitions. Such may be seen in 1407<sup>i</sup> for London, Melcombe, Lyme, Shrewsbury, Ilchester and Yarmouth.

Other selected petitions are entered in various years among the ordinary business of parliament and are referred to as having been specially introduced there by the commons. Two petitions were so preferred by them in 1416,<sup>ii</sup> one on behalf of the Girdler's Guild of London and another for the town of Coventry. It is in the XV century that the commons are first seen thus ranking as vicarious petitioners with the other lofty suppliants who hitherto had alone exercised this privilege.

On other petitions the express consent of the commons is mentioned in the phrase "a ceste bille les communes sount assentiz."<sup>v</sup> This may be found on petitions in 1433<sup>iii</sup> and 1449-50<sup>iv</sup> from merchants of the staple asking for the repayment of loans made to the crown, and on a petition of 1432<sup>v</sup> concerning

- i. R.P. III. 615, 616, 618, 619, 620.
- ii. R.P. IV. 73, 75.
- iii. " " 474.
- iv. " V. 206.
- v. " IV. 405. See A.P. 9865 (198)

some repairs in the harbour at Calais.

A further number of petitions reveal the commons' intervention by endorsed references either to the king or the lords - "soit baille a Roy", "soit baille as Seigneurs." Such endorsements are assigned to the commons because they nearly always occur on petitions addressed to them. There appears no reason to assume that any other body should consider it necessary so to endorse these particular petitions. It is clear that such an endorsement was not the sole means of access to the lords, nor does the undistinguished nature of the contents of these petitions justify the assumption that they were specially endorsed because they were all found too weighty for the somewhat limited jurisdiction of the auditors. The most reasonable conclusion is that petitions addressed to the commons were actually sent into their house and consequently that they themselves were responsible for the endorsements. Further, that when similar endorsements are found on petitions addressed elsewhere, they are a proof that these petitions must have been specially brought before the commons.

These petitions present some difficulty. What was the exact force of the endorsements which they received and in what relation did they stand to the enrolled common petitions? In order to elucidate this point it is necessary to consider the

composition of the rolls of parliament.

The schedule of common petitions set out in a parliament roll was, of course, copied up by the clerk of parliament from the original batch of petitions which the commons actually sent up to the king and lords. In doing this he usually attempted to give an air of uniformity to his work, generally by introducing each petition with the words "Item, priount les Communes." This means that in most cases the original address of a private petition, adopted by the commons is not reproduced, nor any other possible clue as to the way in which the common petitions were actually prepared.

However, some of the original common petitions can still be seen from which the enrolled schedules were made, and also a number which, having been specially introduced by the commons into parliament, were entered up among the other business. Of these, all those which are addressed to the commons are endorsed with a reference to the lords.<sup>i</sup> That is to say, there is no

i. Dorchester.	R.P.	IV.	380.	A.P.	1242 (25)	)
Calais	"	"	401			)
"	"	"	410	Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.)	20/21	) Common
"	"	"	490	A.P.	4971 (100)	)
London	"	"	354	A.P.	4238 (85)	)
"	"	V.	325	A.P.	1410 (29)	)

London (fishers in Thames) R.P. IV. 132. A.P. 7167 (144) ) Intro-  
 Plymouth R.P. V. 18. ) duced  
 Northampton " IV. 373. A.P. 1239 (25) C.P.R. 1429-36. p. 117 ) into  
 says definitely that this petition was preferred by the ) parlia-  
 commons. ) ment.

obvious difference between these petitions which, being addressed to the commons, received their endorsement and were enrolled, either among their common petitions or as having had their special introduction into parliament, and the other petitions similarly addressed and endorsed which have only been preserved among bundles of ordinary private petitions. The most probable inference is that the latter were simply left out of the parliament roll by some oversight or negligence of the clerk.

This view is supported by evidence from other petitions. There are among the bundles of private petitions on behalf of towns some of which were actually from the commons themselves and which should therefore have been enrolled.<sup>i.</sup> It may be argued against this that these are not genuine common petitions but really private petitions drawn up as from the commons, especially as they are endorsed with the commons' reference to the lords. Undoubtedly

i. Bristol R.P. IV. 315. Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.) 17/5. Calais  
 Dover " " 364. " " " " " " 19/26. R.P.V.273.



this was the case in some instances<sup>i</sup> and it may very well have been so with these town petitions owing to their essentially individual character. The way in which any one common petition was actually composed is a matter which can rarely be determined<sup>ii</sup> owing to the absence of records of the commons' proceedings in their own house, but this practice of individual petitioners presenting the commons with "bills" is worth noting. In connection with the matter in hand, however, the point is, that petitions from the commons endorsed with the same reference have been enrolled among schedules of common petitions, whether they were

- i. R.P. V. p. 155-156. A petition concerning merchants begins "Praise~~n~~ the Comens in this present Parliament assembled" and is endorsed "Soit baille as Seigneurs" but at the end of a schedule annexed to it is this note, "As to all the mater comprised in this Cedule, not comprehendid in the Bille to the which this Cedule is annexed, the Comens be not assented" I.E. the Commons themselves were not the authors of the petition, but if they had agreed to the whole of the petition and the schedule they would merely have signified their general approval by the endorsement.
- ii. R.P. IV. 254. In a petition concerning disorders in Hereford, the Commons state that several persons have submitted petitions to them on this subject.

genuine common petitions or not.<sup>i</sup> There appears therefore no reason why the above common petitions on behalf of towns should not have been similarly enrolled. Finally, two of the selected petitions found in private bundles, drawn up either by or as from the commons and referred to the lords, are in the originals<sup>ii</sup> definitely endorsed as common petitions.

A few petitions from towns addressed to the king are also<sup>iii</sup> endorsed by the commons. Apparently these too should have been enrolled for though the selected petitions do not include an example, an instance has been found of a petition which was addressed to the king, endorsed by the commons, and enrolled as a

- i. London R.P. IV. 492. Parl & Co. Procs. (chanc.) 22/6.  
 Norwich " V. 105. " " " " " 50/1.  
 Calais " IV. 358. " " " " " 19/24.  
 " " " 454. " " " " " 21/18.  
 " " V. 28. " " " " " 24/5.
- ii. Calais R.P. V. 275. Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.) 29/24. "Communes peticiones Anno xxxi & xxxii parlamento durante." R.P.V. 330. Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.) 30/11. "Communes peticiones non concesse de Anno xxxiii." It is possible that these actual examples were not enrolled because the requests they voiced were not granted. However the petitions for Dover and Bristol were granted and in any case it was not the general rule to omit petitions which were unsuccessful.
- iii. Ipswich. R.P. III. 514. A.P. 5609 (113). Bristol. A.P. 4770 (96)  
 Dunwich " " " A.P. 1086 (22).

common petition.<sup>i</sup>

Thus the commons sought to establish their claim to be the prime mover of the crown in parliament either by including private petitions among their common requests or by specially introducing them into the parliament house. The petitions from towns discover no method according to which a supplication was allotted to either of these classes.

The intervention of the commons on behalf of such a large number of petitioners cannot have failed to have an effect upon the position of the auditors. Any request issuing from the commons' house went straight before the king and lords, so that all the private petitions which passed through it were removed from the auditors' sphere of action. This point may go far to solve the problem put forward above of how the Lancastrian auditors who were also members of the king's ordinary council and lords of parliament reconciled their conflicting duties. It means that they would be less frequently required to absent themselves from the lords' house in order to determine petitions in the Chamber of the Chamberlain or the Chamber Marcolf.

i. R.P. IV. 455. A.P. 5472 (110) from the merchants of England. Petitions not addressed to the commons were also endorsed by them when they received their special introduction into parliament. eg.

R.P. IV. 130-1. A.P. 1157 (24) for Griffith Donne. R.P. IV. 141 A.P. 1160 (24) for Earl of Salisbury.

All this activity on the part of the commons implies a fair amount of organisation existent in their house, and that not merely of an expedient and temporary nature. It is reasonable <sup>i</sup> to suppose that individual suppliants would be anxious to get their petitions adopted by the commons as soon as possible, which means that some regular procedure for carrying this out, which could be set in motion as soon as parliament was opened, must have been evolved. There is, of course, no direct evidence on this point but there are two facts which may have some bearing on it. In the first place, the frequent re-election of a former speaker <sup>ii</sup> for the commons must have gone a great way towards creating a continuous tradition for the conduct of their house. Secondly, it is noticeable that from about 1415 onwards there are almost perpetual delays in the formal presentation of the speaker in parliament. After 1427 the commons occasionally send a deputation

- i. In the event of the commons refusing to adopt a private petition, there was only a week at the beginning of a parliament during which it might be alternately handed to the receiver.
- ii. Thomas Chaucer. 5 times. 1407, 1410, 1411, 1414, 1421.  
 Roger Flour. 4 " 1416, 1417, 1419, 1422.  
 William Tresham 4 " 1439, 1442, 1447, 1449.  
 John Tyrell 3 " 1427, 1431, 1437.

from their number to announce his election to the king and lords but to ask that the presentation may be delayed. This reluctance of the commons to appear in parliament must have arisen from their being pre-occupied with business in their own house and it is not an unreasonable supposition that this included the carrying out of their own arrangements for dealing with parliamentary petitions.

CHAPTER II.SOME PROBLEMS OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AND CONDITIONS OF  
"TOWN LIFE."

Mediaeval town governments were faced by no easy task in merely maintaining their existence. Their parliamentary petitions reveal some of the most pressing difficulties with which they had to deal in this connection.

In some cases municipal freedom was threatened with complete extinction by the imposition of an alien administration. Southwark complains<sup>i</sup> in 1406 that the mayor, sheriffs and aldermen of London have lately obtained letters-patent<sup>ii</sup> from the king granting them entire jurisdiction over this ancient borough of the county of Surrey. This aggressive act on the part of the London authorities was most likely due to a long-standing grievance, namely that Southwark gave shelter to felons fleeing from justice and that it also covered the commercial intrigues of forestallers who bought up goods there before they arrived at the

i. R.P. III. 595-6.

ii. C.P.R. 1405-8. p. 207.

city.<sup>i</sup> Part of the town had indeed been granted to London by Edward III<sup>ii</sup> and the city now claimed that this concession really entitled it to the whole. In answer to the petition of 1406 the parties were ordered to bring their suit before the king and his council. Apparently the result was favourable to Southwark for the town continued to enjoy independent parliamentary representation after this date and it was not until 1550 that London finally bought out all the rights of the crown there.<sup>iii</sup>

Another instance of this difficulty is afforded by the history of Beverley. In 1415 Henry V. granted to its municipal officials entire jurisdiction within the town and the profits arising from the same.<sup>iv</sup> This royal liberality evoked a petition from the Archbishop of York in the parliament held the next year in which he claims the franchises in that district bestowed on his predecessor by Athelstan - "As free mak I the, as hert may thynk or eygh may see." Accordingly the above grant was annulled<sup>v</sup>

i. A Calendar of Early Mayors' Court Rolls of the City of London. (ed. A. H. Thomas 1924) pp. 234. 245.

ii. R. R. Sharpe "London and the Kingdom" (1894) p. 441. Charter dated 6 March 1 Edward III.

iii. " " " p. 442.

iv. C.P.R. 1413-16. p.287.

v. R.P. IV. 85.

and the townsmen were once more subjected to ecclesiastical administration.

Active legal ownership suddenly affirmed or tenaciously maintained was thus an obvious danger to a town's self government but as may be seen in the case of Southwark it was sometimes possible to resist these claims by due process of law. There were occasions however, when there was little or no question of legality involved but when a town was forcibly attacked by some local magnate. The tenants of the little towns of Darlton and Ragnall state in 1414 that Sir Richard Stanhope "ove force & armes" has enclosed all their common fields and pasturage with the result that they are so impoverished that they can scarcely pay their rents and services due to the king. They leave no doubt as to the efficiency of the assault by adding "q'ils ne osent suer la <sup>1</sup>hey devers luy pur doute de leur vies." Because of this they pray that the king himself will grant them aid, but their petition was refused as the question of free tenure was involved.

These, of course, were only small places and an easy prey to the avarice of neighbouring landowners. However in 1416 the mayor, i. R.P. IV. A.P. 1128 (23).



i

bailiffs and citizens of the city of Carlisle present that whereas one of their most valuable possessions consisted of certain fishing rights in the River Eden, Thomas, Lord Dacre had lately come with a great number of his men, armed as for war, and had broken down the eel-traps<sup>ii</sup> set therein, to the utter destruction of any fishing and consequent loss to the citizens. They ask that he may be forced to repair the traps and that if he pretends to any rights in the matter he may be compelled to pursue his suit in a legal manner. The supplicants were merely told to apply to the common law, a course which it is obvious they had intentionally avoided owing to the hope<sup>less</sup>~~ful~~ness of obtaining local impartiality. These two cases indicate that justice against such violent attacks was hard to obtain.

Although the complete annihilation of a town's self-government by the legal or forcible imposition of an alien administration was comparatively rare, a number of towns were ~~ifaced~~ faced by the same problem in a modified form. It frequently happened that within the walls of one town there were portions which remained the entire possession either of the Church or some lay lord and which owed the municipal authorities no allegiance whatever.<sup>iii</sup> This,

- i. R.P. IV. 92. A.P. 1154 (24).
- ii. J. H. Wylie. "The Reign of Henry V" (1914) p.121. note 8.
- iii. A. S. Green. "Town Life in the Fifteenth Century" (1894) Chapter XI.

produced constant friction between the rival jurisdictions as the town government naturally felt aggrieved that it should secure benefits for inhabitants who refused to pay for them. The city of Lincoln which experienced constant difficulty in raising its fee-farm submits in 1416<sup>i</sup> as the chief reason for its incapacity "qe toutz les Terres & Tenementz deinz le Close de l'Eglise Cathedrale de notre Dame de Nicole, et le Baille q'est parcell del Duchie de Lancastre, et touts lez Tenementz de Beaumont fee, ove toutz les appurtenances les queux amountent al moyte de dite Cite, sont enfraunchisez & exemptz deinz eux mesmes, & nient contributaries al dite fee-ferme." As a result the mayor and commalty can only be sure of raising £14 towards their annual farm of £100. The burgesses of Ilchester in a similar plight, point out<sup>ii</sup> that when John gave one part of their town to William Daco and resumed another portion into his own hands, an area which accounted for £24 out of £30 farm was thus removed from the municipal jurisdiction. They complain that in spite of this they have recently been pressed for the whole amount. Again, when the borough of Plymouth was created in 1439<sup>iii</sup>, the prior and convent of the town were entirely exempt

i. R.P. IV. 313. A.P. 6024 (121).

ii. R.P. III. 619.

iii. R.P. V. 18. Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.) 23/10.

from any contribution to its financial burdens. Calais was troubled by somewhat the same problem in 1400<sup>i</sup>. Its mayor and aldermen then protest that the inhabitants who in time of peace go to live outside the town in a jurisdiction known as the "echevinage", refuse to pay their accustomed dues under the assize of bread, wine, ale and beer sold retail.

The municipal governments of Oxford and Cambridge both suffered in this way from the presence of the universities. The mayor and commonalty of Oxford complain in 1420<sup>ii</sup> that all its ecclesiastical inhabitants have refused to make their legal contribution to the taxes levied on the town. They emphasise the fact "qe la greindre partie de possessions deinz les ditz Ville & Suburbes sont es may~~ns~~ des ditz gentz de Seint Eglise, & lour tenantz pur la greindre partie sont Escolers, qe riens ne paient<sup>celle</sup> partie," and that it was therefore impossible to raise the correct amount without the help of the clerical tenants.

At Cambridge the town authorities have been robbed by Richard II, of some valuable franchises which he had subsequently bestowed on the chancellor of the university. The profits from these used to go a great way towards the payment of the

i. R.P. III. 500.

ii. " " 645.

iii. " " 515. A.P. 5169 (104)

fee-farm and so their possession by the university which does not contribute to this charge is a serious loss to the townsmen. Nevertheless in support of their remaining liberties they have endeavoured to continue the payment of the ancient amount but are at last forced in 1402, to ask for a reduction.

In London the sanctuary of St. Martin le Grand formed such an area which was outside the control of the municipal authorities. The abuse of its privileges is the subject of a petition in 1402<sup>i</sup> which states that it is infested with thieves, imposters and murderers who all contrive against the peace and tranquillity of the city.

An instance of active antagonism on the part of the ecclesiastical inhabitants of a town against the municipal government may be seen in a petition of 1416<sup>ii</sup> from the bishop of Lincoln and the dean and chapter of the cathedral church there. It concerns a legal ambiguity which had arisen owing to the elevation of the city of Lincoln to the status of a county in 1409. By a statute of 13 Richard II. it had been established that if anyone should complain of perjury in assizes, juries and other inquests taken before the mayor and bailiffs of the city, a writ should be sent to the sheriff of the county

i. R.P. III. 503.

ii. " IV. 74.

to empanell another jury from men outside the city, according to whose verdict judgment should be given. Since 1409 however, the city had constituted a county by itself and its bailiffs had taken the name of sheriff. Doubt had thus arisen as to whom the above writs should be directed. The petitioners secured that it should not be to the sheriff of the city but to that of the county as before. This meant that they would have less to fear by way of coercion in the town courts.

Municipal government did not only suffer from local and particular problems of conflicting jurisdictions. All towns alike lay open to some amount of interference by the central government and they were continually on the alert to defend their franchises against its aggression<sup>i</sup> which conflicted with their domestic preoccupations. Liverpool protests in 1414<sup>i</sup> against the intrusion of royal officials who had lately been holding courts within the borough notwithstanding a confirmation by the present king of all its ancient liberties and franchises which included a free court. The matter was committed to the council<sup>ii</sup> and apparently had an issue unfavourable to the town.

<sup>iii</sup>  
In 1399 the mayor, sheriffs, aldermen and commonalty of

i. R. P. IV. 55. A.P. 6091 (122).

ii. A. S. Green. "Town Life in the Fifteenth Century," vol. I. 272. note 3.

iii. R.P .III. 442. A.P. 1068 (22)

London request that a statute of 28 Edward III may be annulled. This set forth the procedure to be followed in cases of misgovernment in the city, including certain fines to be levied, inquests as to the facts of the matter to be taken of men from counties round about the city and the appointment of the constable of the Tower or his lieutenant as receiver of writs in place of the city's sheriffs who would be parties to the suit. The petitioners assert that the statute is contrary to all their ancient liberties and the Great Charter. They were only promised however a possible mitigation of the fines.

These same suppliants submitted another petition,<sup>i</sup> in this parliament complaining of an inconvenience arising in the administration of justice. They say that the assizes held before the sheriffs of the city are frequently delayed owing to the absence of the coroner and his deputy and ask that in future these sessions may proceed notwithstanding their non-appearance. The coroner of London was not elected; his office together with that of the chamberlain was held by the king's chief butler and as a rule the duties were actually performed by his deputy or deputies.<sup>ii</sup> All these officials were continually

i. R.P. III. 429. A.P. 6075 (122).

ii. C. Gross. Introduction to "Select Cases from Coroners' Rolls" p. xxiii. (Selden Society's Publications).

being employed by the king on other business of state so that the constant appointment of different deputies and sub-deputies must have made the execution of their office in the city almost impossible.<sup>i</sup> So obvious was this that the above petition was granted provided a solemn proclamation for the coroner or his deputy were made before every assize.

Other towns had complaints to make about the operation of the judicial system. The burgesses of Grimsby protest in 1402<sup>ii</sup> against their being haled to distant parts of the county to appear before various royal commissioners. The expense thus incurred hinders them in the payment of their farm and their absence from their town would be disastrous in the event of an alien invasion. They petition that they may not be summoned out of the town except before justices on eyre, of either bench or of assize or gaol delivery. The king replied,

- i. Calendar of London Letter Books. Vol. H. (ed. R.R. Sharpe) 1894.  
 p.201 15 Nov. 1382. Richard Wellesbourne appointed as deputy coroner to John Sleghe - the king's butler.  
 " 30 Dec. John Charney appointed deputy in place of Wellesbourne.  
 " 21 Jan. 1383. Henry de Shelford appointed deputy for one month in place of Charney "who was engaged on other business."  
 p.202. 18 Feb. John Charney reinstated as deputy.

ii. R.P. III. 514. A.P. 1085 (22).

however, that matters should continue as before.

In 1435<sup>i</sup> the knights and esquires of the county of Cumberland join with the mayor and citizens of the city of Carlisle in a complaint that the sessions held by the justices of common assize and gaol delivery have lately been held elsewhere than in the said city, contrary to a statute of Richard II that such sessions should always be held in the shire town. As a result there is a danger of the city being lost to the Scots and of all the prisoners escaping from the gaol there because knights and esquires, mayor, citizens and all free tenants must attend the assizes wherever they are held. Their request that these sessions might always be held in Carlisle was granted in time of peace and truce.

The men of Hull counted among their special franchises a grant of Edward I that they might leave their lands by will and another of Edward III that the mayor and four burgesses might hold assizes of fresh force. These assizes in some boroughs "took the place of the king's assize of novel<sup>ii</sup> disseisin." It would appear that in the earlier years of Henry VI they suffered some apprehension as to the safety of these particular liberties for in 1433 they submit a petition

i. R.P. IV. 490.

ii. F. Pollock & F.W. Maitland. "The History of English Law before the time of Edward I" (1911) Vol. I. 644. C.A. Markham & J.C. Cox "Records of Northampton" (1898) vol. I. 477.



in parliament <sup>i</sup> saying that these privileges have been ratified by Richard II and Henry IV. and asking that they may be confirmed for the future. Their request was granted. <sup>ii</sup>

It is clear that municipal freedom needed constant protection against the aggression or indifference of the central government.

The foregoing difficulties which beset the authorities of a mediaeval town were all in the nature of conflicts with outside forces seeking either to destroy or weaken them. They had also, however, constitutional problems to face within their own proper sphere of activity. One or two of the municipal petitions throw some light on the character of these internal difficulties.

Seven men of Bishop's Lynn <sup>iii</sup> present in 1404 that there had been a dispute between the great men of the town on the one part and the said suppliant together with other poor commons on the other, whereupon the latter had petitioned the council for a remedy. At the instance of the great men a commission had been appointed to enquire into the general misgovernment of the town and as a result the above seven men had been imprisoned. They ask that they may be released on sufficient bail in order that they may answer the accusations made against them and give

i. R. P. IV. 468. A.P. 1294 (26)

ii. C.P.R. 1429-36. p. 294-5.

iii. R.P. III. 565.

evidence as to the alleged misgovernment. Their request was granted. This petition gives a small but characteristic glimpse into the domestic affairs of Lynn. It was ruled by a wealthy corporation which was really identical with the heads of the Merchant Guild. The community of burgesses and non-burgesses in the town, however, was supported in its resistance of this oligarchy by the bishop of Norwich and managed to maintain itself in a fairly thriving condition. The misgovernment here complained of consisted chiefly of financial abuses. The indignation which they aroused finally culminated in a revolution in 1411 when a more representative form of local government was temporarily introduced.<sup>i.</sup>

Shrewsbury was also distracted by financial problems though, of course, on a far smaller scale than the wealthy town of Lynn. General dissatisfaction with the administration of its revenues by the bailiffs led the commonalty in 1433<sup>ii</sup> to seek parliamentary confirmation of a modification of the municipal constitution. This was done in order that the commonalty might be able to bring

- i. A. S. Green. "Town Life in the Fifteenth Century" Vol. II. Chap. XV.
- ii. A. P. 67919 (139) The portion of this petition which was missing when the "Rotuli Parliamentorum" were compiled (R.P.IV. 476) has since been found and reunited to the other piece.

an action against defaulting bailiffs although they themselves were members of the commonalty. The new provisions<sup>i</sup> were all calculated to protect the common funds of the town from any possible manipulation by the bailiffs. This composition received sanction for a three years trial after which in answer to another petition<sup>ii</sup> the period was extended for ten years. Before this time was up, however, the town submitted another petition in 1445<sup>iii</sup> asking that, owing to the success of the above arrangements, they might, with one or two minor alterations, be made perpetual law.

The self-government of a town in the Lancastrian period might thus be threatened in various ways. It ran a risk of complete overthrow or serious curtailment at the hands of external forces and it was further subject to the possibility of modification as a result of internal dissensions. These difficulties, which may all be classed as 'constitutional', appear overwhelming enough but they by no means exhaust the store of troubles with which such a town might be visited.

The parliamentary petitions of towns reflect the fact that municipal administration was no easy task. Some places were

- i. This schedule (R.P.IV. 476) is now attached to Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.) Roll 22 which is the petition and schedule of 1445. (R.P. V.121).
- ii. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 22/1. About 1437.
- iii. R.P.V . 121. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) Roll 22.

faced with the primary difficulty of securing active and personal support in this matter. The mayor and citizens of York complain in 1450<sup>i</sup> that divers citizens have procured letters patent from the king exempting them from ever holding the offices of mayor, sheriff, chamberlain, collector of taxes or representative of the city in parliament. They affirm that because of this "grete inconveniences and hurt hath fallen of late in the said Cite" and secure that all such patents shall be annulled and that any citizen procuring one in future shall forfeit £40, half to the king and half to the mayor and commonalty. An examination of the calendar of patent rolls discovers the fact that these delinquents were merchants<sup>ii</sup> who evidently desired to pursue their private commercial ventures unhampered by the possibility of incurring any loss in the service of the community. Such loss was not always a mere matter of time. Officials were held personally responsible for the revenues of their offices and in

i. R. P. V. 225.

ii. C.P.R.	1436-41.	p.126.	25 Jan.	1438.	Nicholas Useflete	"merchant"
"	"	p.441.	30 Aug.	1440.	John Wetelay	"glover"
"	"	p.556.	14 July	1441.	John Deyn	"merchant"
"	1441-46.	p. 22.	18 Oct.	"	Nicholas Romley	"
"	"	p.395.	10 Nov.	1445.	John Thirske	"
"	1446-52	p. 49.	21 Feb.	1447.	John Carre	"

the event of a town becoming impoverished their own pockets suffered. By 1420 the bailiffs of Winchester had several times been ruined and the more substantial inhabitants were leaving the town in order to avoid a similar fate.<sup>i</sup> In 1437 the sheriffs of Lincoln who should have answered for the fee-farm for the two previous years, had removed themselves and their goods out of the city in order that they might not be distrained for the sums which they had found it impossible to raise.<sup>ii</sup>

These last examples of the distaste exhibited by various townsmen for any active participation in municipal administration point to what was, of course, the chief problem in this connection, namely finance. Difficulties concerning the municipal revenue are the subject of a large number of the town petitions.

The two principal charges which a town had to meet were the payment of its fee-farm and its contribution to the national taxes.<sup>iii</sup> The farm was the rent paid to its lord and was a fixed amount which had been settled when the collection of the profits from the town had just been taken over by the inhabitants. It was raised from certain "locata" or things that yielded issues which were specially assigned for this purpose,<sup>iv</sup> and only if these revenues

i. R.P. III. 640.

ii. A.P. 6083 (122).

iii. T. Madox. "Firma Burgi" (1726) p.3. Chap.I. sect.IV.

iv. " " " p.251.Chap.XI.sect.III.

fell short of the required amount was a levy made among the townspeople. At Cambridge the profits from the assize of bread wine and ale were thus allocated before this franchise was granted by Richard II to the University. Dorchester had a town balance and enjoyed the monopoly of weighing in it all things weighable, bought or sold in fairs and markets within the borough and twelve leagues radius. The charges made for this service were assigned for its farm. That of Carlisle was largely supported by the profits made out of the fishing in the River Eden which was specially preserved by the town. The bailiff of Smithfield took the third best beast from every drover bringing cattle into Smithfield Market between the feasts of St. Martin and the Nativity in aid of the farm of the city. At Southampton the greater part of this charge was met by certain customs named "little tolls" levied on goods sold there.

The quota of taxation had also become a fixed sum in accordance with the rates of certain compositions made between all

- i. R.P. III. 515. A.P. 5169 (104).
- ii. " IV. 380. A.P. 1242 (25).
- iii. " " 92. A.P. 1154 (24).
- iv. " III. 474.
- v. " IV. 53.

communities and the exchequer officials in 1334.<sup>i</sup> The distribution of the amount within each town had become settled locally in various ways.

It is easy to see how the rigidity of both these charges would turn to the benefit of those towns which were favoured with increasing prosperity while it would double the burdens of those which met with unexpected misfortune. Moreover many towns, in their first eagerness to gain independence from their lords, bought their freedom too dearly and agreed to pay a farm which they were really unable to support at any time.<sup>ii.</sup>

The towns which petition on this subject in parliament are naturally the unfortunate<sup>ones,</sup> those which complain of the greatness of their farm being, of course, royal towns and addressing the king as their lord. It is interesting to note how the period when they first assumed their financial burdens seems to have developed into a sort of "golden age" in the tradition of some of them. The mayor and burgesses of Oxford speak of "howe that the seid Towne, in the dayes what tyme the same Towne was thus charged..... was full enhabited with Merchauntes, Artificers and

- i. S. Dowell "Taxation and Taxes in England" (1888) Vol. I. pp.85-87
- ii. J. Tait "Study of Early Municipal History in England" p.7. (Proceedings of British Academy. Vol. X. pt. 17. 1922).

lay people." <sup>i</sup> Yarmouth was assessed "quant mesme la Ville <sup>ia</sup> estoit en prosperite & plein enhabite des gentz & de richesse" and Lincoln refers to these days when it was "a notable & gret Cite and the third cite named in this noble reaume, stuffed with grete noubre of citezeins and substance of goodes." <sup>ii</sup>

The majority of these unfortunate towns are situated on the coast and their inability to meet the financial demands made of them is therefore frequently ascribed to damage done by the sea. For instance the men of Dunwich affirm of their town that "la plus grande partie est destruit par tempest du mier"; <sup>iii</sup> the burgesses of Ipswich complain of "plusours meschiefs & destruccions <sup>iv</sup> que sont ave<sup>n</sup>uz a dite Ville par la Meere" while in 1431 the town of Mablethorpewas "utterly destroyd and wastid be over flowyng and gret distres of the Water of the Sea." <sup>v</sup> In cases where the town was a port such ravages were doubly felt. It is said of Yarmouth in 1407 <sup>vi</sup> "qe le Port de mesme la Ville est ensi estoppez de zabule qe les hiefs ne purront y entrer & isser ovesqe Merchandises, come ils soloient quant la dit Ville estoit en

i. R.P. V. 205, 337. A.Ps. 6599 (132) 1388 (28).

ia. R.P. III. 620.

ii. A.P. 6083 (122).

iii. R.P. III. 514. A.P. 1086 (22).

iv. " " " A.P. 5609 (113)

v. " IV. 385. A.P. 1245 (25)

vi. R.P. III. 620.



prosperite", and in the same year the burgesses of Lyme speak of the "destruction de leur Port par les rages du Meer." <sup>i</sup> The genuine character of these statements is confirmed by similar <sup>ii.</sup> occurrences at the present day.

Some of the towns on the southern coast suffered also from the naval attacks of enemies. Melcombe, Lyme and Truro were all burnt and destroyed under Edward III and Richard II by the French and refer to their consequent impoverishment, <sup>iii</sup> while the same fate had lately befallen Rottingdean in 1421. <sup>iv</sup>

Hostile attacks were not only to be feared from enemies beyond the sea. A description of the wretched condition of the northern counties, including that of the city of Newcastle, by the commons in 1402 <sup>v</sup> attributes much of their deplorable state to "des graundes chivaches et arsures sur eux par l'Escoce grauntez", <sup>vi</sup> and the burgesses and commons of Shrewsbury indignantly recount

- i. R.P. III. 618.
- ii. In 1924 the sea wall of Sidmouth was destroyed by storms. The inhabitants have since been put to a great deal of expense by the erection of a new one which was necessary in order to save the town from utter extinction. ("The Times" 22 March 1926).
- iii. R.P. III. 619. 640. 515.
- iv. " IV. 160. A.P. 1170 (24).
- v. " III. 518.
- vi. " " 618

how "Owen de Glendour, traitour & rebell, ad ars VIII Villages deins la Fraunchise de la dite Ville & les suburbes d'icelle."

Some towns number among their misfortunes the havoc wrought by fire. Cambridge refers to loss by "sodeine fortune de <sup>i</sup>fire" and a petition from Shrewsbury states <sup>ii</sup>"qe la demy parte du dit Ville fuist ore tarde par fue de fortune ars, ove toutz les biens des Burgeys en ycelle partie esteantz a grand anientisment de tout la Ville." The unfortunate inhabitants of Andover, however, suffered in this respect to an extreme degree for in 1435 "la dite ville & toutz lez Measons, biens & chateux illeog<sup>es</sup> esteantz ---- par sudaigne aventure de fue <sup>iii</sup>farrant arsez & tout outrement destruez."

Pestilence also left its desolating mark on some towns. It is referred to by Lyme <sup>iv</sup>, Truro <sup>v</sup> and Ilchester, <sup>vi</sup> and Lincoln <sup>vii</sup> also speaks of "divers and mony pestilences".

All these misadventures meant, of course, a general decrease

- i. R.P.III 516 A.P.5169 (104).
- ii. " " 618.
- iii. A.P. 4477 (90)
- iv. R.P.III.618.
- v. R.P.III.638 and A.P. 1119 (23)
- vi. " " 619
- vii. A.P. 6083 (122)

in the wealth of these towns which made it impossible for them to answer for their accustomed amounts for farm or taxes.

In certain instances the particular franchise, the profits of which were appropriated to the farm, was in some way interfered with, loss thereby ensuring to the town revenues. Cambridge lost the issues from the assize of bread, wine and ale to the university.<sup>i</sup> The valuable fishing preserves of Carlisle were rudely broken in upon by Lord Dacre and his men.<sup>ii</sup> Dorchester was threatened with the loss of the profits from its balance by a statute of 1429 which ordered that every city, town and borough in the country should have its own common balance in which residents should weigh freely and foreigners on the payment of a small charge.<sup>iii</sup> Finally, whereas Southampton for the payment of its farm depended largely on the "little tolnes" customs on goods sold there, the mayor and burgesses state in 1414<sup>iv</sup> that for the last three years alien merchants have not visited the town, to its consequent deprivation of the said customs.

Allusion has already been made to cases in which the revenue of a town was not drawn from all its inhabitants. This circumstance was a serious misfortune as it was a continual handicap on the municipal resources, from which there was little likelihood

- i. R.P.III.515. A.P.5169 (104).
- ii. " IV. 92. A.P.1154 (24)
- iii. " " 380. A.P.1242 (25)
- iv. " " 53.

of recovery as from a sudden attack of plague or devastation by fire. Lincoln suffered greatly in this respect where about half the city was exempt from contributing to its charges.<sup>i</sup>

Certain towns in the early years of Henry IV were greatly hindered in the payment of their taxes by the unworthy behaviour of foreigners who had settled within their walls. These should have shared in the town and burdens according to the value of their lands, cattle and other goods. Nevertheless, as soon as they had notice of the grant of a tenth or fifteenth<sup>ii</sup> "les ditz foreins .....chasant, amesnent & eloignent lour ditz bestes & emportent lour ditz biens & chateux hors des ditz Villes, jesques al dit Disme, Quinzisme ou Taxe est assesse, & adonques re-amenent lour ditz bestes & reportent lour ditz biens & chateux: Et issint sount ils ~~quis~~<sup>ui</sup> ditz de contributions a ascune tiel Disme, Quinzisme on Taxe ....." It was therefore decreed that the collectors of taxes might have power to distrain these defaulters in any place in the county, either before or after the towns in which they resided had answered for the entire tax, provided that they should not be made to pay twice for the same goods.

One case of unfortunate taxation deserves special notice. This occurred in connection with a little town in Somerset,

i. R.P. IV. 313. A.P. 6024 (121)

ii. " III.619.

variously known as Hatch or West Hatch. It appears that in 1334 some negligent officials carelessly assessed the town twice over, as Hatch at 31/2 and as West Hatch at 33/2 "en manere come ils estoient un Village par soy mesmes appelle Hacche, & un autre Village appelle West Hacche, la on en verite ele est tout un mesme Village, & noun pas deux diverses Villages, sicome il est tout pleinement conuz par tout la pais envyron." This information is furnished by the inhabitants of the town in a petition which they submit in 14<sup>i</sup>20. Thus for nearly eighty years they and their predecessors had been forced to pay the taxes demanded from their entirely imaginary neighbours - "deux foitz chargez... en diverse manere pur un mesme cause." They humbly request the appointment of a commission to verify the truth of their statements and ask that if Hatch and West Hatch are found to be truly one and the same town it may only be charged for the one assessment. They were answered that there was a record of the matter in the exchequer which the barons of the exchequer were given parliamentary authority to examine and determine to the best advantage of both the king and the suitors. Official blundering on this scale might well be placed high among the discouraging factors in municipal enterprise.

The difficulties in connection with the administration of a town's finances are thus revealed as varied and considerable. What course, then, was taken by the local government when it found itself becoming overwhelmed by such problems? The usual proceeding seems to have been for a town to let its payment of farm and taxes get hopelessly in arrears and then for it to petition the king for some alleviation of its burdens. Only one definite instance is furnished by the selected petitions of a town spontaneously making an effort to keep up with its charges. At Southampton, on the failure of the accustomed profits assigned for the farm, a levy was made on the burgesses generally and further amounts were borrowed from some to the extent of £400.<sup>i</sup>

A device sometimes resorted to by the ports when seeking to shelve their financial responsibilities is revealed in a complaint which was made in 1417.<sup>ii</sup> This states that merchants of inland counties have been forced to pay taxes in the ports by which they export and import their goods, according to the value of the same, thereby incurring a double assessment. It is asked that no merchant shall be compelled to pay taxes<sup>except</sup> in the town in which he is well known to reside. In reply, ancient custom in this matter was confirmed.

i. R.P. IV. 53.

ii. " " 114.

Some towns, however, were not lacking in suggestions as to how their financial position might be improved with royal sanction. Lincoln<sup>i</sup> and Winchester<sup>ii</sup> both ask for permission to buy lands in aid of their charges, that is to say, they wish to endow themselves with new "locata" which may be exploited to the permanent benefit of the community. No indication is given of how these impoverished towns proposed to raise the money for these purchases. It is probable, however, that the majority of their inhabitants would be willing to make one handsome subscription towards such an investment if it were understood that this would exempt them in future from continual harrying for smaller sums. Lincoln was ready with other plans for its financial restoration. The mayor and commonalty<sup>iii</sup> ask in 1432 that they may be granted two fairs about the feasts of St. Matthew and St. George. These would yield issues by way of various tolls and profits of justice, besides generally benefitting the city by the attraction of merchants thither. The request was not granted, probably because, in view of the fate of some of the old-established fairs, it was not thought likely that these new ones would prove a success.<sup>iv</sup>

i. R.P. IV. 313. A.P. 6024 (121). R.P. IV. 417.

ii. " III. 640.

iii. " IV. 417.

iv. E. Lipson "An Introduction to the Economic History of England. I. The Middle Ages"(1926) p. 234-235.

i

In 1437 (?) the same city asks that for the next twenty years it may be allowed to ship sixty sacks of wool a year from the ports of Boston or Hull without paying subsidy on the same in aid of its farm. This scheme, for a period of sixteen years, was sanctioned as a conditional clause in the commons' grants of tenths and <sup>ii</sup> fifteenths.

The rest of the towns in financial straits merely petition for an outright reduction of their charges. Their wretched condition is generally conveyed in some variant of the phrase "en point d'estre perduz." As for Melcombe, "la dit Ville ne fuist unges si desolate, ne les gentz en icell unqore demurantz en si graunt poverte.... come ils sount a present." <sup>iii</sup> while at Shoreham and Rottingdean the inhabitants "sount ensy empoverez q'ils n'ount a peine de vivre." <sup>iv</sup> In the event of the required concessions not being made, immediate and absolute desolation is confidently foretold. Nearly every town refers to the accomplished departure of a number of its inhabitants and anticipates for an early date the inevitable removal of its whole population. At Yarmouth <sup>v</sup>

i. A. P. 6083 (122).      ii. R.P. N. 503. V. 5, 37, 68, 142, 228.

iii R.P. III. 616 and A.P. 6246 (125).

<sup>iv</sup> iv. " IV. 159. A.P. 1169 (24)

<sup>v</sup> v. " " 160. A.P. 1170 (24)

v. " III. 620.



"graunt partie du poeple qe soloit enhabiter mesmee la Ville s'en ount departez hors d'icelle Ville & leur enhabitent aillours & ascune de eux ount emportez toutz leur measons & enhabitacions hors du dit Ville, & les edifient & alienent es autres lieux, si qe les avaunt ditz sommes sont emportables as panges et poveres gentz illeogues a ore remaignantz; Et si remedie sur ce le plus tost ne soit mys, y faudra toutz les enhabitantz mesme la Ville a present de verraie necessite & poverte departer hors de la Ville suis dit, en final destructione de mesme la Ville....."

The ports endeavour especially to recommend themselves to the king's grace by pointing out that their distress is his loss also. A number of them refer to their national importance as a defence against enemies "qelle fronture vers le overt Meer de tout la pais environ, & busoigne tres hautement estre enhabiter pur resister la malice des Enemys si ascunes y purpoisent illeogues armer, qe Dieu defende." <sup>i</sup> Melcombe asks for particular consideration "considerantz le grand Perde qe purroit estre a Roy de ses Custumes & subsides qe amountent par an a mille marcz a meins en la Port du dit Ville, a cause q'est verisemblable, qe Merchauntz ne vuillent venir au dit Port en apres, come ils soloient faire

ovesqe lour Merchandises, si la dit Ville serroit desolat par encheson des importables Charges avaunt ditz." <sup>i</sup> The burgesses of Lyme, who include among their financial burdens the expense of rebuilding their port which has been destroyed by sea, confess that this cannot be accomplished without the king's aid, but add as an encouragement to royal indulgence "lequele Porte, s'il purra estre fait serra graund profit.... a notre dit Seigneur le Roy." <sup>ii</sup>

The replies to these petitions on the whole justify the statement "The Kings of England in Former ages were found to be Merciful and Gracious Lords to the Inhabitants of their Towns." <sup>iii</sup> In some cases Commissioners were appointed to verify the truth of the complaints made and to re-assess a town at its depreciated value. The townsfolk were then allowed for a certain period to pay at the reduced rates suggested in these reports. In this way Lyme, <sup>iv</sup> Melcombe and <sup>v</sup> Truro were all <sup>vi</sup> granted <sup>^</sup> a rebatement of farm and taxes in 14<sup>1</sup>20 for a term of ten years.

- i. R.P. III. 639.
- ii. " " 640.
- iii. T. Madox. "Firma Burgi" (1726) p. 288. Chap. XI. sect. VI.
- iv. R.P. III. 640.
- v. " " 639.
- vi. " " 638.

A similar inquest was held at Melcombe in 1430.<sup>i.</sup> Mablethorp was granted entire respite from taxation for two years<sup>ia.</sup> and Andover secured like exemption for ten years as one of the towns specially mentioned in the Commons' grant during that period.<sup>ii.</sup> Winchester<sup>iii.</sup> Southampton<sup>iv.</sup> and Lincoln<sup>v.</sup> were given permission to acquire lands for the common profit. Lincoln was also granted a commercial privilege in aid of its farm<sup>vi.</sup> The ecclesiastical inhabitants of Oxford were ordered to make their legal contribution to the taxes levied on the town.<sup>vii.</sup>

The practice of granting a town relief for a limited period only, receives an interesting comment from the inhabitants of Truro.<sup>viii.</sup> They refer in 1410<sup>ix.</sup> to such concessions made to the burgesses of the town by Richard II. and Henry IV. and say "Et par cause q'ils ont la dite Graunt sinon par Patent pur certains ans, ils ne fount ascuns Reparations de leur Measons eins purposent de guepre la Ville, & leur enhabiter en autry lieu".

i. A.P.6388 (128) and R.P.IV.468.A.P.6267(126).

ia. R.P.IV.385.A.P.1245(25).

ii. R.P.IV.487,502, V.5,37,68.

iii. R.P.III.640.

iv. R.P.IV.53.

v. R.P.IV.313.A.P.6024(121)R.P.IV.417.

vi. R.P.IV.503. V., 5. 37, 68, 142, 228.

vii. R.P.III.639.

viii. A.P.1119(23).

ix. R.P.IV. 364. Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.) 19/26.

Accordingly they ask for a perpetual reduction of their charges, but only received an extension of the former grant for another ten years. At the end of this period they submit another petition <sup>i.</sup> including the same remark and the same request. They were given no definite reply.

This indication of the inefficiency of temporary relief is corroborated by the fact that from 1433 onwards the commons always except a certain sum from their grants of tenths and fifteenths which is to be remitted in aid of towns, cities or boroughs which are desolate or impoverished or over-greatly charged for the said taxes. On some occasions certain towns are specially mentioned which are to be exempted either from a definite fraction of the tax or from the whole of it. Of these Lincoln is always one and Yarmouth is always included from 1442.

The financial difficulties of a number of towns are thus revealed by their confessed incapacity to meet the usual demands made upon them. In a few instances their petitions show the limited nature of their revenues in their inability to cope with any extraordinary expenditure which they found to be necessary. These cases ~~all~~ concern the carrying out of certain repairs. About the year 1429 <sup>ii.</sup> Dover was in danger of fatal inundation.

i. A.P.1119(23).

ii. R.P.IV.364. Parl. & Co. Procs (Chanc.) 19/26.

Its sea wall had been badly injured by severe tempests and at high tide the water rose half way up ~~it~~ it. Nevertheless, the men of the town "ne sont en poair de reparailler le dit mure de leur proprez biens". Similarly the streets of Gloucester by 1495<sup>i</sup> were badly in need of repair bu the "Bailiffs and Cominaltee been in grete poverttee by reson of grete costs and chargez whiche they have borne and yet doo dailly for the same Towne, and have noo Landes, Tenements, Rents nor other yerely returnes in comyn whereof thei mow make and susteyn the pavements of the seid Stretis". Both these towns ask for permission to raise the funds required from those using the convenience which is in need of renovation. Dover was allowed to raise certain tolls from people and beasts passing in and out of its walls. The petition from Gloucester was refused but a similar one from Northampton was granted in 1431.<sup>ii</sup> The method of procedure suggested in both cases and allowed in the latter was that every tenant occupying a house which abutted on one of the main streets should be forced to pave and repair the road lying just in front of his tenement up to the middle of the way. In Northampton the occupants of houses surrounding the market place were only to be held responsible for a distance of thirty feet in front of their residences; the remaining area in the centre was to be paved and repaired at the common expense.

i. R.P.V.338. A.P.5704(115).

ii. R.P.IV.373. A.P.1239 (25).

It is clear that any irresponsible action on the part of the town officials engaged in the administration of municipal finances thus uncertain and limited would bring a town to speedy ruin. Reference has already been made to the dissatisfaction evinced by the townsfolk of Shrewsbury with the way in which their farm was collected by the bailiffs and the consequent modification of the town constitution. Some of the provisions established in 1433<sup>1</sup> are especially interesting as they indicate a few of the directions in which financial abuses were likely to occur. The bailiffs are entirely removed from any actual contact with the town revenues. The town rent is to be collected by a Sergeant appointed by a body of twenty-five burgesses which also nominates the bailiffs themselves. He is to pay it straight into the common exchequer which is to be governed by six men - also chosen in the above manner. The immediate delivery of the rent into the exchequer is significantly emphasised and another illuminating charge is added that "the Bailiffs that been, or in tyme ~~ss~~ comyng shall bee, abbrege ne pardon no maner of dute that longeth to the said Cominalte, withoute avise and assente of the seid VI men or iii of hem atte the leest". The accounts of the bailiffs and the six men are to be rendered before auditors who are to be elected by the commonalty and not "by bille afore contrevd in disceit of the seid Comyns". The common seal is not to be used without the consent of twenty-four burgesses, and twelve burgesses chosen by the bailiffs and commonalty are to act as life-long assistants to the

1. R.P.1V.476. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) Roll 22.

bailiffs. The necessary expenses of the bailiffs in their official capacity are to be allowed them from the common fund "so that the seid expenses and costages been overseen by the seid VI men, that they be truly expendet in maner above seid, or by three of hem atte the leest, and ellys they never to be allowed thereof."

A later petition <sup>i.</sup> affords the satisfactory information that these provisions, with a few alterations, were entirely successful in re-establishing the town government on a sound financial basis.

The difficulty, and in some cases the impossibility, of straining a town's resources to cover its ordinary expenses or incertain instances to provide for some extra outlay, is thus revealed as the skeleton in many a town chest.

A number of the selected petitions concern the regulation of various industries. They all contain indications of the weakening of the levelling control exercised by the guilds. For instance in 1404 <sup>ii. the goldsmiths'</sup> <sub>^</sub> mystery of London asserted an ancient right to complete supervision of the cutler's craft which, it affirmed, had lately been making the gold and silver ornamentations on its productions in an illegal manner. Notwithstanding the protests of the cutlers <sup>iii.</sup> who declared that the goldsmiths had only accused them

1. R.P.V.121. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) Roll 22.

ii. R.P.111.536.

iii. R.P.111.536.A.P.5070(102).

of untrue workmanship in order to secure the government of their craft, the goldsmiths won their suit. This enveloping by a greater craft of a lesser allied one meant that the new guild thus formed was only a ~~mere~~ cloak for the introduction of capitalist methods of employment. The members engaged in the humbler branches of the craft were reduced to the position of dependents on the plutocrats of the industry.

The London guilds also suffered from work done out of the reach of their supervision in the suburbs of the city. They assert <sup>that</sup> the consequence of this immunity is the production of badly made articles. The men of the artifice and mystery of girdlers indignantly protest <sup>i.</sup> against the scandal caused by such unregulated activities in the articles of their trade for "les acheteurs d'icell leur mesmes excusent es diverses villes du Roialme as leur acheteurs, q'ils mesmes cell Ceintures ensi ceverez avoient achetez & furent ceverez en la Cite. suis dite." They ask that the guardians of their craft may have power to search all such work done in London and for a league round about, but this was only granted to them within the city itself.

Similar complaints were made in 1423 <sup>ii.</sup> against embroidery issuing from the London suburbs. It is said that "swiche warkes, so untrewely made by swiche persones aforesaid, dredying the serche of the wardens of Brauderie in the said Citie of London, kepen and

i. R.P.IV. 73.

ii. R.P.IV. 225.



senden unto the fayres of Steresbrugg, Ely, Oxenford and Salisbury and ther thei outre hem, to greet deseit of our soverain Lord the Kyng and al his peple." Petition is made that all such false embroidery may be declared forfeit to the king and <sup>that</sup> the wardens of the embroiderers' craft in London may have power of search in the above fairs. The first request was granted, so that the forfeiture were made to the lord of the franchise within which the untrue work was found.

The weavers' craft was troubled by the same problem. Members forsook their residences in the city<sup>i.</sup> "for they will nocht be under correccion when they make untrewe cloth in wirking which thing ys ageins pe comone profitte of alle". Moreover, as the remaining craftsmen complain, these delinquents "comen and goen in to pe seid Citée and taken aweye the profites advantage pat shuld falle to pe seid bisechers."

Another factor which contributed towards the downfall of the guilds was the influence of foreign competition, either the importation of goods manufactured abroad, or the unrestricted activities of alien workers within the country. The silkwomen and throwsters of London complain in <sup>ii</sup> 1455 that of late the Lombards and other aliens have only brought manufactured silk articles to this realm and no usable raw silk at all, which has caused "grete ydelnes amongs yonge

i. A.P. 7494 (150)

ii. R.P. V. 325. A.P. 1410 (29)

Gentilwymmen and oyer apprentices of the same Craftes and also leying  
 down of many good and  
 notable Housholdes of them that have occupied the same  
 Craftes." It was accordingly decreed that for the next five  
 years penalties should be imposed on any merchants importing  
 such manufactured silk articles with the exception of corsets  
 from Genoa.

The weavers of London were handicapped by the rivalry  
 of alien workers. Edward III had granted these exemption  
 from the native guild with the result, as its members bewail  
 in 1406 <sup>i.</sup> that "les ditz aliens supplantent & preignent les  
 profitz du dit mestier & les ditz suppliantz portent les  
 charges". They therefore ask that the aliens may be compelled  
 to join and support their guild. The matter was committed to  
 the king's council which decided in favour of the natives. <sup>ii.</sup>  
 However, the judgment seems to have had little practical effect  
 for in 1414 <sup>iii.</sup> they re-submit the same petition and ask that  
 it may be put into force seeing that it was granted on the  
 previous occasion. The question was again referred to the  
 council. Some years later the alien weavers present their  
 case <sup>iv.</sup> quoting the grant they had received from Edward III.

i. R.P.IV.600.

ii. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 13/13.

iii. R.P.IV.50.

iv. A.P.6094(122) about the year 1421.

and protesting that the native weavers of London by abettment of the Chamberlain have lately been refusing to allow them the free exercise of their craft. Subsequent references in the city records indicate that the matter continued to be disputed.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence of a more direct application of capitalist methods to industry is contained in petitions issuing from districts which were specially engaged in the manufacture of cloth. Thus the commonalty of Coventry states in 1416<sup>11</sup> that the dyers of the town have combined to raise their charges without in any way enhancing the value of their services. They also engage in the manufacture of cloth themselves and reserve all the best dyes for their own productions. The petitioners ask that a body consisting of two drapers, one woder and one dyer shall be elected at the same time as the mayor to supervise the conduct of this craft. They also request that no dyer shall manufacture cloths for sale. The petition was refused, the committee suggested in it being obviously impracticable. But it presents a vivid picture of the early growth of some of the seeds of capitalism, showing how men engaged in the latter stages of an industry endeavoured to gain control over all the rest by combining to hold it up entirely until the other workers were forced to accept their lead on their own terms. Further

i. Calendar of London Letter Books. K.pp.150,166.(Ed.R.R.Sharpe)

ii. R.P.IV.75.

they are to be seen connecting themselves with two allied processes, controlling the one in order to benefit their own interests in the other.

Other petitions afford a glimpse of the worsted manufacturers of Norwich attempting to gain control of the industry throughout the whole county. They state in 1410 <sup>i.</sup> that there has been a falling off in the quality of goods produced which has caused great dissatisfaction to their foreign purchasers. Accordingly they secure that for seven years the town officials shall search all the cloths which it was customary to bring to Norwich for sale. In 1442 <sup>ii.</sup> the complaint is repeated and for three years the weavers' craft of Norwich was permitted to elect four wardens who would choose two more from craftsmen outside the city, all of whom would supervise the industry. Here apparently the county rebelled against this aggression on the part of Norwich for when in 1445 <sup>iii.</sup> the above grant was renewed the county secured the direct election of four wardens of its own. The desire for large-scale organisation is thus seen stirring in the breast of the incipient capitalist.

The question of labour is touched upon by some towns. The

i. R.P.111.637.

ii. R.P.V.60.

iii. R.P.V.105. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.)50/1.

government's policy being to keep as many people as possible engaged in agricultural labour, a statute was passed in 1406 forbidding any child to be apprenticed unless his parents ~~paid~~ had 20/- a year in land or rents. This measure was of course a hindrance to the capitalist employer who desired to have a large body of cheap floating labour at his disposal. The town authorities of London protest in 1429 <sup>i.</sup> that they have been vexed on account of this statute against all their ancient privileges in the matter by which they could take anyone as an apprentice provided he were not already a labourer in husbandry. They received confirmation of their old liberties during the king's pleasure.

The inhabitants of Oxford were especially exercised by this problem. They declare that because of the limitations imposed by the above statute "the seid lay people that is there of dyvers craftes, may not bere the charges aforesaid, ne serve and please the Clergie and the Universite that ia there, wherefor many Scolers withdrawe them and voide the seid Universite, seyng that they may not have artificers to serve theym, to perpetuel anyentesyng of the seid Towne and grete hyndryng of the seid Clergie". <sup>ii.</sup> Two petitions were presented by them, in 1449 <sup>ii.</sup> and 1466 <sup>iii.</sup> asking that they might enjoy the privileges of London in this respect but on both occasions thear prayers were denied.

1. R.P.IV. 354. A.P.4238(85).

ii. R.P.V. 205. A.P.6599(132).

iii. R.P.V. 337. A.P. 1335(28).

It is clear from all these petitions that forces were at work in the sphere of industry which were inspired by a very different conception of its functions from the true mediaeval view which is set forth by the London silk-women who declare that "it is pleasyng to God that all his Creatures be set in vertueux occupation and labour accordyng to their degrees, and convenient for thoo places where their abode is, to the nourishing of vertue and eschewyng of vices and ydelnes."<sup>i.</sup>

Some idea of the actual aspect of towns at this period may be gathered from their parliamentary petitions. Mention is frequently made of their enclosing walls, generally with reference to the expense of their upkeep. Southampton numbers this among its chief burdens,<sup>ii.</sup> Coventry<sup>iii.</sup> and Norwich<sup>iv.</sup> suggest the allocation of certain fines for this purpose while Colchester<sup>v.</sup> cannot afford parliamentary representation when surrounding itself with a new wall. At York the Archbishop was responsible for the repair of a certain portion of the city wall which abutted on some of his free tenements. The mayor and commonalty

i. R.P.V.325. A.P.1410(29).

ii. R.P.IV.53.

iii. R.P.IV.75.

iv. R.P.III.637.

v. A.P.5013(101).

complain about the year 1422 <sup>i.</sup> that his recent neglect to perform his obligations has damaged them to the extent of £2,000. The evils entailed by the absence of such fortifications are revealed in a petition concerning Plymouth. <sup>ii.</sup> It occupied of course an exceptionally exposed position on the coast opposite Brittany, the home of pirates, and for lack of a wall it was frequently burnt, and its inhabitants despoiled of their goods or they themselves carried off and kept in close confinement until ransom had been paid for them.

Streets with a drain running down the centre are described by towns seeking means to renovate them. <sup>iii.</sup> The condition of those at Gloucester was probably typical of a great many, <sup>iv.</sup> for there "the Stretes of the seid Towne been gretely broken, and full febly pavyd, and full perilous for the King's liege peple <sup>to</sup> ryde and to goo upon, insomoch that diverse of the Kings peple have be gretely hurt often tymes and in grete perill of their lyves, as well men of grete worship as other meen persones."

One or two references to public buildings are a slight indication of the growth of municipal prosperity and dignity.

- i. A.P.7623(153).
- ii. R.P.V.18. Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.) 23/10.
- iii. Northampton R.P.IV.373. A.P.1239(25). Gloucester R.P.V.338. A.P.5704(115).
- iv. The following towns petitioned in parliament under Edward IV on this subject. Gloucester R.P.VI.49. Canterbury 177. Taunton 179. Cirencester 180. Southampton 180.

Mention <sup>i</sup> is made of the guildhalls of London <sup>i.</sup> and Shrewsbury <sup>ii.</sup>  
 The mayor and commonalty of Bristol acquired some land from  
 Richard ii. whereon they built a hospital for the poor concerning  
 whose foundation they submit a petition in 1427 (?) <sup>iii.</sup> The same  
 town also seeks permission to erect a common hall for the sale of  
 cloth <sup>iv.</sup> and Norwich refers to its "Worstede Selde" <sup>v.</sup> which was  
 used for the same purpose.

A few statistics of municipal population are given. They  
 are however of doubtful value as most of them occur in requests  
 for the alleviation of financial burdens and are therefore more  
 in the nature of picturesque representations of the paucity of  
 taxpayers. An extreme example may be found in a petition from  
 the men in the towns on Hayling Island submitted in 1406 <sup>vi.</sup>  
 in which they state with dramatic simplicity "qe a peyn est lesse  
 en ascun des villes suis ditz un homme". Lincoln declares in  
 1426 <sup>vii.</sup> and 1432 <sup>viii.</sup> that it contains not more than two  
 hundred inhabitants who can contribute to its charges and in

- i. R.P.111.429.A.P.6075(122).
- ii. A.P.6919(139).
- iii. A.Ps.4770-73(96).
- iv. A.P.4789(96).
- v. R.P.111.637.
- vi. A.P.1115(23) this petition is quoted in another submitted  
 in 1407.R.P.111.620.
- vii. R.P.IV.313. A.P.6024(121).
- viii. R.P.IV. 417.



1437 (?) <sup>i.</sup> they have dwindled to one hundred. At Shoreham  
 in 1421 <sup>ii.</sup> the population had decreased from more than five  
 hundred to about thirtysix while there were only eight burgesses  
 and tenants at Melcombe in 1410. <sup>iii.</sup>

Two other interesting references to this matter are made in  
 petitions concerning the condition of industry. The London  
 native weavers in 1428 (?) bewail <sup>iv.</sup> the fact that whereas there  
 used to be three hundred looms in London and Southwark there  
 are now only seventeen, and the silkwomen state <sup>v.</sup> in 1485 that  
 there are more than a thousand of them engaged in this manufacture.

The petitions from towns do not reflect any of the communal  
 interest in culture which undoubtedly flourished in many of them  
 during this period. <sup>vi.</sup> The condition of education in London is,  
 however, the subject of a supplication from four priests in 1447. <sup>vii</sup>  
 After deploring the great scarcity of schools in the country

- i. A.P.6083(122).
- ii. R.P.IV.159. A.P.1169(24).
- iii. R.P.III.639.
- iv. A.P.7494(150).
- v. R.P.V.325. A.P.1410(29).
- vi. A.S.Green "Town Life" in the Fifteenth Century" Vol.II.Chap.1.
- vii. R.P.V. 137.

generally they say that many young people come up to the city for their learning either for lack of teachers in their own counties or in order to take advantage of the charity of lords, merchants and others which is more plenteously bestowed in London than elsewhere. Under these circumstances it is desirable that there should be a good number of schools there "For where there is grete nombre of Lerneris, and fewe Techers, and all the Lerneris be compelled to goo to the same fewe Techers, and to noon other, the Maisters waxen riche in money, and the Lerneris pouere in comyng, as experience openly shewith, aynst all vertue and ordre of well puplik." The petitioners ask that they may each of them appoint in his own parish "a persone sufficiently lerned in gramer to hold and exercise a Schole in the same science of gramer, and it there to teche to all that will lerne." Such power was granted to them provided it received due ecclesiastical sanction.

Altogether the main bearing of these petitions is on the adversities which might be encountered by XV Century towns in the conduct of their more domestic affairs. They reveal chiefly the difficulties experienced by some in the maintenance of the mere existence of self-government and the problems faced by many in connection with the administration of their revenues and the supervision of industry. Finally they are in themselves a striking witness to the vitality of the corporate spirit which could produce such lively memorials of misfortune.

CHAPTER III

TOWNS AND TRADE.

Mediaeval towns were independent but not isolated. All may be seen occupying relative positions along the routes of trade. Their parliamentary petitions reveal some of the ways in which these commercial connections were maintained. For example when Andover was burnt in 1435 and consequently petitioned for temporary exemption from taxation,<sup>i</sup> it appears chiefly concerned at the damage done to itself as an indispensable factor in the means of internal communication. For the king's subjects dwelling in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire pass through this town on their way up to London and "entre la Citée de Novel Saresbirs<sup>&</sup> la ville de Basyn<sup>g</sup>stoke<sup>g</sup> qe sont par xxx leaucz distauncz neste ascun ville pur easer on herbergier les lieges suisditz." The ready exemption which was granted to Andover for a period of ten years indicated<sup>s</sup> the importance of towns which were thus situated on the main roads. Probably a good deal of the traffic which passed through Andover was connected with the wool trade for which it was a noted centre.<sup>ii</sup>

A reference to the cost of transporting wool is made by the burgesses of Lewes.<sup>iii</sup> They affirm that one of the disadvantages of

- i. A.P. 4477 (90).
- ii. Victoria County History. Hampshire vol.V. p.476.
- iii. R.P. III 497.

the tronage of wools being fixed at Chichester only, is that the merchants round about Lewes "ne p̄urrount my carier par terre les ditz Leynes a le Poyse, saunz graundes costages & charges importables." In view however, of other more impartial evidence as to the cheapness of carriage during this period,<sup>i</sup> it is probable that the above statement was simply due to the business instincts of the petitioners.

The importance of rivers as a means of communication is demonstrated by a number of petitions originating in towns situated on the Severn.<sup>ii</sup> In 1411 Bristol and Gloucester together with other neighbouring inhabitants join in a complaint against the violent interruption of the free passage of traffic up this river. It is stated that the men of these parts are accustomed to transport timber and fuel on rafts, both for reasons of economy and because of the lowness of the water in summertime. But lately certain persons from Bewdley, Shropshire and Wales, who are in possession of certain large boats called "trowes", have banded themselves together to prevent any transport of goods on the river except by the hiring of these boats. Accordingly on the vigil of St. Michael last past they lay in wait near Bewdley for certain men of Gloucester who were taking fuel to that town on rafts as aforesaid, and on their appearance these

- i. J. Thorold Rogers "A History of Agriculture and Prices in England" (1882) vol IV. p.710-11.
- ii. R.P. III. 665.

ruffians "ove graund force & armes pristeront les governours del dit dragge appelle flote, & eux firent de trenchier en peces le dit flote en le dit Ryver, on autrement lour testes serroient illoeqes decoupees." Thus all the fuel and other goods were lost in the river and such traffic is in danger of being entirely arrested "pur singular profit de duzse on vygnt persones, qe Dieu defend." The petitioners ask that the free passage up and down the river may be confirmed and a penalty ordained for anyone disturbing it. In reply, however, the previous usages in the matter were merely ratified in general.

A similar complaint was made by the burgesses of Tewkesbury in <sup>i</sup>1429. They refer to the position of their town on the bank of the Severn "whiche Rever is comen to alle your poeple, oure soverain Lorde, for to carye, recarye and lede, withynne the streme of the saide Rever, in botees, trowes and other wise, alle maner of Marchaundise and othur godus and catelles to Bristowe, and to every partie adjoynaunt to the same Rever." Nevertheless when certain of the said burgesses had lately endeavoured so to take some of their boats to Bristol laden with wheat, malt and other corn and goods to the value of £500 their progress was forcibly arrested in the neighbourhood of the Forest of Dean. For "there have come grete multitude of peple and rowtes of the Comens of the same Forest and of the Hundredes of Bledislowe and Wesebury, with greete ryot and strengthe in maner of Werre, as Enemyes

of a strange land, and have with force dispoiled the same persones of the seide vesselles, and take fro hém alle here corne and goodes withynne the same vesselles, and hem maneshud to bee dede, if they made any resistence ~~or~~ any sewte or querell therefore, to grate annyentesyng and enporischyng of hem and oppression to alle the Cuntre there adjoynaunt." Letters of privy seal have been of no avail to stop this lawlessness. Royal sanction is therefore sought of a certain legal process by which the petitioners may recover the value of such pillaged goods. This was granted.

This river traffic was not only interrupted by violent interference. A complaint is made in 1400 that Gloucester and Worcester exact certain unlawful tolls from boats merely seeking to carry their cargoes past these towns, not to land them there. This protest is repeated in 1411 when Bridgew<sup>n</sup>orth is also condemned for similar aggression. The goods which are specially mentioned are victuals in general and wine and oil. In answer to the first protest the king commanded that the matter should be settled according to previous custom, merely expressing a desire that there should be no extortion. On the second occasion however, representatives from the towns concerned were ordered to come before the council to show by what authority they indulged in these practices.

The importance of maintaining a clear passage on navigable rivers

is further indicated in one or two petitions from the authorities of London concerning the Thames and Medway. Apparently there was some ambiguity with regard to the city's responsibilities under the clause in the Great Charter commanding all dams and other obstacles to be pulled down in all the rivers of the kingdom in order to avoid the destruction of fish and to preserve a free passage for boats. In 1414<sup>ii</sup> the mayor, aldermen and commons refer to this statute and state that the conservancy of the Thames and Medway had always been granted to the City authorities. Nevertheless obstructions not only remain in those rivers, but have also begun to appear in the Lee. They ask that the total destruction of all these nuisances may be decreed. This was granted and also that the Mayor of London should be included in a Commission for the Conservancy of the Lee.

The efficiency of the London government in the performance of these duties was, however, severely criticised in a petition submitted by the fishers of the Thames in 1421.<sup>iii</sup> They declare that in spite of repeated notification it has utterly neglected to do anything whatever. Whereupon the Mayor of London was ordered to make enquiry ~~with~~<sup>into</sup> the condition of the river four times a year and to take due action in the matter on pain of

- i. R.P.III 663.
- ii. " IV 36.
- iii. " " 132 A.P.7167 (144)

forfeiting to the King 100 marks at every default. However  
 in 1427<sup>i</sup> the mayor and commonalty themselves complain of  
 the bad state of the Thames and Medway, but account for it by  
 the fact that the execution of the appropriate statutes has  
 been given to Commissioners and J.P.'s<sup>who</sup> cannot do anything as the  
 said rivers are of the liberty of the City and their supervision  
 belongs to its mayor or guardian. Request is made that this  
 franchise may be definitely confirmed. In reply, the suplicants  
 were ordered to put their case in detail before the King, showing  
 exactly how far the privilege was supposed to extend.

Another petition to the same effect which they present in 1439,<sup>ii</sup>  
 was granted until the next parliament, specially<sup>if</sup> for the Thames  
 and Medway.

These petitions thus indicate that easily staged roads  
 and well preserved rivers were the essential conditions for  
 internal communication.

The centres of commerce to which these roads and rivers  
 led were the weekly markets and the periodic fairs. In the  
 former was concentrated local trade, especially in goods of a  
 perishable nature, while at the latter the more elaborate  
 products of home industries and foreign goods were sold. The  
 inhabitants of Andover state with pride<sup>iii</sup> that "en la dite

i. R.P. IV 330.

ii. R.P.V.34. A.P. 1329 (27).

iii. A.P. 4477 (90)



ville de Andevere fuist chescun samedi de lan le melior marcat de dite Counte de Suthampton a graunt ease & avantage de toutz enhabitantz environ la dite ville". When the town was burnt in 1436 the inconvenience caused by the loss of such a facility for trade was felt to be one of the most serious consequences.

Not only were these markets and fairs a direct stimulus to commerce, but they were also an indirect source of income to those possessing them. Rents, tolls and the profits of justice were the chief constituents of the revenue which they afforded. It was for this reason that the impoverished city of Lincoln asks in 1432<sup>i</sup> that it may be granted two fairs, one to be held for ten days before the feast of St. Matthew and fifteen days after, the other for thirteen days before the feast of St. George and eight days after. This request was not granted, probably out of consideration for the failing fortunes of St. Botolph's fair.<sup>ii</sup>

Dorchester had a peculiar franchise in this respect,<sup>iii</sup> that was, to weigh in its town balance according to the standard of the exchequer all things weighable bought or sold in markets and fairs within the borough and twelve leagues radius.

i. R.P. IV. 417.

ii. A Calendar of London Letter Books I p. 159.

iii. E. Lipson "An Introduction to the Economic History of England. I" (1926) p. 234.

iiii. R.P. IV. 360. A.P. 1242 (25).

The charges made for this service were allocated to the payment of the town's farm. When a statute was passed in 1429 ordering every city and town to have its own common balance, Dorchester secured that its special privilege should remain undisturbed thereby.

The complaint made in 1423<sup>i</sup> of the bad embroidery which was produced in the London suburbs away from the supervision of the London Broiderers' Guild, mentions that these inferior articles were sent to the fairs of Stourbridge, Mly, Oxford and Salisbury to be sold. The first of these was the greatest of all English fairs and valuable and rich embroidery was one class of wares for which it was chiefly renowned.<sup>ii</sup>

Permanent provisions were made in some towns exclusively for the sale of cloth.<sup>iii</sup> Norwich refers to its "Worstedes-  
Selde" to which all the worsted weavers in the district were wont to bring their goods. There they were sold to merchants of the city, other native traders or aliens. Bristol petitions about the year 1421<sup>iv</sup> that it may erect a similar hall to be conducted on the same lines as the Bakewell Hall in London -<sup>v</sup>

- i. R.P. IV. 255.
- ii. E.Lipson "Economic History" (ut supra) p.233.
- iii. R.P. III 637-8
- iv. A.P. 4789 (96)
- v. Later Blackwell Hall.

the most famous of these centres. The Mayor and burgesses affirm the desirability of such regulation of the sales of cloth for otherwise "la custume ent due est enbesile du Roi & du la dite ville a cause qe lez ditz foreins & estrange<sup>1</sup>s y gisoient en lieux secretz ove leur ditz draps & laynes & en tiel manere est le Roi disceive de sa dit custume & auxi plusours gentils repairantz & veignantz al dite ville pur y acchater tielx draps pur leur lyvere en tiel manere sont auxi disceivez a cause de leur ditz secretz lieux a plusours disconuz on tielx maneres draps on laynes soloient y estre venduz a leur grande damage".

It is clear from these petitions that a Lancastrian town government as such was very closely concerned in the conduct of trade.

The misfortunes complained of by some towns were connected with points of merchant law. Lancaster deplores<sup>1</sup> the fact that whereas it was the chief and most ancient town of Lancashire "a la quel Burgh y ad grande confluence & concours de peple, sibien des marchandes denizens come estrange<sup>1</sup>s & d'autres & avant ses heures ad estre pur la greindre partie enhabitez des marchantz," these prosperous times have been drawing to an end. The reason for this is that the mayor and bailiffs have no power to receive recognisances of debt according to statute merchant. Consequently merchants who have failed to recover money owed to them in the town have refrained from coming there with their goods. Request is therefore made that the mayor and bailiffs

and a sub-clerk to be nominated periodically by the King may be empowered to receive all such recognisances. This petition was granted.

A commercial lawsuit troubled the town of Sandwich early in the reign of Henry V. About the year 1413 the goods of a certain Katharine Kalewartes, a widow of Flanders, were captured at sea by some Englishmen, in spite of the truce which was then in existence between the two countries.<sup>i</sup> The purloined wares were landed in England at Sandwich of which town some of the captors at any rate were natives.<sup>ii</sup> Katharine petitioned the Chancellor for restitution of her stolen property or its value which she put at £80.<sup>iii</sup> Accordingly in obedience to a royal mandate the mayor and bailiffs of Sandwich arrested the robbers and others into whose hands the goods had passed. The next incident of the case was the release of all the prisoners before any restitution had been made. Exactly where lay the responsibility for this act cannot be ascertained. In July 1413 the King, indignantly asserting that the mayor and bailiffs had done it on their own authority commanded that the £80. should be levied on their personal possessions.<sup>i</sup> However, a further enquiry into the matter was instituted in 1414<sup>iv</sup> for the mayor, bailiff and gaoler

- i. C.P.R. 1413-16. p.110.
- ii. " " " p.223.
- iii. A.P's 15127, 15128 (303)
- iv. C.P.R. 1413-16 p. 223.

having recently appeared before the King in Chancery "the mayor and bailiff asserted that the gaoler delivered the prisoners and he asserted that they did." Finally an order was issued on 8 May 1415<sup>i</sup> that the £80. should be levied on the people of Sandwich generally. This drastic measure called forth a petition from the men of the town in the parliament which met in November.<sup>ii</sup> According to this the stolen goods had been landed near, not at Sandwich, and of these only about £40. worth had actually been brought into the town. This had been immediately arrested by the town officials in whose charge it still remained ready to be handed over to Katharine. (No reference is made to any dealings with the captors). Her assertion that the value of her goods taken to Sandwich was £80. is absurd and the royal mandate that this sum should be levied on its inhabitants without allowing them any opportunity of stating their case is contrary to the Great Charter and other ancient statutes. It is requested that all proceedings may be suspended until Katharine's statement has been proved according to common law. The King answered that the matter should be settled in accordance with the form and effect of the truce between England and Flanders. The unsatisfactory nature of this reply evoked another petition from the town in the next parliament in 1416.<sup>iii</sup> In it the inhabitants point out that the truces required that such goods or their value should be restored and the whole point of the present

i. C.P.R. 1413-16 p.334.

ii. R.P. IV. 67.

iii. " "91 A p 1145 (23)

dispute was of course exactly what the value of the goods amounted to. They complain that another order has been issued for the levy of £80. on the town and ask that a commission may be appointed to enquire into the details of the matter, so that any of Katherine's possessions which may be discovered shall be restored to her on their real value. They were again answered that restitution should be made according to the form of the truces. It is probable that the men of Sandwich had to pay the whole amount. From their own petitions it appears very likely that the £40. which they asserted was the value of all Katharine's goods really only represented the portion they had managed to preserve after the other half had been irretrievably disposed of among themselves.

The attitude taken up by Sandwich towards the commercial delinquencies of some of its inhabitants demonstrates the necessity there was of providing special judicial facilities for merchants, including such as Lancaster desired to exploit for its own advantage.

A number of petitions reveal London as prominent in the possession of special commercial privileges. In 1400<sup>i</sup> the mayor, aldermen and commonalty secure the confirmation<sup>ii</sup> of their

- i. A.P. 6080 (122)
- ii. C.Ch.R. 1341-1417.p.403.Confirmation of letters patent of 2 Edward III. See C.P.R. 1334-38 p.460.

ancient liberties that alien merchants shall sell their goods within forty days, shall not lodge in companies by themselves but go to host with Englishmen and shall not buy or sell between themselves within the liberty of the city. A complaint was made in 1406<sup>i</sup> that this last restriction had been extended to include native merchants from other parts of England, who protest that unless it be removed they will cease from coming to London with their goods. Their wishes were acceded to, but for a short period only for in 1407<sup>ii</sup> the Londoners promptly reassert their rights and obtain the ratification of their former privileges, saving that any subject of the realm might buy goods wholesale from foreign merchants in the city, provided they were for his personal use and not for purposes of retail.

iii

The merchants and citizens of London protest in 1399 against the inconvenience to which they have been put during the past twenty years by the appointment under Richard II of certain persons to the office of Packer, so that no cloth might go out of the port of London unless packed by them. These men demanded a small charge on each cloth which passed through their hands "q'amont a grant somme par an". London merchants were accordingly freed from all interference by these officials.

In the same parliament however, the city suffered the loss

i. R.P. III 598.

ii. " " 613

iii " " 443.

of one of its privileges by the abolition of a patent of Richard II granting the London Fishmongers' Company the entire control of all the retail trade in fish within the city.<sup>i</sup>

Nevertheless the fishmongers secured a confirmation of the above patent in 1428<sup>ii</sup> and presumably put it into execution until 1435,<sup>iii</sup> when another petition for complete freedom in the trade was granted as before.

Occasionally the legality of some of the commercial franchises asserted by the city was disputed. Genoese merchants protest in 1402<sup>iv</sup> against their having been forced by a certain farmer of the city's sheriffs to pay the custom of "scawage" on goods which they had brought to London overland from Southampton. They affirm that this is only due on goods brought straight to London by sea. As a result of the inconvenience to which they have been put in this matter numbers of them have refrained from coming to England at all. They ask for redress as well for the past as the future. The King replied that as he understood that "scawage" was not specially included in the charter of confirmation which he had granted to London, he would allow this petition, provided the Genoese merchants brought with them to London letters testimonial from the customers of Southampton

- i. R.P. III 444.
- ii. C.P.R. 1422.29 p.482
- iii. R.P. IV 492
- iv. " III 491 A.P. 1098 (22)



to the effect that they had already paid customs there. This arrangement did not settle the matter however, as the city still maintained that the custom appertained to its sheriffwick and therefore shared the immunity of all its ancient franchises. The case dragged on,<sup>i</sup> various temporary compositions being made. Finally in 1454 it was arranged that all the merchants of Genoa should pay in respect of this custom £28. a year for their goods brought to London from Southampton.<sup>ii</sup>

The Hanse merchants similarly complain in 1422<sup>iii</sup> that they have suffered distraint at the hands of the London sheriffs for tolls illegally demanded. They had commenced an action against the sheriffs in the previous reign<sup>iv</sup> which had finally been brought before the council but for various reasons had not been decided at the death of the late King. Instead they have again been vexed by the sheriffs for the unlawful custom. Request is made that the justices of both benches may determine the case or else that some other remedy may be provided in parliament. In reply the suppliants were ordered to continue their suit before the council while the sheriffs were charged to refrain from levying the disputed tolls until the matter should be legally decided.

- i. Calendar of London Letter Books (ed. R. R. Sharpe) vol. K. p. 167, 174, 252-3, 303. R. P. V 68.
- ii. Calendar - (ut supra) K. p. 366.
- iii. R. P. IV 192.
- iv. Calendar " I p. 95, 198, 260.

An agreement was reached in 1427<sup>i</sup> by which the House merchants were declared quit of all customs payable on merchandise in the city on condition that they paid yearly to the sheriffs for the time being the sum of 40/- and to the mayor for the time being two barrels of best herring, one barrel of sturgeon and a hundred-weight of good and clean Polish wax on their value in money as prescribed.

The difficulty of getting the better of the London authorities is obvious.

The foregoing petitions thus reveal a few aspects of the internal and import trade under the Lancastrians. The main conditions which they indicate are the use of roads and rivers as means of communication, the existence of markets and fairs as centres of trade with special judicial facilities for traders and the predominance of London merchants in the commercial world.

The condition of a great proportion of the export trade during this period is amply illustrated in the parliamentary petitions submitted by the commercial fellowship of one town.- Calais.

Calais owed its unique position among royal towns to the staple which was set up within its walls. A staple is a depot in which trade in certain articles is exclusively permitted. The system of regulating export trade by means of such a depot or depots was developed in the XIV century as a result of the coincidence of

i. Calendar (ut supra) K.p.46.

governmental and commercial interests. The furtherance of trade was a matter of importance to the government as the customs and subsidies levied on it formed a large part of the revenue. To facilitate the collection of these it was desirable that trade should be as organised and concentrated as possible. Merchants were concerned to establish their status among the foreigners with whom they had to deal and were therefore inclined to concentrate trade on their own account. For the same reason they were also ready to welcome any additional support from the government. The advantages to both parties of some sort of a staple system are obvious. If the principal streams of commerce were forced through certain channels the government could more easily ascertain its exact volume and the consequent amount which was due from it to the treasury, while the merchants would benefit from their congregation in large numbers, both by the mere weight which such combination would afford in commercial transactions and from the additional privileges which the government could bestow upon them when thus gathered in organised bodies.

After a number of early experiments with a staple or staples either at home or abroad<sup>1</sup>, a single staple finally became fixed in 1391 at Calais<sup>ii</sup> which had the double advantage of being both an English possession and a continental town. The interests

- i. T.F.Tout. "The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History" (1914) pp.241-266.
- ii. G.Unwin. "Finance and Trade under Edward III" (1918) pp. 313-348.

of the government in the system were maintained by regulations as to the export of goods to the mart at Calais. Customs had to be paid in English ports and a second searching of goods on their arrival at the staple secured that these obligations had been fully performed. There were also apparently some restrictions as to the ports from which staple goods might be exported. This point is somewhat confused by the fact that some English ports were still known as staples even after the real staple market had been transferred to Calais. It seems probable that actually they were merely distinguished by additional facilities for obtaining justice in trade disputes. In any case as late as 1437 Lincoln still sees reason to regret the removal of its staple to Boston and to place this among the chief causes of its decay. Again when in 1404 out of consideration

- i. Staple Rolls. Henry V & Henry VI. The appointment of mayors and constables of the staple are recorded for Boston, Westminster, Chichester, Exeter and Bristol. Newcastle on Tyne is added in 5 & 6 Henry VI.
- ii. E. Lipson (ut supra) p.480 note 1.
- iii. e.1376. See R.P.II 332-3.
- iv. A.P. 6083 (122)
- v. C.P.R. 1401-5 p.369.

for the poverty of Great Yarmouth the staple and export of wool, fells and hides for Norfolk and Suffolk was removed thither from <sup>xxx</sup>Lyme and Ipswich, both the dispossessed towns immediately petition for the restoration of their former privileges. The last two supplications were supported by neighbouring merchants who naturally desired to have these staples of export placed for their best convenience.

Two other petitions which have obviously received similar inspiration show clearly that the export of staple goods to Calais was strictly regulated. The first is from the burgesses of Lewes in 1400 <sup>iii</sup> requesting that the <sup>r</sup>tonnage of wools might take place in that town as well as <sup>at</sup> Chichester "a cause qe la dite Ville de Lewes est plus <sup>uis</sup> pres <sup>pres</sup> la meer & qe la greindre partie & plus des Leynes qe sount cressantz en le Counte de Sussex est dedeinz dys leukes environ la dite Ville de Lewes, & la environ sont resceantz & enhabitauntz plusours grandes marchauntz". They say that the said merchants cannot afford the expense of taking their wools to Chichester nor of paying for a special licence to have them weighed at and exported from Lewes. The king replied that he would do what seemed best to him by advice of the Council. As a result it was ordered that staple goods might be exported from Lewes until the following Christmas. <sup>iv</sup>

- i. R.P.III.560. A.P. 6017 (121)
- ii. R.P.III 555. A.P. 5865 (118)
- iii. " " 497.
- iv. C.C.R. 1 Henry IV (in preparation at the Public Record Office)  
p.55.

Some time after this however this permission must have been withdrawn as licences to export such goods from Lewes are enrolled subsequently.<sup>i</sup> The second petition was submitted in 1427<sup>ii</sup> asking that staple goods may be exported from Melcombe. This was granted. The attention thus drawn to this town had a disconcerting issue for one merchant who had evidently not waited for any royal bestowal of such franchises.<sup>iii</sup> In November 1428 all the judges consulted together in the Star Chamber as to what punishment should be meted out to John Roger who had exported wools from Melcombe when it was not included in the statute. They decided that he should pay a fine as he was likely to corrupt a jury. Owing to its impoverishment and consequent desolation, however, Melcombe was altogether annulled as a port in 1433<sup>iv</sup> and Poole was substituted in its place.

Only on two occasions during the Lancastrian period was there any question of changing the place of the staple market. In the first parliament of 1404<sup>v</sup> the Commons ask that in the likely event of war breaking out between England on the one side and France

i. C.P.R. 1416-22 pp. 398, 417.

ii. R.P. IV 334. A.P. 1225 (25)

iii. H.Nicolas "Proceedings & Ordinances of the Privy Council of England" (1834) vol.III p.313.

iv. R.P.IV 444.A.P.6255.(126) Parl & Co.Procs (chanc) 21/6.

v. " III 529.

and Flanders on the other the council may have authority to remove the staple from Calais and provide for its erection elsewhere.

This was granted, but in the second parliament of that year, the threatened war having commenced, a further request that the council might exercise the powers conferred on it as above was refused.<sup>i</sup>

Again in 1421<sup>ii</sup> it was ordained that the King with the advice of his council might transfer the staple at Calais to some other place for a period of three years from the following Michaelmas.

The chief staple wares were wool, wool-fells, hides, lead and tin. These were declared the only such by a statute of 21 Richard 11.<sup>iii</sup> but in 1399<sup>iv</sup> a petition was submitted that a former patent of Edward 111.<sup>v</sup> including a number of other commodities under this designation might be ratified. Accordingly the above goods received immediate confirmation in parliament while the patent was granted in its entirety soon after<sup>vi</sup> so that Calais was also declared the staple for butter, cheese, honey, felt, tallow,

- i. R.P. 111. 554.
- ii. R.P. 1V. 130.
- iii. Statutes of the Realm Vol.ii.p.108.
- iv. R.P.111. 429.
- v. T. Rymer "Foedera" (1816) Vol.iii.pt.ii.p.1062.
- vi. C. Ch.R.1341-1417.p.389.

worstedes and all other small wares except woollen cloths made in England, dried herrings, grindstones, sea-coal, cor<sup>r</sup>, and logs of wood. However in 1400 <sup>i.</sup> the staplers complain that all the worsteds, butter, cheese and small wares and a great deal of the wools, hides, lead and tin go straight to Flanders and Zealand without coming to Calais at all. They received confirmation of all their former privileges but with the important exception of the worsteds.

A protest was made in 1439 <sup>ii.</sup> that the chancellor under a mistaken interpretation of the statute of 21 Richard 11. had refused to grant licences to people wishing to export cheese and butter elsewhere than to Calais. Seeing that "Cheese and butter is a merchandise that may not well be kept nor abyde his merchant, and wil take grete empayryng by bestes of Vermyn and Wormes, and also is tendre and of so smypyl prys that it may not goodly bere ~~the~~ costes of Staple" the suppliants request that these articles may be struck off the list of staple goods altogether. This was granted provided the king might restrain it when ~~he~~ pleased, but an attempt made in the same parliament to gain similar exemption for hides and tallow was frustrated. <sup>iii.</sup> Wool, fel<sup>ls</sup>, hides, lead and tin ~~thus~~ remained the chief staple wares.

i. R.P.iii.500.

ii. R.P.v.24.

iii. R.P.v.28.Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 24/5.



The merchant staplers were organised <sup>into</sup> ~~with~~ a company under a mayor and two constables. This is the body whose numerous petitions in the parliaments of the Lancastrian kings throw so much light on what constituted a very large proportion of the export trade of the time.

The actual constitution of the staple company at this period is not clear. It is certain from the long lists of staple merchants to be found in the Rolls of Parliament <sup>i.</sup> and the Calendar of Patent <sup>ii.</sup> that it contained many more than the original twenty-six appointed by Edward III., but the conditions of membership are not indicated. That there still was a distinct company however is shown by the request of the commons in 1454 <sup>iii.</sup> "that it shall be leeffull for every one of youre said liege peple from this time forwarde, to bring the seid Wolles and Wolfelles to the seid Staple of Culeys, and them to utter and selle there .... and to be free there to enjoye and have at all times all maner of liberties and customes as any of the feliship of the seid Staple hath or shal have, without any fyne makyng or paying therfore, except ordinarie charges". This petition was refused.

i. R.P.v.208.

ii. C.P.R.1446-52.pp.315-16.323-4.

iii. R.P.v.276. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 29/24.

The mayor and constables were generally elected annually, but in 1429 <sup>i.</sup> "pur certains tres grandes & notables causes, l'onneur de notre souveraigne seigneur le Roy & le commune bien de tout son Roialme d'Engleterre" the mayor for the time being had his term of office extended for a further two years. He was a certain John Reynwell who <sup>/was/</sup> apparently of an energetic and enterprising nature. He had had previous experience as a mayor of London. <sup>ii.</sup> In this year a number of new ordinances for the staple prepared under his direction <sup>iii.</sup> received parliamentary confirmation <sup>iv.</sup>. Shortly afterwards he was granted a house in Calais. <sup>v.</sup> The extension of his period of office was deemed an item worthy of entry in one of the London chronicles. <sup>vi.</sup>

These elections were supposed to be made by members of the Company but complaint is made in 1445 <sup>vii.</sup> that of late

- i. R.P.iv.361.
- ii. Calendar of London Letter Books (ut supra) K.pp.54-55. In 1426-7.
- iii. R.P.v.256 refers to an ordinance of partition made during his mayoralty.
- iv. R.P.iv.359. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 19/25.
- v. C.F.R. (Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records 1887 No.48) p.267.
- vi. "Gregory's Chronicle" (Camden Society. New Series No.17.ed. J. Gairdner 1876)p<sub>2</sub>164.
- vii. ~~see~~ R.P.v.105.Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 26/3.

"Maires have ben chosen at the saide Staple by multitude of voyces of divers persones made free of the saide Staple and not havynge Goodes nor Merchandises under the rules of the same Staple at tymes of such Elections, nor beryng charges in the same but procurryd by divers menes to be ther at the saide tymes to give thaire voices as they were stered unto, which persones of lykelyhed as it is thought would not hede ne tender gretely the wele of the saide Marchauntz and Staple as such persones wolde that hadde Goodes and marchandises under the rules of the same Staple, at tymes of Election aforesaide."

It is requested that the electors shall consist only of merchants having at least ten sacks of wool at Calais under Staple rules at the time of the election or within the previous year. The petition was refused, possibly because these interlopers were men who had purchased special licences from the king to sell their goods independently of the staple.<sup>i</sup>

The general policy of the staplers was, of course, to take as much advantage as possible of the strong position occupied by the united body of English merchants in Calais as was consistent with the maintenance of sufficient attractions which should induce foreign traders to come and deal there. Thus they were extremely indignant when the ordinary municipal

i. See p.116.

officers of Calais attempted to swell the revenues at their disposal by imposing a new toll on empty carts entering the town. A complaint of this innovation made in the autumn parliament of 1404 <sup>i.</sup> secured that only the dues established under Edward III. should be levied. The staplers were above all anxious that the price of wool and other staple goods should not be lowered, but if anything raised. Loud are their complaints in 1429 <sup>ii.</sup> against divers merchants continually resident in Calais who in collusion with certain foreign merchants "for yair singuler lucre" endeavour to bring down the price of wool, "in so moche yat what tyme merchauntz straungiers shuld have repaired yider to by Wolle & Wollefelle, thourgh hem yai have been retourned and withdrawen, so yat ye pore men have been verray wery of yair goodys, yat for grete mischief yei most nedys selle to ye saide Inhabitauntz of Caleys, ye which will nocht by yerof bot moche withynne ye pris of ye saide commodite." It was accordingly granted that no merchant continually living in Calais should deal in staple goods, but the same request is significantly repeated in 1454. <sup>ii.</sup>

Among other franchises granted to the mayor and constables of the staple was that of taking recognisances of debt. Some doubt arising as to the validity of these bonds they petition

- i. ~~R.P.iii.555~~. <sup>III 555</sup> R.P.iv.360. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 19/25.
- ii. R.P.v.275. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 29/24.

i.  
 in 1432 that recognisances taken before them may hold good and be executed in all points within the realm of England as those taken before the mayor and constables of the staple of Westminster or any other staple of the kingdom. This was granted.

These staple officials were empowered in general to make all ordinances necessary for its government. One that is especially referred to in the parliamentary petitions concerning Calais, is that of partition which enforced that the profits from each individual bargain should be divided proportionately among all the merchants of the company having goods in the staple. In 1429<sup>ii.</sup> it was somewhat modified so that partition should only be made between merchants having goods produced in the same county. It is obvious that the benefits to be derived from this system of communal trading would be somewhat questionable from the smaller merchant's point of view. Dissatisfaction with the restrictions imposed by this ordinance finds voice in a complaint made in 1442<sup>iii</sup> that "the Merchants of this your said Roialme beth thereby gretely anientised and of verrey nede the more party

i. R.P. IV. 401. A.P. 14.463 (290)

ii. " " 359. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 19/25

iii. " V 64 " " " " " 49/13. 5--Parl--&  
~~Co--Procs--(Chanc--)-26/12-~~

of thayne beth enforcid to leve their Merchaundises of Woll and Wollfell be cause they may not be rulers of their owen goodes." The mayor and fellowship were ordered to reform the ordinance provisionally for the next seven years. Apparently the influence of the bigger merchants re-asserted itself for in 1446<sup>i.</sup> it is asked that partition shall be made among all the merchants of the staple. This petition was refused but the request is repeated in 1454.<sup>ii.</sup> The king then replied that petition might be made as in the time of Reynwell's mayoralty, that is in the modified form of 1429. As, however, this was by no means the suppliants' desire they submitted another petition in the same parliament asking that the former request might be altogether cancelled.<sup>iii.</sup> This was granted. It would thus appear that during the latter part of the Lancastrian period, partition was made on some scale between that in counties introduced by Reynwell in 1429 and the full partition which took place previously.<sup>iv</sup> Later evidence reveals the survival of some such regulations.

- i. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 26/12.
- ii. R.P. V. 275. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 29/24
- iii. On the original petition the first reply may be seen crossed through and the second one substituted for it.
- iv. Cely Papers (Camden Society. 3rd. series, Vol. I. ed. H.S. Malden 1900) pp. 65, 133.

A good deal of complaint was evoked from the staples<sup>r</sup> in general by the government's desire to utilise the trade at Calais as a means of furthering its fiscal policy .

Two of the chief objects of this were the exclusion of foreign coin from England and the importation of as much fresh bullion as possible to swell the volume of the currency. The mint set up by Edward III at Calais<sup>i.</sup> continued to operate under the Lancastrian kings<sup>ii.</sup> and was calculated to serve both the above aims. Under the ordinance of bullion all payments for English goods had to be made in ready gold and silver, a certain proportion<sup>iii.</sup> of which had actually to be bullion, all of which was taken to the mint to be received into English money. The evasion by merchants of all these regulations is revealed in the various proposals which were made to enforce them.<sup>iv.</sup> That they became a hindrance to trade is, of course, obvious. Foreign powers naturally resented such a drain of bullion into the English treasury and attempted to check its export from their own dominions.<sup>v.</sup> It is said in 1442,

- i. "Poedera" (ut Supra) Vol. III. pt. II. 725.
- ii. There was an uncertain lapse c.1420 . See R.P. IV. 125,146. R.Ruding "Annals of the Coinage" (1840) Vol. I. 264.
- iii R.P. IV. 359. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 19/25.
- iv. R.P. III. 470. IV. 125.
- v. " V. 64. Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.) 49/13.

that indignation at the cramping restrictions of the ordinance of partition "hath caused Merchantz Estraungers to labour unto their Lordes of their partie, to make so grevous and streite serch uppon Bullion commyng unto your Mynt at Caleys, so that men of divers Countries in conveyeng of Bullion hath bene gretely hyndered as well in their persone as in their goods, so that the seide mynt is fallen into grete decay and may not be susteyned like as it was in the tyme of the regne of the Kyng your full noble Fadre, whom God assoille, and many yeres afore the saide partition furst ordeyned." Again in 1454<sup>i</sup> it is reported that the Duke of Burgundy "hath made a gret penale restreint upon passage of Merchaundise called Bullyon of Silver to passe thurgh eny of his londes aforesaid to come to Caleys, which merchaundise growith in no land of his, whereof money should be coyned in the Kyngs Mynt atte Caleys, to be caried and sprade in this Reaume, for to pay the growers of the said commodities, the lakke whereof is grete hurte to the comen well as it is openly known." The immediate check imposed by these regulations on trade at Calais is plainly set forth in a petition of 1437.<sup>ii</sup> Transport of bullion at this date had been further hindered by the wars and complaint is made

i. R.P. V. 277. Parl & Co. Procs. (chanc.) 29/24,

ii. " IV. 508 A.P. 5481 (no)



that "where late certeins Merchauntz of Leyden, Amsterdamme and oyer parties of Holland and Seland, beyng of ye special Amiste of oure Soverain Lorde, come yiderto have boght a gret part of ye said Wolles and Wolfell, offringsuffisant contentment, plein agrement and redy paiement yerfore. The pore Merchaunts of this Royalme yar beyng yere, myght ner durst not enclhne yerto be cause of ye Statut aforsaid."

However, in spite of all these complaints, the various proposals which the staplers made from time to time, either that bullion might be brought into the mint at reduced rates or that a smaller proportion of goods need be paid for in ready money, were all rejected by the government.

The staple at Calais was not entirely monopolist. During the Lancastrian period there were some extensive and continuous exceptions to its regulations. The chief of these was that occasioned by the permission granted by Richard II to the merchants of Genoa, Venice, Castile, Aragon and other friendly realms in the west freely to export staple goods from Southampton or other English towns to western parts provided they found surety that they should not be taken to any place in the east

i. R.P. V. 64. Parl. & Co. Procs.(chanc.) 49/13. Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc). 26/12. R.P. V. 276. 29/24.

ii. Statutes of the Realm (1816) Vol. II. p.8.

except Calais. English merchants were similarly allowed to export staple wares straight to these southern countries. Further the towns of Berwick-on-Tweed and Newcastle-on-Tyne were frequently allowed to buy staple goods produced in Scotland or in the most northern counties of England and to export them to whatever countries in the king's friendship they wished. These exemptions were repeatedly ratified in various statutes but in each individual case the merchant wishing to take advantage of these privileges had to obtain a special licence allowing him to do so. The merchants of England petitioned in 1411<sup>i</sup> that they may freely export staple goods through the Straits of Morocco towards the west, paying the usual customs, provided they only export from London, Sandwich, and Southampton and find security that the goods shall go to their declared destination on pain of forfeiture. This concession was not granted. All usual customs and subsidies had to be paid on these goods and also the special tolls collected at Calais for the general maintenance of the town and government there.

The staplers were naturally jealous of these exceptions especially those of the northern towns who sold their goods

i. R.P. III. 662.

in the Eastern countries which were the particular market of the company. In 1429 <sup>i.</sup> its members declare that whereas the men of Berwick and Newcastle say that to bring their goods to Calais would mean their ruination, the contrary is really the case for they could get as good a price for them in Calais as elsewhere and the costs there are less than in Flanders. They ask that all licences to these towns may be annulled and further that no one shall export staple goods to Scotland on pain of a year's imprisonment "Consideryng wel, yat no Scottysnman wil be so advised, in disceit of his Soveraigne Lorde, or in nynderyng ye commen profit of Scotland, to bryng any goodys or merchandise into yis Roiaume, or any oyer; and yat if ye saide towne of Caleys were, as God defende, to ye Kyng of Scottes, as it is to our Soveraigne Lorde, his subgitz had lever and wolden rather repaire yider, yan to any Towne in Flandres, Holand, Zeeland, Brabant, or any oyer straunge parties, for the fortification and amendment yerof" - an interesting portrait of the XV Century Scot as seen by his contemporary this side of the border. The above petition was granted. As a result a protest <sup>ii.</sup> was made immediately in the next parliament by the northern counties which had benefitted through these licences. They say that their withdrawal has caused

i. R.P.<sup>IV</sup>.1C.360. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 19/25.

ii. R.P.1V.379.

a great quantity of goods to be left on the producers' hands to their inevitable destruction and the king's loss in customs and subsidies to the amount of 100 marks a year. They reaffirm that their goods are of such poor quality that they cannot possibly be sold at Calais supporting the staple charges. A final reproach is added "qe ceux d'Escoce, par cause de repell du dit licence, ont venduz lour layns cest an a grander value & auxi a grander nombre & quantite des layns q'ils n'ont par moltz anz passez, a lour grande encrece & damage a notre Seigneur le Roy & toutz ses Lieges." Their request for a renewal of the licence was nevertheless refused. The reason for this is probably to be found in the appointment of a commission during this same parliament.<sup>i.</sup> to enquire into the unlawful export from Newcastle of wool which had been grown in countries not included in its licence. However, later in the year<sup>ii.</sup> the inhabitants of Newcastle received permission to export wool and leather bought in the north of England to Flanders and in 1435<sup>iii.</sup> Berwick was again included in the statute list of exceptions. No other attempt was made under the Lancastrians to cut down the number of these permanent exemptions from the staple regulations.

i. C.P.R. 1429-36. p.132.

ii. C.F.R. (Deputy Keepers Report No.48) p.289.

iii. Statutes of the Realm. Vol.11. pp.289-90.

These however were not the only exceptions whose rivalry the staplers were called upon to meet in the first half of the XV. Century. It is clear that the Lancastrian kings were trying to fit two strings to their bow of commercial policy. They wished to support the staplers from whom, on occasion they were pleased to borrow very heavily, but they were also inclined to encourage by special royal licences a promiscuous trade in staple goods to be carried elsewhere than to Calais. The reasons for the development of this private trade are obvious. A monopoly operates in two directions; it is valuable not only to its possessors in the keeping but also, up to a certain point, to outsiders in the breaking. That is to say, the very essence of their privileges which gathered the staplers together in Calais left a free field open in the Eastern countries to the private enterprise of individual merchants. Further, although the staple gave undoubted protection to English traders, its benefits had to be paid for. Merchants exporting staple goods elsewhere than to Calais had to pay the king's dues which were rendered in the town, but they would be free from the charges of the company itself.

Complaints of these infringements of their privileges are the chief burden of the staplers' parliamentary petitions. Their indignation on this point is intense. It is also somewhat unaccountable. Licences to export staple goods elsewhere than to Calais are enrolled on the patent, close and French rolls. The

majority are apparently to be found in the French rolls, but even here the number for any one year does not exceed twenty.<sup>i</sup> The staple company no doubt suffered from the acute sensibility common to all monopolist concerns but even then it is incredible that such a trifling departure from its regulations should arouse so much alarm. The necessary conclusion is that a great many of such licences did not, for some reason, get enrolled at all.

In any case the staplers complain long and bitterly, denouncing the licences on various grounds according to their varying nature. They endeavour chiefly to persuade the government that this private trade turns to its own loss in customs and subsidies, implying that the majority of licences included an exemption from the payment of these dues. In 1455<sup>ii</sup> they state expressly that "divers persones by sinistre meanes" have obtained "divers licences to shippe and carie Wolle and Wolfelles, Shorlyng and Morlyng, oute of this youre Reame, to other places than to Caleys, summe withouten any payment to you of Custumes, Subsidies, or othere devers and summe to paie to you but litell, and not accordynge to the sume that shulde or myght have longed to you therof of right." The enrolled licences do not justify this accusation. Cases in

- i. N.B. The uncalendared close rolls for this period have not been consulted. Possibly many additions to the list of licences could be made from them, though this is not indicated either by the calendar for Henry IV. nor the selections from the close rolls (in manuscript) which may be consulted at the Public Record Office.
- ii. R.P.V.330.Parl. & Co.Procs.(Chanc.)30/11.

which customs are remitted are exceptional and are for the most part in the nature of repayments of loans or rewards for services to the crown. For instance in 1449 <sup>i.</sup> a number of staplers themselves who had lent the king £2,000. for the soldiers' wages at Calais were allowed to recoup themselves by exporting wool and fells free of duty from London, Ipswich, Boston and Hull. Felix Fagman and Alexander Palestrell, merchants of Milan, were permitted in 1445 <sup>ii.</sup> to send wool from Chichester to Normandy free of duty on account of their having paid for certain indulgences granted by the Pope to Eton College. In 1437 <sup>iii.</sup> Baldwin Budes, late of Dieppe, was licensed to ship wool from England to Calais without payment as he was imprisoned for his loyalty at the capture of Dieppe and compelled to pay a heavy ransom. There are other instances of such remissions in aid of ransoms. <sup>iv.</sup> Another interesting case of similar exemption which was granted as a reward for civil service occurred in 1440 <sup>v.</sup> when John de Schiedamme was given a licence to export 1,000 pieces of tin free of custom from England to Germany for the following

- i. R.P.V.208.
- ii. C.F.R. (Deputy Keeper's Report No.48)p.365.
- iii. C.F.R. (Deputy Keeper's Report No.48)p.319.
- iv. C.F.R. (Deputy Keeper's Report No.48)pp.415-446.
- v. C.P.R. 1436-41.p.485.

four years "because by his diligence and search land previously of no value has been reclaimed near Winchelsea, where now much salt is made to the great profit of the commonwealth of the land of England."

In other licences which were granted for purely commercial reasons the payment of all usual dues is expressly enjoined. It is clear that the crown did not incur any direct loss in granting them, indeed it derived a modest profit from the sums charged for their issue. The only real danger it ~~had~~<sup>ran</sup> was in permitting too much licensed trade to the serious injury of the staplers and the consequent loss of the customs or their exports.

The merchant staplers did finally acknowledge that the king might remit customs in repayment of loans.<sup>i.</sup>

A more real disadvantage to the crown, pointed out by the staplers,<sup>ii</sup> which might arise from the export of staple goods elsewhere than to Calais was that they thus avoided the second searching carried out there which served as a check on the under or non-payment of customs in England.

Licences were not only granted to ship goods elsewhere than to Calais. In 1435<sup>iii</sup> mention is made of certain persons who "purchacen licences for yaire singuler availle, to shippe wolles to Caleys, yere to be solde afore alle other Wolles beyng there, and been not bounden neither to kepe ye pris, ne to receive no

i. R.P.V. 330. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 30/11.

ii. R.P.V.<sup>III</sup>lv.661. IV.251. ✓

iii. R.P.lv.490. A.P.<sup>49/11</sup>(100)



Bullion, ne to make petition ne distribution of thaire moneye, likeas alle the merchauntz of England thider repairyng been strictly bounden by ye saide Statutz to doo". This explains the force of the permission granted to various people to ship wool to Calais, there to sell it for their own profit,<sup>i</sup> or as it is more expressly worded in a licence made out in 1440<sup>ii</sup> to Nicholas Bedford (himself a stapler<sup>iii</sup>) he may ship wool to Calais and sell it independently of the staple there. . . . Protests are again made out in 1440<sup>iv</sup> against "specialle licences graunted to private personnes a part, for to selle hir owne Wolles and Wolfelles at large, for hir singuler avauntage and against ye commen prouffit" and it is stated that "ylf ye said Commoditees be divided into diverses parties yere may no goode reule be hadde ne sette yeruppon."

Another form of licence complained of was that granted to a private person to ship goods in the king's name.<sup>v</sup> Apparently this simply meant that the king extended the protection of his

- i. R.P.V. C.F.R. (Deputy Keeper's Report No.48) pp.330.367-368.
- ii. C.F.R. (ut supra) p.341.
- iii. R.P.V.208.
- iv. R.P.1V.508. A.P.5481(110).
- v. R.P.V.273. V.330 Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.)30/11.

name over transactions from which he derived no personal profit. Such a licence would naturally secure its possessor additional facilities for the disposal of his wares owing to the prestige of the fictionary transaction.<sup>oγ.</sup>

In dilating upon what they regard as an unpardonable attack on their privileges the staplers also enlarge upon the way in which the licences themselves were abused:<sup>i</sup> "bying of Wolles and Wolfell on other place than thaire licence contayneth, shipping more nombre and weight and coloring, by newe feyned names as Morlings and Shorlings, and somme personnes yat shuld by thaire Licence have caried thaire Wolls over the mountaynes, have solde theyme in Brabant and in other places, to suche men as were wonte to bye thaire Wolls at the Staple of Calais." The government was not unaware of this danger. In reference to some licences granted in 1400 to certain merchants of Newcastle it is expressly stated that they are not to export more than the number of sacks contained in their patents.<sup>ii</sup> Again, a licence issued in 1440 to a London merchant to ship "moreyns" and "shorlyng" to Holland and Zeeland was cancelled as it was discovered that better woolfells on which the great custom should be paid would be exported under colour of the above designation.<sup>iii</sup>

i. R.P.V.149. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 27/11.

ii. R.P.111.465.

iii. C.P.R.1436-41.p.412.

Notwithstanding all the protests of the staple company the king maintained his right to grant such licences practically intact. He occasionally conceded in parliament a temporary suspension of his power but even this did not guarantee his complete abstention from this practice. The greatest concession to the staplers on this point was secured by them in 1442.<sup>i</sup> Complaint was then made that various native merchants exporting elsewhere than to the staple by the king's licence, carried with them the goods of aliens also, but paid on the whole cargo only the customs demanded from natives. It was therefore decreed that all native merchants, thenceforward shipping staple goods elsewhere than to Calais by the king's licence or otherwise should pay customs on them at the higher rate fixed for aliens.

An interesting compromise on this point was embodied in a licence issued to the staple company in 1444<sup>ii</sup> to ship wool from England to Calais without payment of customs during the next seven years should permission be given during that period to any private person to export wool. Not even this appropriate concession however served to check individual enterprise. The company made a final effort in 1458<sup>iii</sup> to stop the infringement of its monopoly by striking a bargain with the king. In

i. R.P.V. 54.

ii. C.F.R. (Deputy Keeper's Report No.48)p.360.

iii. C.P.R.1452-61.pp.500-1.

the December of that year he promised to abstain from granting licences for the next four years and to uphold the company generally while in return it guaranteed to lend him £1000. every quarter during the said period. The deposition of the king not long afterwards put an end to his side of the agreement, but not before he had already broken it.<sup>i</sup>

Although the merchant staplers were on the whole unable to obtain a favourable hearing for their complaints about trade in staple goods carried on by royal licence, they had another grievance in which they were sure of the full sympathy and support of the government. This was against the widespread growth of private commercial enterprise in its most extreme form of smuggling. "Il n'est merveille" says the company in 1423<sup>ii</sup> "qe les custumes & subsidies du Roy ne sont si grauntz value a luy come ils ont este devant ces heures. Car de temps en temps, si grande quantite des lains repairent en Holand, Zeland & Flandres, hors de diverses Parties & Crikes du Roialme, qe le Roy n'a point de Custume ne subside, qe merveille est." The staplers declare that four hundred uncustomed samples of wool have recently arrived in the aforesaid parts, and mention Lancashire as one of the centres of this secret shipping. They also say that some merchants have been going over to Dublin to

i. C.F.R. (ut supra) pp. 436, 444, 447.

ii. R.P.IV. 251.

obtain their cockets and evade the customs. Apparently collusion in this matter was not uncommon. In 1449<sup>i</sup> the commons denounce "untrue Officers as Sercheours and Surveiors, which take no fee, but prive rewardes for doying the Kyng wrang". Native and alien merchants alike were guilty of these practices.<sup>ii</sup> As a result, not only was the king defrauded of his revenue but also as the staplers point out in 1422<sup>iii</sup> when complaining of the continual export of staple goods not to Calais but to Scotland, Flanders, Holland, Zeeland and Brabant, and that uncustomed, "been the said Wolles and Merchandises solde so goode chepe in the parties foreseide, that the merchantes strangiers been stuffed so gretely therwith, yat they comen noight to Caleys, os yei have been accustomed to doo, to bye neyther Wolles ne Wolfelles there." Goods exported uncustomed were forfeited if captured, but apparently this was a risk which might be taken. Accordingly in 1433<sup>iv</sup> it was ordained that for the next three years no one should ship staple goods from any but the appointed ports on pain of felony. However, in spite of this severe measure the staplers state in 1435<sup>v</sup> "Nevertheless, ther been diverses persones navyng no drede

i. R.P.V. 149. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 27/11.

ii. ~~C.P.R. 1452-61. pp. 500-1.~~ R.P. 111. 661.

iii. ~~C.P.R. (ut supra) pp. 436, 444, 447.~~ R.P. 1v. 410. Parl. & Co.

iv. R.P. 1v. 454.

Procs. (Chanc.) 20/21.

v. R.P. 1v. 491.

of the Statut aforsaid that custumabely shippen als wele in the Portes as in the Crikes aforsaide, by undewe menes, notable substance of Wolle and Wollefelles, and other merchandises of the Staple, and theym caryen and leden into Flaundres, Holand, Zeland, Brabant and Normandye, withoute any custume payng." Upon this the pain of felony was revoked and such goods merely declared forfeit, but it was also decreed that "if any persone lay eny Wolles, Wollefell or ony other merchandises of the Staple in any suspéciouse place adjoignant to the water side, where so ever it bee, and therof noon Endentures made between him and the Mair, Baillifs nor Constable of the Towne in which such Wolles, Wollefell or eny other Merchandise of the Staple been so layed, of suche Wolles, Wollefell and Merchandises, layde in such places, that thenne the same Wolle, Wollefell and Merchandises been forfeit" - a provision requiring somewhat delicate interpretation.

Subsequent complaints<sup>i</sup> and the repeated appointment of commissions<sup>ii</sup> to enquire into the export of uncustomed goods indicate the difficulty of stamping out these evasions.

Notwithstanding these various disadvantages under which the staplers so protestingly laboured, evidence of their continued prosperity under the Lancastrians is to be found in the loans which they periodically made to the government for the payment

- i. R.P.IV. 508. A.P.5481(110).R.P.V.64.Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.)  
R.P.V. 149. Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.)27/11. (49/13.)
- ii. e.g. C.P.R.1436-41.p.87 for Norfolk and Suffolk.  
C.P.R. p.88 " Surrey  
p.89 " Norfolk and Suffolk  
p.146 " Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk,  
London and Middlesex.

of the soldiers' wages at Calais. These seem to have been perpetually in arrears; the men themselves state in 1421 <sup>i</sup> that they have served for five and a quarter years "without any pleine paiement, savyng apprest and vitaille, the which vitaille natn be so high supportacion to the Soudeors that ollis here continuance might not have be born." The merchants were personally interested in this matter as on one or two occasions the unpaid soldiers seized all the wool in the staple and held it to ransom. <sup>ii</sup> Some of the assignments for the repayments of these loans were drawn up as petitions and received parliamentary sanction. In 1433 <sup>iii</sup> the amount was £2,918.12.10d. in 1449 <sup>iv</sup> £2,000., in 1454 <sup>v</sup> 10,000 marks (over £6,000.) and in 1455 <sup>vi</sup> 23,000. marks (over £15,000.) Finally, mention has already been made of their promise in 1458 <sup>vii</sup> to make advances of £1,000. a quarter for four years.

- i. R.P.IV. 159. A.P.1168(24).
- ii. G.A.C. Sandeman. "Calais under English Rule"(1908)pp.23-24. (in 1407 & 1423). C.P.R.1452-61.p.154.(in 1454).
- iii. R.P.IV. 474.
- iv. R.P.V. 203.
- v. R.P.V. 248. A.P.4968(100).
- vi. R.P.V. 295.
- vii. C.P.R. 1452-61.pp.500-1.

It is noteworthy that the staplers do not make any reference in their complaints to what was really the most serious menace to their prosperity, namely the development of the English cloth industry. This meant that wool which used to be taken to Calais was made up at home into cloths which were not staple goods. Apparently this competition was not as yet felt by the staplers to any alarming degree and any possible danger from it paled into insignificance beside the enormities committed by unworthy members of their own class.

The amount of attention given in the Lancastrian parliaments to the affairs of Calais and its staple is a striking indication of the importance which was then attached to it. Its peculiar military and commercial functions rendered it unique among royal towns. Its development was not left to municipal enterprise but was made a matter of governmental policy. Calais was essentially a national possession having a claim to more than local interest, "Considered ye effusion of alle ye roial bloode and ye grete goode yat hath ben spent upon ye conquest of ye saide towne, which every trewe Englyshman ought to have in full grete chierite and tendernesse".<sup>1</sup>

Towns in the early XV. century are thus revealed by their parliamentary petitions in various relations to the streams of commerce. Some are situated on the highways of trade - either road or river. Others are the scenes of markets and fairs

1. R.P.lV. 360. Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.)19/25.



while some are the more specialised centres of the cloth trade. London is seen as the chief home centre of commerce, possessing special privileges in the conduct of trade. Finally Calais is shown as the home of the staple which was set up in order that the export of England's chief products might be encouraged and protected.

CHAPTER IV

TOWN AND PARLIAMENT.

In 1426 the M.P's for Bristol journeyed up to the parliament at ~~Le~~ Leicester primed with a grievance. They had suffered an indignity which through them cast a slight upon their town also. The cause of their distress together with a plea for its removal is embodied in a petition submitted in parliament on their behalf. It is here stated that when Edward III in the forty-seventh year of his reign raised the town of Bristol to the status of a county by itself, he granted that it should only return two members to his parliaments and those of his successors who should serve both as knights for the county and burgesses for the town. But the writ issued to the sheriff of Bristol for this last parliament had only ordered him to cause to be elected two burgesses for the town, so that Henry Gildeney and John Langley who were returned accordingly "ne purrent estre resceu d'apparer & respoundre en cest present Parlement, come Chivalers pur le dit Counte de Bristuyt, sibien come Burgeys pur lez ditz Ville & Burgh, a desheritaunce dez toutz lez Burgeys enhabitantz deinz le dit Counte de Bristuyt, de lour Liberte & Franchise suis ditz!" In answer to this petition it was granted that no prejudice should attach to the franchises of the city county by reason of the appearance of its members under the

i. R.P. IV. 315. Parl. & Co. Proco (chanc.) 17/5.

incomplete writ. The chief motive of the request was, no doubt, anxiety lest this circumstance should serve as a pretext for a subsequent attack on the town's independence of any other than the municipal sheriff. Nevertheless it does give the impression that the town took a pride in its distinguished representation and resented the formal disability under which it was immediately placed by the mis-worded writ as well as the possibility of any more practical effects from it in the future. It is interesting to note in this connection that the indisputable superiority of a county over a borough member is implied, though owing to the real motive of the petition as shown above, the point may not be stressed.

The impression of municipal interest in parliament made by this petition on behalf of Bristol is flatly contradicted by another from the poor men and burgesses of Colchester. When considerations of local economy forced this town to choose between parliamentary representation and enclosure by a new wall, it unhesitatingly declared for the latter. Although it had secured almost continuous exemption from the former burden since 1382, it asks in 1422 for a further extension of this immunity for another twenty years. In this case, local and immediate necessities are unmistakably placed before the

i. The soldiers of Calais in 1421 address their petition exclusively to the speaker and the knights of the shires. A.P. 1168 (24)

ii. A.P. 5013 (101)

iii. C.P.R. 1381-5. p. 214.      C.P.R. 1401-5 p. 355.  
       "    1385-9 " 505           "    1408-13 " 199  
       "    1391-6 " 379           "    1413-16 " 23.

more indirect benefits to be derived from participation in national councils.

Judging from these petitions, which are the only ones submitted by towns in the Lancastrian parliaments directly bearing on this point, the relations between the two were of a dubiously intimate character. The nature of the rest of their petitions does much to confirm this view. The dominance of local preoccupations indicated in the kind of requests they contain would not be calculated to leave much room for close attention to the central conferences of the realm.

However the mere fact of towns sending petitions into parliament at all is an indication of some interest in its proceedings, if only of a severely local and practical nature. The question is thus naturally raised of what traces may be found of town parliamentary petitions in municipal records. Was their composition an event of importance to be specially noted and the treatment they received a subject for particular entry among town annals? There are two great drawbacks to a general investigation of this point. A number of the towns concerned have few or no municipal documents preserved for this period at all, while others have them but they are as yet unpublished.

The available material affords only three examples of towns whose archives contain records of petitions in parliament, London, Northampton and Melcombe.

London's commercial privileges were infringed in 1406<sup>i</sup> when

i. R.P. III. 598.

it was ordained that any merchant not of the liberty of the city might be free to buy and sell with any of the king's subjects there. This aroused a quick protest from the London merchants in 1407<sup>i</sup> whereupon their former franchises were restored to them. Their petition in parliament and its answer is entered in the city letter-book.<sup>ii</sup>

Some years later the city's liberties were again brought into question by the statute of 7 Henry IV which placed certain restrictions on apprenticeship. Although the statute expressly declared that London should enjoy its ancient privileges, the citizens were vexed on account of it in the early years of Henry VI.<sup>iii</sup> They complained of this in the parliament of 1429<sup>iv</sup> and received confirmation of their former liberties during the king's pleasure. This petition is also entered in a letter-book.<sup>v</sup> There is an interesting discrepancy between the original petition and the copy made in the city records. It was drawn up and entered on the parliament roll as addressed to the commons but is quoted simply as a petition to the king, a clear indication of the purely mediatorial implication of addresses to the commons. The favourable reply to the petition is not recorded but there is a

- i. R.P. III. 613.
- ii. Calendar of London Letter Books (ed. R.R. Sharpe) I. p.69
- iii. Calendar of London Letter Books (ut supra) K. p.87
- iv. R.P. IV. 354. A.p. 4238 (85)
- v. Calendar of London Letter Books K. p.104

subsequent entry of the whole statute made thereon.<sup>i</sup>

The ordinance made in 1455 prohibiting the import of manufactured silk goods for five years is entered in a letter book together with a writ to the sheriffs to proclaim it, but there is no mention that it was enacted on the petition of the London silkwomen.<sup>ii iii iv</sup>

Northampton submitted only one petition in parliament during the Lancastrian period but that is enshrined among the town archives.<sup>v</sup> It was a request that the mayor of the town might have power to force all the inhabitants of tenements abutting on the high road or any other street of the town to pave or repair the same as often as it should be necessary. This was granted for certain streets and a border of the market-place. The town authorities secured an exemplification of both petition and answer before the parliament was<sup>vi</sup>

- i. Calendar of London Letter Books K. p.116
- ii. Calendar of London Letter Books K. p.380
- iii. R.P. V. 325. A.P. 1410 (29)
- iv. Calendar of London Letter Books K. p.68 refers to another petition in parliament from the mayor and commonalty, on behalf of the Duchess of Gloucester. It is not entered in the Roll of Parliament. A chronicler ascribes a similar request to a body of London women, but his entry is confused. (Amundesham. Rolls Series. No: 28. I. p.20) In any case, the above reference implies that the petition was merely an oral one.
- v. R.P. III. 373. A.P. 1239 (25)
- vi. G.P.R. 1429-36. p.107.

dissolved and it is still preserved among the municipal documents.<sup>i.</sup>  
 Further it has twice been copied into the "Liber Custumarum" of the  
<sup>ii</sup>  
 town, and on the second occasion, the petition and answer, originally  
 in French, have been translated into English.

The third example mentioned above of a town preserving some record of a parliamentary petition among its own archives, is not quite in line with the two preceding cases; that is to say the petition is not actually from the town itself. By 1433 Melcombe had become so impoverished and desolate that it no longer contained sufficient inhabitants to exercise its functions as a port. Whereupon a request was made to the king in that year that he would annul Melcombe as a  
<sup>iii</sup>  
 port and substitute Poole in its place. There is no express mention in the petition of by whom it was made but it apparently originated among the men of Poole and the merchants exporting from that district. Very likely it was chiefly inspired by one, John Roger who had suffered the loss of some of his goods through the inability of the depopulated town of Melcombe to withstand the marauding attacks of enemies. In any case, the petition was granted and Melcombe suffered a curtailment of its commercial franchises. Among the documents preserved in the

- i. "Records of the Borough of Northampton" (ed. C.A. Markham and J.C. Cox 1898. vol. I. 75)
- ii. "Records of the Borough of Northampton" (ut supra) vol. I. p. 283. 286
- iii. R.P. IV. 444. A.P. 6255 (126)

town is an extract made from the parliament roll for this year of the above petition and answer.<sup>i</sup>

A similarity of motive can be detected in the recording of each of these petitions. It may best be expressed by saying that it is not so much the petition which is noted as the answer to it, and this for the reason that the granting of each of these requests had an important and lasting effect on conditions in the towns preferring them. London merchants could monopolise all the wholesale trade in the city, its inhabitants were privileged in the matter of apprenticeship, the mayor of Northampton could secure that the streets of the town should be paved while Melcombe lost its status as a port. Thus the act of municipal petitioning is not recorded but the display of royal grace which it evoked.

This of course might be expected in those more formal and legal muniments which are essentially evidences of privileges enjoyed rather than desired. It might however be conjectured that the more popular aspect of a town's petitions, even where they were in vain, would be reflected in its contemporary chronicles, if any should exist. A number of such relating to London have been published, but here again, though there is far more reference to parliamentary proceedings in general, there is practically no mention of the city in any particular relation to them. Only in one short Latin chronicle<sup>ii</sup> is

- i. "A descriptive catalogue of the Charters, minute books and other documents of the borough of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis" (ed. H.J. Moule. 1883) p.149
- ii. "Six Town Chronicles of England" (ed. R. Henley. 1911) p.110.



there an entry to the effect that the ordinance of 1455 against the importation of manufactured silk goods was made " ad supplicationem londonien<sup>nsium</sup>~~um~~ suam." The writer goes on to say that the foreign competition has deprived Englishwomen of their occupation and sustenance "ut dolorose referabant."

In spite of the absence of allusions to their parliamentary petitions in the local records of the towns submitting, the petitions themselves still remain as evidence of a practical if intermittent interest in parliament. Accordingly the point has been raised as to whether the presentation of a petition from a parliamentary borough does not necessarily imply the presence of its members in the commons' house.<sup>i</sup> To this it has been objected that the fount of royal justice was open to all during the sitting of a parliament as at any other time, and that the character of numbers of known petitioners - Jews, mendicants, prisoners, - would imply a motley personnel for the lower house, had their presence there been a necessary condition of their petitioning.<sup>ii</sup> The analogy is not just. Jews and mendicants were not asked to send representatives from among themselves to join in the king's councils. A beggar for the king's grace had no knowledge of a parliamentary pauper to whom he might think of entrusting his petition. But boroughs in general were supposed to be represented in parliament. Their members were

- i. English Historical Review. XXXIX p.514, 520.
- ii. A.F.Pollard. "The Evolution of Parliament" (1926) Appendix II. p.425.6.

regarded as a distinct element in its composition. A town with a petition was not in the same position as a Jew, for there was often at any rate the possibility of a town, which there never was for any of the other promiscuous suppliants, of sending up its petition by men who were not merely its representatives but its parliamentary representatives. If therefore members were returned for a town to a parliament to which it sent a petition, it can certainly be maintained that the petition is a point in favour of the actual presence of the members in the common's' house. The desire of furthering municipal interests would quite conceivably lead to a town's taking practical advantage of its power to send members to parliament in order that its petition might have a close backing of local patriotism. An incident which occurred in 1376<sup>i</sup> bears out this view. In a parliament held that year "les Communes baillierent avant as Seigneurs deux grantz Billes faites par le Communaltee de la Ville de Grant Jernemuth dont plusours y estoient present<sup>i</sup> ~~ix en~~ <sup>a</sup> poursuivre mesmes les Billes."

On the other hand, of course, the mere fact of a town sending a petition to parliament is no proof that its members actually went with it. Practically the only proofs of the presence of borough members in parliament are records of some payment being made to them for their attendance.<sup>ii</sup> Writs de expensis issued to the commons during the Lancastrian period are only entered

- i. R.P. II. 360.
- ii. The petition from Bristol in 1426 is a proof of the actual attendance of its M.P.'s as it concerns their attendance in that Parliament under a mis-worded writ.

on the close rolls for the first seven parliaments of Henry IV and the first two of Henry V. The list of borough attendances here given for these parliaments must be supplemented<sup>enc</sup> by entries in local records. For the rest of the period it must be constructed entirely from these scattered sources.

A study of the returns of members to parliament and the writs de expensis<sup>i</sup> enrolled in the early XV century in connection with the petitions<sup>s</sup> sent up by towns during that period, yields interesting if contradictory results.<sup>ii</sup> In two cases the evidence seems to point to a connection between the town representative and the town petition. Ipswich and Lewes receive only one writ de expensis each during this time, but they get them for just those years in which they present petitions, Lewes in 1400 and Ipswich in 1402.<sup>iii</sup> However, some towns for whom members were fairly usually returned did not even receive a summons to the parliaments in which they petitioned. Cambridge and Norwich were not returned in 1402 nor were Norwich and Truro in 1410. Further, some towns which received writs de expensis for one or more parliaments did not have them for those in which they submitted petitions. For instance writs were issued to Grimsby in 1399, 1404, 1406 and 1407 but not in 1402. Melcombe

- i. Record Commission Transcripts. Series I. Nos. 44, 45a.
- ii. See Appendix II.
- iii. Lincoln received a number of writs de expensis including the two years in which it submitted petitions.

and Yarmouth only had writs in 1403 but they both petitioned in 1399 and 1407. Southwark got a writ in 1414 but not in 1406. Finally, other towns as Lyme and Truro received no writs de expensis.at all although the former petitioned in 1402 and 1407 and the latter in 1402.

As has been pointed out this information must be supplemented by what may be gained from local records. This may affect the foregoing analysis in two ways. Evidence may be found that towns which only received a writ de expensis for the parliament in which they petitioned, actually sent members to other parliaments, or it may be discovered that towns which had **no writ** for the parliament in which they petitioned did in fact send members to it. An illustration of the latter occurrence has been found in the records of Shrewsbury. Members were returned for this town in 1399, 1402, 1403, 1406, 1407, 1410, 1411 and 1413. It sent up petitions in 1406 and 1407 and received writs de expensis in 1399 and 1403.

However, there is an entry in the town bailiff's accounts for 1408-9<sup>i</sup> to the effect that £4 were paid to John Scryven and Thomas Pryde "pro expensis ad parlaments de Gloucester" (1407) and also 1/- a day to each of them again for eleven days at the same parliament, together with 53/4 to them for going "versus Regem pro pardonacione subsidii habenda." This means in the first place that the

i. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 15th Report. Appendix 10. p27.

Shrewsbury M.P.'s were undoubtedly present in this parliament.

It also bears out the suggestion that some towns did not apply for writs de expensis because they were not willing to pay their members at the standard rate of 2/- a day.<sup>i</sup> The Gloucester

parliament sat for forty-four days and the members for Shrewsbury were allowed four days travelling expenses when parliament met

in this town.<sup>ii</sup> There was therefore due to them £9. 12s. Instead, they were paid in all £7.15. 4. The reasons for this economy are

fully set forth in the petition which the members took with them.<sup>iii</sup>

Half the town had lately been burnt; at the parliament held there in 21 Richard II all the armour and weapons of the burgesses had been seized and given away to others, to their loss of more than 300 marcs; whereas the town had chiefly thriven on merchandise, ale and other victuals, the sheep of the county had been seized and destroyed by the Welsh rebels to the ruination of the victuallers of the town; Ower Glendower had burnt eight villages within the town's franchises; at the Battle of Shrewsbury one of the suburbs was burnt; the burgesses had gone on every expedition to Wales at their own cost; they were put to such expense by the necessity<sup>l</sup> of maintaining a mighty watch

- i. A.F.Pollard. "The evolution of Parliament" Appendix II p.410-11 428.
- ii. C.C.R. 1377-81. p.221-2. When Parliament met at Gloucester in 1378 the Gloucestershire knights were allowed expenses for 28 days. Shrewsbury M.Ps for 32 days.
- iii. R.P. III. 618.

on their walls that many of the inhabitants had left; a recent flood of water had brought down part of the town wall and a tower, doing damage which  $\frac{1}{2}$  200 ~~ls.~~ could not remedy; finally, notwithstanding all these misfortunes the town had laid out more than 400 marcs on divers works since the parliament held at Coventry in 1404. Request was therefore made that it might be exempted from taxation during the Welsh rebellion. In view of such municipal straits it is not surprising that representatives had to be found who would serve the town for less than the standard wages. It is noteworthy that in spite of the town's impoverishment it was thought worthwhile to send members. The comparative proximity of the parliament no doubt encouraged the desire to do so and also facilitated the practical fulfilment of it.

The last item of payment recorded in the bailiff's accounts is interesting - 53/4 for going "versus Regem pro pardonacione subsidii habenda," The tempting conjecture that the members received this as a commission for successfully pushing the town's petition cannot be entertained as the petition was rejected. But Shrewsbury did obtain exemption for a certain amount of the taxes granted in the Gloucester parliament. This may be ascertained from a patent issued on 28 February 1408 at Westminster by which the town is pardoned the sum of £47 because it has suffered great losses "by the malice and invasion of the Welsh rebels"<sup>i</sup> From this it may be gathered that the

members for the town, undismayed by the treatment which their request had received in parliament, followed the king back to London and finally did succeed in wringing some measure of relief from him.

It would thus appear that in certain instances the fact that a town wished to submit a petition in parliament may have constrained it actually to shoulder the burden of representation. It is also clear, however, that this is not a matter upon which any general statement can be made but that each particular case must receive individual investigation.

Although the published municipal records for this period contain but few allusions to parliamentary petitions, they are by no means devoid of references to connections between town and parliament. For the most part these are concerned with the wages paid to borough members. In most cases such payments fall below the standard rate of 2/- a day. Shrewsbury in 1437<sup>i</sup> paid one of its members only £4. for 67 days service.<sup>ii</sup> Reading gave its representatives 10<sup>iii</sup> marcs (£6.13. 4) for the parliament of 1449 which lasted for 107 days

- i. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 15th Report. Appendix X p.28.
- ii. This and the following references to the number of days duration of a parliament have been recalculated from the list given in C.H.Parry "The Parliaments and Councils of England" (1839) Introduction p. lvii-lviii, where they are reckoned from first to last day including intervals between sessions for which M.P.'s were not paid.
- iii. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 11th Report. Appendix VII. p.130.

and for which they were consequently entitled to £11. 2. 0 each." <sup>i</sup>

Ipswich paid one of its members for the same parliament only <sup>ii</sup>

£4. 9. 0. Launceston practised the most rigid economy in this res- <sup>iii</sup>

pect. In 1432 (67 days) 13/4 was assigned to its members; in 1445 <sup>iv</sup>

(190 days) one received 13/4, the other 6/8; those who served in <sup>vi</sup>

1449 (107 days) got 20/- each; the members in 1449-50 (over 110 days) <sup>vii</sup>

received 13/4 between them, those in 1459 (31 days) 6/8 each. <sup>viii.</sup>

It is not surprising to find that in 1432, 1d earnest money was

given to one of the members elect together with threepennyworth of <sup>ix</sup>

bread and ale.

The mayor of Oxford who represented his town in 1429 (99 days) <sup>x</sup>

was given only 13/4 for his expenses. At Canterbury <sup>in 1445</sup> the wages

- i. Reading M.Ps were allowed 4 days expenses when parliament met at Westminster. Writs de expensis for January parliament 1404 (67 days). Reading M.P's allowed for 71 days.
- ii. N. Bacon "The Annalls of Ipsw<sup>che</sup>" (1884) p.109.
- iii. R. & O.B. Peter. "The Histories of Launceston & Dunheved" (1885) p.124-5.
- iv. " " " " " " p.129.
- v. " " " " " " p.131.
- vi. The roll of parliament gives no termination.
- vii. "History of Launceston" (Ut Supra) p.134.
- viii. " " " " p.137.
- ix. " " " " p.124-5.
- x. "Munimenta Civitatis Oxonie" (ed. H.E.Salter. Oxford Historical Soc. 1920) p. 285.



of members were reduced from 2/- to 1/- a day until 1447 when<sup>i</sup>  
 they were increased to 1/4,<sup>ii</sup> while an order was made at Nottingham  
 in 1436 that henceforward the burgesses of parliament for the town  
 should receive **only** 1/4 a day.<sup>iii</sup>

In some towns on the other hand members were paid at a higher  
 rate than the standard 2/-. At Norwich in 1417 they were given<sup>iv</sup>  
 6/8 a day. It would seem that at Lynn an attempt to maintain a  
 higher standard of wages for the parliamentary burgesses proved too  
 costly for it was agreed by the whole congregation in 1442 that the  
 members chosen thereafter should receive 2/- a day and no more.<sup>v.</sup>  
 Nevertheless the M.P's for this town in 1459 were paid at the rate  
 of 4/- a day.<sup>vi</sup>

- i. Historical Manuscripts Commission 9th Report. Appendix I p.138
- ii. C.R. Bruce<sup>n</sup> "Ancient Canterbury" (1924) p.138.
- iii. H. Stevenson "Nottingham Records" (1882) vol II. p.423.
- iv. "Records of the City of Norwich" (ed. W. Hudson & J.C. Tingey. 1906-10) vol II. p. 62.
- v. Historical Manuscripts Commission 11th Report. Appendix III. p.164.
- vi. " " " " " " " " " " p.167.

One of the representatives for Romney was given 2/6 a day  
 in 1411 <sup>i.</sup> and another for Hythe received similar payment in  
 1418 ; <sup>ii.</sup> both members for Hythe received 2/6 in 1419. <sup>iii.</sup>  
 In 1435 Dover paid one of its M.P's 3/4 a day. <sup>iv.</sup> By a special  
 arrangement some of the members of the Cinque Ports were allowed  
 to return home after the first few weeks of a parliament leaving  
 three or more of their number to represent the ports as a whole. <sup>v.</sup>  
 Thus those towns whose members were sent back to them before the  
 close of parliament only had to pay them for the shorter period  
 of service, though they sometimes shared the expenses of those  
 towns whose members remained. <sup>vi.</sup> In 1399 Winchelsea paid one  
 of its members for 5 weeks the other for 3; <sup>vii.</sup> Hythe, in 1411,  
 one for 55 days, the other for 26; <sup>viii.</sup> Dover in 1435, one for  
 78 days , the other for 10, <sup>ix.</sup> and in 1452 one of the representa-  
 tives for Rye only attended parliament for 28 days while it sat  
 at Reading, while the other continued to the end after its  
 adjournment to London. <sup>x.</sup> On the other hand in 1413 Hythe con-  
 tributed towards the wages of John Gildeforde an M.P. for Sandwich. <sup>xi.</sup>

i. Historical Manuscripts Commission 5th Rep: App: p. 538.  
 ii. G. Wilks "The Barons of the Cinque Ports & the Parliamentary  
 Representation of Hythe" (1892) p. 45.  
 iii. "The Barons of the Cinque Ports etc." (ut Supra) p. 46.  
 iv. W. Boys "Collections for an history of Sandwich in Kent.."p794.  
 v. " " " " " " " p.774.  
 vi. "The Barons of the Cinque Ports etc." (ut Supra) p.56-57.  
 vii. W.D.Cooper "A History of Winchelsea" (1850) p.208.  
 viii. "The Barons of the Cinque Ports etc." (ut Supra) p.45.  
 ix. "History of Sandwich (ut Supra) p.794.  
 x. "Historical Transcripts Commission.5th Report,Appendix p.491.  
 xi. "The Barons of the Cinque Ports etc." (ut Supra) p. 45

Sometimes when parliament was summoned to meet elsewhere than at Westminster special arrangements were made by a town for the payment of its members. When parliament was adjourned/in 1450 to Leicester it was ordained in London that thenceforth the city members should have 40/- a day for their expenses and also all other members elected in future so long as parliament should continue to sit in some place remote from the city. <sup>i.</sup> In order to meet this extra expense the fees for the enrolments of apprentices and admission to the freedom were doubled for a year afterwards. At Ipswich when parliament met at Coventry in 1459 it was agreed that each of the town's representatives should have 1/6 a day so long as the parliament were at Coventry or York, but if it adjourned to London or Canterbury they should only have <sup>ii.</sup> 1/-. Similar arrangements were made in 1460 when parliament <sup>iii</sup> met at York.

A special allowance for horse hire is sometimes mentioned. Each of the M.P's for Winchelsea received 10/- on this account <sup>iv.</sup> in 1399, and together with "other fees" this made up an item of <sup>v.</sup> 16/8 in the bill of expenses for a Dover member in 1435.

- i. Calendar of London Letter Books (ut Supra) K. p.330.
- ii. "The Annalls of Ips<sup>wche</sup>" (ut Supra) p.117.
- iii. " " " " " p.121.
- iv. "History of Winchelsea" (ut Supra) p.208
- v. "History of Sandwich" (ut Supra) p. 794.

The representatives for some towns occasionally received extra payment which was definitely in the nature of a reward. One of the burgesses for Winchester in the second parliament of 1421 was given 15/- "in reward<sup>e</sup> Parliamenti" and the other, 2/- for defending the exemption of the citizens from being appointed collectors of the king's money in the county.<sup>i</sup> At Sandwich in 1446 a reward of 16/- was granted to each of the barons in parliament over and above their wages.<sup>ii</sup>

In order to relieve a town of the expense to which it was put by its parliamentary representation, a burgess would sometimes offer his services gratis or at much reduced rates. When Mark le Fayre and William Wode had been elected as members for Winchester in 1413 it was agreed that the former should have the anciently accustomed wage of 2/- a day; but the latter in relief of the commonalty of the town promised to serve for 3/4 a week.<sup>iii</sup> Edmund Winter<sup>iv</sup>, a burgess for Ipswich in 1452 paid all his own expenses and another representative for the same town in 1469 acted in consideration of his admission to the freedom.<sup>v</sup>

- i. J. S. Furley "City Government of Winchester, from the records of the XIV & XV centuries" (1923) p.iii.
- ii. "History of Sandwich" (ut Supra) p. 673.
- iii. "The Black Book of Winchester" (ed.W.H. Bird. 1925) p.17.
- iv. "The Annalls of Ips<sup>wche</sup>" (ut Supra) p. 110.
- v. " " " " p.129.

A somewhat unusual composition was made on this point at Dunwich in 1463 when John Strange, the member elect, covenanted "whether the parliament hold long time or short or whether it fortune to be prorogued, that he will take for his wages only a cade and a half a barrel of herrings, to be delivered by Christmas."<sup>i</sup>

A few other detailed entries of the particular uses to which the money collected for members' wages was put, throw an extraordinarily interesting light on some of the actual activities of the representatives at Westminster, or other meeting-place of parliament. Thus in 1413-14 the M.P.'s for Romney gave 3/4 to the Clerk of the Rolls "to have his friendship as to allowance of the tenth and fifteenth granted in parliament." They also paid 12d for having the Acts of Parliament written out.<sup>ii</sup> Such items, at any rate argue a lively and intelligent interest in parliamentary proceedings on the part of at least one town for at least one parliament. Other references reveal a municipal concern for the conduct of parliamentary burgesses no less interesting though perhaps on a lower constitutional plane. Two of these are to the bestowal of ordinary gratuities. The above-mentioned members for Romney also disbursed the sum of 8d to the usher of the parliament chamber,<sup>iii</sup> while in 1419 the

- i. Quoted in E. Duke "Prolusiones Historicae" (1837) p.306
- ii. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 5th Report Appendix p.539.
- iii. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 5th Report. Appendix.p.539.

the M.P.'s for Hythe gave the same official <sup>i.</sup> 12d. A further somewhat mysterious entry in the Norwich Treasurer's Account for 1410-11 records, not a casual largesse, as the above, but what was apparently a customary payment made to one of the parliamentary officials. "For six bolts (rolls) of worsted, <sup>ii</sup> viz. three white and three green for Rome, the clerk of the <sup>iii</sup> parliament as ancient first fruits, 34/- ." Or was it simply a joke? The exact nature of the services which evoked such liberality must be left to conjecture.

The maintenance by their representatives of a superior social status, both as regards appearance and lodging, was a matter of interest to some towns. In 2 Edward IV an ordinance <sup>iv</sup> was made at York to the effect that "for als mykel as nowe late some aldermen being at the parliaments in time passed have gone to borde, whereas yai have at all times to fore holden house for the worship of the cite yet fro henceforth what alderman soever shall go to parliament and will hold house, shall have for his costs daily iiiii s. and if he go to borde he shall have but ii s. upon the day and no more fro nowe forth." At

i. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 5th Report, Appendix p. 539  
 "The Barons of the Cinque Ports etc." (ut supra) p.46. He is here called the doorkeeper

iii. "Records of Norwich" (ut supra) Vol. II. 57.

iv. F. Drake "Eboracum" (1736) p. 357. note 3.

London, apparently, the municipal efforts in this direction were at one time abused by the members themselves for in 1429 an ordinance<sup>i</sup> was made by the mayor and aldermen to put a stop to the city's M.P.s appropriating more cloth and fur at the city's expense than they ought.

Clearly, the larger and more prosperous towns were at pains to secure that their municipal dignity should be reflected in and upheld by the conduct of their parliamentary representatives.

These indications of the interest evinced by some towns in the activities of their members at the place of parliament are confirmed by one or two references to what was expected of them on their return home. At an assembly held on 30 May 1421 in Norwich<sup>ii</sup>, the two ex-M.P.'s "declared the whole intent and business done in the Lord King's Parliament" which had been held at Westminster in the early part of the month. The burgesses for Lynn similarly "declared the acts of parliament" on their return in 1459 and 1461.<sup>iii</sup> In 1425 and 1427 the members for this town were in close touch with their constituency during the time of parliament. On both occasions they were engaged in negotiating for the repayment of various loans which the borough

i. Calendar of London Letter Books (ut supra) K. p. 201.  
 ii. "Records of Norwich" (ut supra) Vol. I. p. 276.  
 iii. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 11th Report. Appendix III. p. 167, 168.

had made to the crown. Their communications with their fellow townsmen were chiefly concerned with this business, but in the second instance their letter "made mention that the Friars Preachers contrived a certain malicious bill, complaining to the King about the community in respect to divers transgressions."<sup>i</sup>

The return of some parliamentary burgesses receives a distinguished notice in the local records on account of their giving, not a description of the conduct of the king's council, but a public-spirited donation to the common funds out of the money collected for their expenses. Edward Horne, one of the members for Canterbury in 1406 gave 6/8 out of his remuneration, towards the purchase by the Corporation of the Inn known as the "Lyon."<sup>ii</sup> Geoffrey Goodlok, M.P. for Romney in 1449, gave 20/-<sup>iii</sup> out of his wages to the community. An early instance of a similar benefaction is recorded at Guildford where in 1364, when 39/6 had been collected in part payment of the town's representatives, they immediately gave 13/4 towards the repair of the County Hall.<sup>iv.</sup>

- i. Historical Manuscripts Commission. 11th Report. Appendix III. p. 160-1
- ii. " " " 9th. Report. Appendix I. p. 138.
- iii. " " " 5th. Report. Appendix p. 543.
- iv. "Guildford, a descriptive & historical view of the county towns of Surrey" (1845) p. 115. note. This is quoted from the Black Book of Guildford.



Altogether it is clear that in a consideration of the relations between town and parliament in the first half of the XV century, the municipal petition in parliament must not be ignored. Very likely the mere fact of its existence may be all the evidence which it will afford on this point, but this is by no means a negligible contribution. In some instances however, research into all the attendant circumstances of its presentation may reveal that such a petition is an indication of an intimate and intelligent connection between the town submitting it and the parliament to which it was sent. A general investigation of the published local records for the period, nevertheless, conveys on the whole the impression, that from the municipal point of view parliamentary representation was regarded chiefly as an item in the town treasurer's accounts.

CHAPTER V.

THE VALUE OF TOWN PETITIONS IN PARLIAMENT.

Considered as a general historical source, municipal petitions in parliament are essentially local and scattered material as they issue from towns situated in all parts of the country. This circumstance of their origin imparts individuality and independence to the information which they afford; and this information <sup>additional</sup> ~~They also possess~~ <sup>being entirely unsolicited.</sup> ~~the~~ interest of ~~spontaneity~~.

Another intrinsic characteristic of these documents somewhat detracts from their purely historical value. The object of a petition was to secure a favourable answer. It was not a mere record of municipal history but a plea for the king's grace. This meant of course that strict accuracy in details would be subordinated to dramatic and appealing effect. This influence of this circumstance over statistical information has already been noted.<sup>i.</sup>

Further, the very nature of these petitions severely limits the extent to which the evidence they contain may be generally applied. Each arose out of some local difficulty. They cannot therefore be considered as giving anything like a complete picture of municipal conditions under the Lancastrians. Any effort so to stretch their individual application can only be compared to an attempt to ascertain a

i. See Chapter 11.

nation's standard of health by an exclusive research among doctors' bills. "They that are whole need no physician", whereas the *raison d'être* of a parliamentary petition was misfortune.

To the general historian therefore these petitions are a valuable source for an account of the difficulties which were met with by towns in the first half of the XV century. Here again, of course, there is a danger of confounding the general with the particular. Misfortune itself was most often a result of some local accident. However, two figures do stand out in the town petitions as personifications of more or less general problems. The first is that of the fugitive town treasurer. <sup>ii.</sup> Whether the lack of public funds which had occasioned his hasty withdrawal were due to complications of jurisdiction, <sup>iii.</sup> accident of natural situation, <sup>iv</sup> violent assaults, <sup>v</sup> or any other cause, it is clear that this paucity of municipal revenue was the most threatening portent in the fate of many a mediaeval town. The other figure is

ii. e.g. Lincoln. A.P.6083 (122).

iii. e.g. Lincoln. R.P.iv.313. A.P.6024 (121). Ilchester R.P.iii.619.

iv. e.g. Yarmouth R.P.iii.438. Mablethorp. R.P.iv.385. A.P.1245(25).

v. e.g. Carlisle R.P.iv.92. A.P.1154(24).

that of the private business man, working for his "singuler lucre".<sup>i.</sup> Not only is he seen directly shirking his duties as a citizen<sup>ii.</sup> but it is also obvious that in fulfilling his individual ambitions, either in industry by evading<sup>iii.</sup> or manipulating<sup>iv.</sup> the guilds, or in trade by eluding the staple regulations, he was continually defying the municipal authorities<sup>v.</sup> whose business it was to supervise these activities.

In a further consideration of what contribution these petitions make to the general history of the XV century it should be noted that they contain only a few references to "the unquiet times" during which they were presented. Beyond the uncivil conduct of the Welsh and other borderers to passengers on the Severn, only two cases of violent and lawless behaviour are mentioned, the forcible enclosure of common lands at Darlton and Ragnall in 1414 by Sir Richard Stanhope<sup>vi</sup> and the attack on the Carlisle fishing preserves by Lord Dacre in 1416.<sup>vii.</sup>

- i. R.P.iv.360. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.) 19/25.
- ii. York. R.P.v.225.
- iii. e.g. the London Girdlers' Guild. R.P.iv.536.
- iv. e.g. the London Goldsmiths' & Cutlers' Guilds. R.P.iv.536.
- v. In the case of the staple regulations these were of course the heads of the staple company, who shared with other municipal officers the government of affairs at Calais.
- vi. R.P.iv.29. A.P.1128 (23).
- vii. R.P.iv.92. A.P.1154 (24).

That the burgesses were not unaware, however, of what was really the source of most of the contemporary anarchy is shown in an article in the 1445 municipal constitution for Shrewsbury, submitted for parliamentary confirmation in that year.<sup>i</sup> By this ~~lest~~ "at enny assemble of Lordes, Assises or Sessions, when eny affray or trouble fall in the seidf Town, such man havynge lyverey, wolde drawe to his maister, or to his felawe and not to the Bailifs which have the peas to kepe" it was agreed that no inhabitant of the town should receive livery contrary to the provisions of the statute of liveries. The fact that these are the only allusions in the selected petitions to domestic unrest is a striking witness to the self-sufficien<sup>cy</sup>/and self-absorption of the towns during this period. It should perhaps be noted, however, that no municipal petitions were presented in the last two Lancastrian parliaments of 1459 and 1460.

In the frequent absence of any early local records, the petitions which a town sent to parliament are invaluable material for the local historian.<sup>ii</sup> This may especially be seen in the

i. R.P. V. Parl. & Co. Procs. (chanc.) Roll 22.

ii. He sometimes overlooks them. See Victoria County History for Hampshire. Vol. IV. p. 348. The question of Andover's exemption from taxation owing to the fire there, would be made clear by a reference to A.P. 4477 (90).

i            ii            iii

case of the West country towns as Lyme, Truro and Melcombe each of which submitted a series of petitions detailing its deplorable condition. From these it ~~will~~<sup>may</sup> be gathered that all these towns had been burnt by the French under Edward III and Richard II. Lyme had suffered additional loss owing to the destruction of its port by the sea, and both Lyme and Truro had been further desolated by pestilence. Melcombe felt its devastation most keenly in that it meant that neighbouring merchants ceased to patronise it as a port. As a result of their impoverishment, consequent on the above misfortunes, all these towns sought and gained some alleviation of the financial demands made of them. Lyme made a valiant effort to retrieve its lost fortune by undertaking the rebuilding of its port. The inhabitants of Truro, however, were so discouraged by the misadventures which had befallen their town, that when only temporary relief in the matter of taxation was granted them, they did not even attempt the repair of their ruined dwellings. As for Melcombe, so utterly exhausted and depopulated did it become that it was finally made the subject of a petition which after declaring that the town was incapable of protecting the goods of merchants

i. 1402, 1407, 1410.

ii. 1402, 1420 - and two more about 1421.

iii. 1399, 1407, 1410, 1420, 1426, 1433 and about 1437. Petitions concerning Melcombe, 1427, 1433.

exporting through it, secured its degradation from the status of a port.<sup>i</sup> It may easily be understood how these petitions fill in what would otherwise be a blank in the history of these towns.

Apart from any details of local events which these petitions may supply, the mere fact of their composition is an item of importance concerning the constitutional history of the towns in question. How far all the inhabitants of a town participated in the drawing up of such requests it is impossible to say owing to the silence of municipal records on this point.<sup>ii</sup> The references to the petitioners in the petitions themselves are probably more or less a matter of form. They are certainly designed to give an air of local popularity to the supplications they precede. In a good number of cases the governing body of the town is mentioned, - mayor, sheriffs, aldermen, bailiffs, but in every instance a more comprehensive term such as burgesses, commonalty or commons is added. However, in spite of this absence of conclusive details, the petitions themselves remain as evidence of some degree of corporate action.

Where municipal archives do exist for this period, the

- i. This point could be ascertained from local records but without any details. See H. J. Moule "Descriptive Catalogue of .... documents of ... Weymouth & Melcombe Regis" (ut supra) p.13.
- ii. See Chap. IV.

petition in parliament serves as an interesting supplement to them. Thus the complaint of the commonalty<sup>i</sup> of Coventry in 1416 against the confederacy of the dyers of the town is a valuable addition to other records of the social and industrial disputes which took place there.<sup>ii</sup>

In the eyes of the constitutional historian the importance of these town petitions lies in the fact that they are not entirely of local interest. The very object of their composition was to bring municipal problems before the notice of the central government and to implore its aid in their solution. Thus they, together with the arrangements made for their reception, either officially by the king and his council or unofficially by the commons<sup>iii</sup> are revealed as the links between local needs and central legislation.

The literary interest of these petitions, a matter of concern for all historians, is great. Up till the early years of Henry VI's reign they are all in French but after this a good number were written in English. They are distinguished as a whole by clarity of statement. No doubt is left as to the precise difficulty with which a town is faced nor, in a good many

i. R.P. IV. 75.

ii. Victoria County History. Hampshire Vol. V. p. 148-156.

iii. See Chap. I.



cases, of the exact remedy it requires. Regarding their composition as supplications, the straightforward enumeration of a series of misfortunes affords in most instances an appealing simplicity of its own. Nevertheless these townsfolk do not fail to exhibit a certain amount of ingenuity in presenting their cases. They were aware, of course, that their statements would be verified by royal commissioners before any large concessions were made to them. However the opportunity of making a good first impression was not to be lost. For example in 1410 Melcombe<sup>i</sup> and Lyme<sup>ii</sup> each submit long petitions setting forth an imposing array of misadventures and quoting with painstaking accuracy various displays of royal clemency in the past; the usual prayer for further consideration is added and then, just when these supplications appear to be drawing to a natural close, each is arrestingly reopened by the addition of a sinister postscript to the effect that the king himself will be a loser if he neglects the welfare of these towns. This device of reserving some of the main points of a petition to appear as an artistic afterthought, thereby successfully evoking the extra attention always given to such additions, is employed in other instances. For example Cambridge thus gives a rapid summary of all its incidental

i. R. P. III. 639.

ii. " " 640.

i                                  ii                                  iii

misfortunes while Ilchester and Lincoln drive home the import of preceding petitions by similar additions in the nature of definite statistics. The rhetorical use of the postscript may be seen in another petition from Lincoln which concludes

iv

"Considering more over ~~pat pe~~ said cite not releved atte this tyme but left in poynt aforesaid of ~~nede~~ so compellyd hit shuld cause ~~pe~~ said maire & ~~cit~~ zeims fro the said cite utterly to depart and hit to stand desolate that godde defend."

Another device employed by these municipal petitioners might be designated "culminating consequences." That is to say, by easy flights of inference the general ruin of the country is depicted as being inevitably involved in the downfall of the particular town in question. The merchants of Norwich begin with the universal calamity and work back to their own particular

v

misfortune. Foreign traders are threatening to search English worsteds sent abroad and to impose severe penalties on fraudulent goods "qe serroit graund esclandre & reprof a la Roiaume, si bien come a la dite Citee & a la Countee de Norffolk & final

- i. R.P. III. 515. A.P. 5169 (104).
- ii. " " 619.
- iii. " IV. 313. A.P. 6024 (121)
- iv. A.P. 6083 (122).
- v. R.P. IV. 637.

destruction des Merchauntz come a la dite Citee, qe ne usent autres merchandise en substance forsqe soulement les ditz Worstedes". The staplers on the other hand, in one of their many complaints, work in the opposite direction,<sup>i</sup> asserting that "the saide Merchauntz be ye menes and licences aforsaide stonden in point to bee undoone, ye saide Staple to be dissevered and distroyed and consequently ye saide powere Towne of Caleys, yat by ye continuance of ye saide Staple hath hitherto been gretly maintained and strengthened, like to bee defaited and lost, and ye saide Royaume incommune greetly hindered and hurt." The Lancastrian burgess obviously had a good eye for dramatic effect.

It has been said of parliamentary petitions in general that in them the details of "acts of violence are set forth with far more vividness than is found in any other of the literary productions of the time."<sup>ii</sup> The municipal efforts certainly do not fall behind in this respect. Thus the inhabitants of Tewkesbury wax eloquent over the lawless attacks made on the traffic down the River Severn by men dwelling in the Forest of Dean and roundabout;<sup>iii</sup> they "dispoilled Vlll trowes, at divers~~s~~ tymes, of whete, malt and flowre and other divers goodes, and the men of the same trowes cast over the borde, and diverse of hem drowned, and the hausters of the same

i. R.P.IV. 490. A.P.4971(100).

ii. ~~R.P.IV. 490~~ J. F. Baldwin "The King's Council in England during the Middle Ages" (1913).p.332.

iii. R.P.IV.345.

trowes cutte atwayne, maneshud the owners of the saide goodes and the saide trowmen, that they sholde not be so hardy to carye no maner of vitaille by the saide streme up ne downe, for Lorde ne Lady, and that they wolde alle to have the saide trowes and they comen eny more by the costes of the saide Forest".

With regard to more technical points of style, a frequent felicity of phrase and expression may be remarked in these petitions. The native weavers of London clinch their case against the foreign interlopers by declaring that <sup>i</sup> "les ditz aliens supplantent & preignent les profitz du dit mestier & les ditz suppliantz portent les charges". Hatch was "deux foitz chargez ..... en diverse manere pur un mesme cause,"<sup>ii</sup> and the inhabitants of Yarmouth were alliteratively "panges & poveres gentz."<sup>iii</sup> Lincoln recalls the day when it was "stuffed with grete noumbre of citezeins and substance of goodes" and implores a remedy from "the hendes of the most gracious help ofoure said soverain lord."<sup>iv</sup> The staplers, whose petitions reveal a high standard of literary composition,

i. R.P.111. 600.

ii. R.P.111. 640.

iii. R.P.111. 620.

iv. A.P.6083(122).

present a vividly pathetic picture of undercut merchants who "have been verray wery of yair goodys".<sup>i</sup> They bewail the fact that "chescun prent en custume de malfaire"<sup>ii</sup> or in other words, to ignore the staple monopoly, and elsewhere denounce as abettors of this crime "untrue officers, as Sercheours and Surveiours, which take no fee, but prive rewardes for doying the Kyng wrange".<sup>iii</sup> Another of their petitions affords an excellent example of the weight of a mere accumulation of words. In it a protest is made that staple goods are constantly exported elsewhere than to Calais either by the king's licence or by means of outright smuggling "to grete hyndering to the Kyng oure soveraigne Lord, and to this his Roialme, universell damage, <sup>of the uttering of the Commodites therof beyng</sup> lettyng and grette admientisynge <sup>^</sup> and reparyng to Caleys and never shall be remedied, destroyed ne left, butt yif gretter, sharper and more dredde p̄eynes be ordeigned and sett yere upon." <sup>iv</sup>

Of all the selected petitions, however, the one which stands out as the highest achievement from the literary point of view is that which was submitted by the London silkwomen and throwsters in 1455.<sup>v</sup> It is remarkable alike in its mode of presentation and expression. Here, there is no implication that the particular

i. R.P.IV. 360. Parl. & Co. Procs. (Chanc.)19/25.

ii. R.P.IV. 252.

iii. R.P.V. 149. Parl. & Co. Procs.(Chanc.)27/11.

iv. R.P.V. 325. A.P.1410(29)

v. R.P.V. 325. A.P.1410(29).

misfortune will entail some general material evil but it is presented as involving a transgression of divine law. For the Lombards and other aliens import manufactured silk goods "to th'entent to enriche themself and put such occupations to oyer landes" whereas "it is pleasyng to God that all his Creatures be set in vertueux occupation and labour accordyng to their degrees and convenient for thoe places where their abode is, to the norishing of vertue and eschewing of vices and ydelness". Further, it is argued, on a lower moral plane, but with a continued appeal to principle, in reference to the articles produced by these crafts, that "every wele disposed persone of yis lande, by reason and naturall favour wold rather that wymmen of their nation born and owen blode hadde the occupation thereof, than strange people of oyer landes." The impression is thus conveyed that a purchaser of Italian silkwear would not only be ungodly but unnatural.

The petition includes an illuminating description of the conduct of these crafts "where upon ..... many a warshipfull woman within the seid Citee have lyved full honestly<sup>ourably</sup>, and therewith many good Householdes kept and many Gentilwymmen and other in grete noumbre like as there nowe be moo than a M have be drawn under theym inlernyng the same Craftes and occupation ful vertuesly, unto the pleasaunce of God, wherby afterward they have growe to grete warship."

The foregoing quotations will show how the dignity of the conceptions in the minds of the petitioners has necessarily

communicated itself to the style in which they are expressed. A final note must be made, however, of the felicitous phrase in which the products of these crafts are described. They are simply "things of plesaunce for theym that liken to have them".

Altogether these town petitions<sup>er</sup>~~s~~ have left behind them a valuable body of historical material. Various aspects of early XV century history are reflected in it and receive additional illumination from being revealed in one and the same mirror. Thus the commons are seen adopting the majority of these petitions as their own, in order to establish their claim to be the sole medium of approach to the king in parliament;<sup>i</sup> the burden of these supplications is the struggle of the Lancastrian burgess against multifarious adversities;<sup>ii</sup> and finally, in some instances at any rate, these same petitions represent him in a particular and close relation to the king's council in parliament.<sup>iii</sup> The municipal calamity has thus become the historian's opportunity.

i. Chap. 1.

ii. Chaps. 11 & 111.

iii. Chap. 14.

A P P E N D I X I.

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Ancient Petitions submitted by towns in Lancastrian  
parliaments not printed in the "Rotuli Parliamentorum."

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NOTE.

The Record Commission Transcripts here referred to were made in 1822-4 from the chronological bundles of Ancient Petitions which had been preserved in the Wakefield Tower. Owing to the subsequent rearrangement of the petitions in alphabetical order these transcripts are valuable evidence of their original dates. They must, however, be used with care as it has been discovered in some cases that transcripts of two distinct batches of petitions have been bound in one volume under the same date. However, in most instances when a nucleus of petitions thus transcribed has been definitely dated, the same date may be conjecturally ascribed to the other petitions transcribed along with it.

Apart from the question of dates these transcripts have been used in this Appendix merely for the purpose of deciphering certain defaced portions of the petitions which have obviously become more illegible since the date at which the transcripts were made.

i. "Interim Report" (ut supra)



Andover. c. 1437

Ancient Petition 4477 (90)

Record Commission Transcripts. Series I. vol.118. No.61.

per cancellarium XX die Martii

Soit baille as Seigneurs

As As tressagez communes de ceste present parlement  
 Suppliont humblement lez poveres enhabitantz en la ville de Andevere  
 en la courte de Suthampton en quele ville furront ccc tenantes  
 enhabitees qe come la dite ville & toutz lez measons byens & chateux  
 illeques esteantz en le veile du Pasque lan du regne notre seigneur  
 le Roy qe orest XIII<sup>me</sup> par sudaigne aventure de fue furront arsez &  
 tout outrement destruez affinal destruccion de toutz en ycelle  
 ville enhabitantz & a grant damage & disease de toutz les lieges  
 notre seigneur le Roy de les countees de Cornewaile Devoun Somerset  
 Dorset Wiltshire & Suthampton par mesme la ville de Andevere vers  
 le Citée de Londres passantz pur ceo qe entre la Citée de Novel  
 Saresbur<sup>ir</sup>is & la ville de Basyngstoke qe sont par XXX leaucz dis-  
 tauncz neste ascun ville pur easer ou herbergier les lieges suisditz  
 & en la dite ville de Andevere fuist chescun samedi de lan le  
 ease & avantage de toutz enhabitantz environ ledite ville quele a chescun entier quinzisme & disme graunte  
 meliour marcat de dite Counte de Suthampton a graunt a notre  
 tresoveraigne seigneur le Roy qe orest avant le dite an XIII<sup>me</sup> &  
 a cez progenitours puis lan oeptisme du Roi Edward le primer apres  
 le conquest le dite ville de Andevere ove les hamelettes & membres  
 cestassavoir Charleton Hetherden & Tuam Regis par le noun de

Dominico de Andevere fuist charges a notre souveraigne seigneur, le Roy & a cez progenitours a XIX li. XIX s. XI d. de quelle entier somme le dite ville de Andevere de tut temps suisdit fuist assesse & charge par les collectours dicellez quinzisimes & dismes en le dite Countee a XIII li. XII s. XI d. & les ditz hamelettes & membres a CVII s. Please a vous de votre tresage discrecion de considerer les premises & sur ceo de prier notre souveraigne seigneur le Roy de grantier par auctorite de cest present parlement a ditz suppliantz quils lour heires & successeurs soient quytes & discharged<sup>i.</sup> derle iour de sommonce de cest present Parlement par XX<sup>i.</sup> annz proschein avenirs de les ditz XIII li. XII s. XI d. & de toutz maneres des dismes quinzisimes grauntez ou a grauntier par auctorite de ascun parlement durant le temps de les XL annz suis ditz a tenir parissint qe geans en temps avenir purront avoir le greindre corage en la dite ville enhabitiere & redifier pur dieu & en oeuvre de charitee.

DATE.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this petition owing to its being included in a certain volume of transcripts and to its being minuted for a day in March, an endorsement which is to be found on other petitions transcribed in this volume which have been definitely dated 1437.

i. Note. A two has evidently been omitted under this figure.

Bristol. c.1421.

Ancient Petition 4789(96).

Record Commission Transcripts. Series 1. Vol. 114. No. 34.

A hault & puissant Prince le Duc de Bedford Gardein d'Engleterre  
& as toutz autres tres nobles Seigneurs en cesti present parlement  
assemblez.

Supplient humblement lez Mair & Burgeis de la ville de Bristuyt  
qe plese as voz tres sages discrecions de graunter as ditz suppliantz  
un patent en due fourme affaire desoubz le graunde seal notre  
soverain seigneur le Roi de licence qils purront faire & edifier  
une commune sale en mesme la ville pur resceiver toutz maneres  
foreins & estranges illeoges repairantz & ovesqe eux amesnantz toutz  
maneres draps & laynes pur vendre illeoges & davoit un jour el  
semaigne pur y teigner overt market & vendre leur ditz draps & laynes  
a eux assigne par lordeignances des ditz Mair & Burgeis preignantz  
de eux la custume eut due en mesme le manere come est la custume  
use destre paie par lez gentz foreins ove draps veignantz & repairantz  
a Bakwelhalle en Loundres & ceo en oevre de charite. Considerantz  
tres nobles seigneurs qe le custume ent due est enbesile du Roi & du  
la dite ville a cause qe lez ditz foreins & estranges y gisoient en  
lieux secretz ove leur ditz draps & laynes & en tiel manere est le Roi  
disceive de sa dit custume & auxi plusours gentils repairantz &  
veignantz al dite ville pur y acchater tielx draps pur leur lyvere  
en tiel manere sont auxi disceivez a cause de leur ditz secretz lieux  
a plusours disconuz ou tielx maneres draps ou laynes soloient y estre  
venduz a leur graunde damage.

Date.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this petition as it is included in a particular volume of transcripts containing petitions of this period and as it is addressed to the Duke of Bedford who occupied the office of Guardian of England during the December parliament of 1421.

(c.f. Melcombe.1420. Truro c.1421).

Colchester 1422.

Ancient Petition 5013 (101)

Record Commission Transcripts Series 1.Vo.114. No.35.

A tres sages Seigneurs de cest present parlement .....  
 poverez gens & Burgeys de la vile de Colchestre qe come le Roy  
 Henry quart qe dieu assoile considerant les graundez costages par  
 les ditz suppliantz entour la Closure de mesme ..... mures de  
 pier & de chalk du nouvelle affaire eit graunt<sup>u</sup>e qe les ditz burgoyes  
 seroient quitz exemptz & dischargz de eslire maunder ou trover  
 de leur comburgoys a ascuns  
 ascuns<sup>A</sup>..... de dusze ans ellors proscheins ensuantz sicome  
 en les lettres patentes ent faitz est contenez plus au plein la  
 quelle terme est ore fine & determine & la dit ..... Please a vos  
 tres gracious seigneuries considerer les materes suisditz et sur  
 ces leur grauntier du relevement de leur poverez estat<sup>z</sup> & pur la  
 fortificacion du dit ..... denuncier ou ferre<sup>r</sup>vener ascuns de  
 leur comburgoys suisditz a ascuns parlamentz a tenerz par les vint  
 ans proscheins avenirz mes qils soient .... causes suisditz pur  
 Dieu & oevre du charite.

Date.

This has been definitely established from internal evidence. Henry IV's grant was made 11 June 1410 (C.P.R.1408-13.p.199). As it was for 12 years it expired ("est ore fine") 11 June 1422. The next parliament met in November 1422. (R.P.IV.169).

Lincoln. c. 1437.

Ancient Petition 6083 (122).

Record Commission Transcripts. Series I. Vol.118.No.66.  
per cancellarium XIII die Martii.

Soit baille as Seigneurs.

To the right ~~and~~ wise and discrete Comens of this present parlement Besecheth mekely the pore Maire and Citeyens of the pore Cite of Lincoln to consider howe that nowe the seide pore cite which in tymes of the noble progenitours of the kyng oure soverain lord hath be a notable & gret Cite and the third cite named in this noble reaume stuffed with grete noubre of Citezeins and substaunce of goodes by repairing of marchauntz & usage of marchandises the which said noble progenitours grantyd the said cite the suburbes & the purceint thereof with divers libertees & fraunchisez to the Auncestres & predecessoures of the said M...e & citezeins to have & to ~~had~~ to hem her heires & sucessoures for evermore yeldyng yeerly therefore atte the Eschequer a certain fee fferme of CLXXX li. atte termes of Pasche & seint Michell the Archangell. And howe the said cite by gret & importable charge & birdyn of the said fee fferme paiementes of Xes & XVes as oft as thay be paied thurgh the said

reume atte every tyme c li. divers & mony pestilences.....  
 marchandises be wythdrawyng of the staple fro thens and other divers  
 & notable causes is so empoverest that ther be nought dwellyng with in  
 the said cite the noubre of a c citezeins of the which ther be noon  
 able to support the ..... paiement of the said fee fferme pat hath  
 not born the charge of the same in so myche pat pai that were chosen  
 Shirefs aftir the forme acostumed there to unsware oure seid souverain  
 lord and to discharge pe seid fee fferme for two yere nowe last  
 passid have wythdrawen her bodyes & her goodes so pat the said Maire  
 & Citezeins can not cause hem to support the charge of paiement of pe  
 said fee fferme for the two yere aforeseid..... pat the Maire for the  
 tyme beyng and Citezeins have dewly sewed in the Chauncerie to have  
 hem compellyd by the kynges comaundement to support the charge  
 aforesaid bi cause of wych fee fferme so unpaied writtes..... out of  
 the Chauncerie to make leve of the said Maire & Citezeins of the said  
 fee fferme wych amounteth to pe somme of ccxl li. to pe utter & finall  
 destruccion of the said Cite so pat pe said poer cite be causes  
 aforesaid are wastyd & distrued and ..... plain wythdrawyng of all  
 the people out of the same Cite and hit to stond in utter desolacion  
 but if the hondes of the most gracious help of oure said souverain  
 lord in releve of pe said pore cite .....wherefore please it your  
 high & wise discrecions to beseche oure said souverain lord be cause  
 aforesaid to graunt to pe said Maire & Citezeins her heires & suc-  
 cessoures by autorite of this present parlement..... in

supportyng of the ffee fferme foresaid yerely from hens forth during the terme of XX yeres next suyng may shyp or do shyp atte his portes of Kyngeston upon Hull or Boston lx sakkes of wolle with out any subsidy per of to be paied to oure said soverain or to his heires by force of any graunt unto<sup>oure</sup> said soverain lord or to his heires to be made or proroget in any wyse and pat the lay people dwellinge with in the same Cite pe suburbes & the pur .... per of may clerely be discharged of paiement of all maner of Xes & XVes & all maner partes of hem from hens forth during the said terme by force of any graunt to oure said soverain lord or to his heires to be made in any wise any statute or ..... ordeigned or made in contrarye notwithstanding. Or elles to resume in to his gracious hondys all the said ffraunchises & libertees and to discharge the said Cite Maire & Citezeins & her heires & successours of the said fee fferme for evermore for pe love of godde and in the waye of charite. Considering more over pat pe said Cite not releved atte this tyme but left in poynt aforesaid of nede so compellyd hit shuld cause pe said Maire & Citezeins fro the said Cite utterly to depart and hit to stand desolate that godde defend.

Date.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this petition because it is included in a certain volume of transcripts also containing other petitions, similarly minuted for some day in March,

which have been definitely dated 1437. (Cf. petition from Andover).

London. C. 1400.                      Ancient Petition 6080 (122).

(A very faint endorsement).

A tresexcellent trespuissant & tresgracious Seigneur notre  
 tresdoute Seigneur le Roy.  
 Monstrent tres humblement les Maire Aldermans & la Communaltee  
 de votre Citée de Londres coment ils & leur predecessours Citeins  
 de mesme la Citée taunt bien par leur aunciens libertees franchises  
 .....du temps dont memorie ne court useez come par chartres  
 & confirmacions des diverses Roys dengleterre as Citeins de mesme  
 la Citée leur heires & leur sucessours avant ces heures graunt....  
 en encrees des ditz Citeins & en amendement de la dite Citee  
 eient useez qe touz Marchaunz aliens en Engleterre venantz deussent  
 vendre leur marchaundises deins quarantè iours apres.....  
 ....gent as tables des francs hostes de mesme la Citée Engleys &  
 dantes<sup>r</sup> Citées & villes du Roialme sanz hostelx en compayes par  
 eux a tenirs. Et auxi qe nul marchaunt estraunge del liber.....  
 devert ascuns marchaundises deinz la libertée du dite Citée a  
 Marchaunt ne qe<sup>nul</sup> tel Marchaunt estraunge  
 autry estraunge<sup>^</sup> dantry Marchaunt estraunge<sup>ic</sup> t~~re~~ux marchaundises  
 achat..... de mesmes les marchaundises les queux liberteez  
 fraunchises custumes & grauntz avant-dites tres gracious Seigneur  
 feurent useez en la dite Citée tanqils feurent restreintz par  
 estatut fait a Everw..... Edward tierce noefisme. Sur



quey mesme le Roy Edward tierce par ses lettres patentz faites  
 par advys & assent du parlement lan de son regne unzisme graunta  
 qe les Citeins du dite Cit..... leur successours use....ent  
 & ioieroyent touz leur libertez & francs custumes savz & entiers  
 come ils en ascun temps passee plus fraunchement les avoient  
 useez & ioiez le dit estatut.....marchauntz en le.....on  
 & damage des liberteez & custumes du dite Cite non obstaunt les  
 queux liberteez fraunchises custumes & grauntz avant dites puis  
 en la dite citee feurent....tanq.... par estatut fait a  
 Westmonstier lan du regne mesme le Roy Edwar d tierce vyntisme  
 quinte. Et puis apres Richard secounde nadgairs Roy dengleterre  
 lan du son regne premier touz maneres liber.....f.....usages  
 quitances privileges munumenteez & custumes as Maire Aldermans &  
 Communaltee de la dite Citee par ses lettres patentz par assent &  
 consent de son parlement graunta.....entierment come ils  
 leur antecessours ou predecessours en ascun temps alors passee  
 plus fraunchement ou pleinement lavoient ou lexyent useez queux  
 liberteez francs usages custumes & grauntz..... feurent  
 useez tanqils feurent restreintz par estatut fait a Gloucestre  
 lan du regne le dit Richard secounde seconde. Et puis apres  
 par un autre estatut fait a Westmonstier lan du regne le dit  
 Richard nadgairs Roy unzisme a tres graunt anientissement defes-  
 ance & destruccion sibien dite Maire..... des touz les  
 Marchauntz de votre Roialme. Qe plese a votre tres haute &

tres-puissante regalie de votre propre & certains science par  
 assent & auctorite diceste present parlement et pur relevacion de  
 lestat..... dengleterre les ditz estatutz & touz aut<sup>i</sup>rels  
 estatutz en qanqils sont contraires des dites liberteez fraunchises  
 custumes & grauntz avant-dites casser repeller anientiser &  
 chescun article dicelle.....ditz Maire Aldermans &  
 Communa<sup>i</sup>tee & touz voz Marchauntz des Citees & villes de votre  
 dite Roialme les liberteez fraunchises custumes & grauntz avant  
 dites fermement..... et ioier a eux lour heires & succ-  
 essours en salvacion & encrees du fait de marchaundise pur touz  
 iours sanz occasion ou moleste de vous tresgracious seigneur  
 ou de voz heires officers ou ministres quiconqe p.....  
 en <sup>ex</sup>œre de charitee.

Date.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this  
 petition for the following reasons. In the first place it is  
 most likely addressed to Henry IV. as the latest infringement of  
 the city's liberties referred to is that which took place in  
 11 Richard II. Further on 25 May 1400, Henry IV<sup>i</sup> confirmed the  
 letters patent of 11 Edward III<sup>ii</sup> mentioned in this petition which  
 granted the city all its ancient commercial privileges.

i. C. CL. R. 1341-1417. p. 403.

ii. C.P.R. 1334-38. p. 460.

London (native weavers) c. 1428. Ancient Petition 7494 (150).

Record Commission Transcripts. Series I. vol. 117.No.6.

per cancellarium XI die Februarii.

As tressages seigneurs di cest parlement<sup>1</sup>

Mekely beseches zoures povres lieges the Wevers of youre Citée  
of London that full noble king king Henri the secunde youre  
progenitor pat god assoille be his lettre.....whiche ben  
confermed and ratified be.....lieges than Wevers of pe  
seid Citée. And to there successours diverses liberties  
fraunchises and customes that ys to seye that theyne shuld have  
a Gyld in pe seid ..... London. And p.....  
pertinente to London but zef he were of theme and of her Gyld  
yelding and paying to oure seid sovereign lord than king and  
to his heires zerly in his Eschecquer.....Seint Michell  
.....and confirmations the seid besechers and their  
predecessours in alle tyme have hadd and usid to have Baillifes  
incorporate and communalte<sup>g</sup> governaunce sight and correccion  
and diverse customes to pe seid.....of made more fully  
shewith. And there as were sumtyme CCC lomes occupying pe seid  
Crafte in London and in Suthwerk and now pere ys but XVII lomes  
ffor the men of pe seid Crafte voides.....charge of  
pe seid ferme of XX marc and alle for they will nocht be under  
correccion when they make untrewre cloth in wirking whiche thing ys  
azeins pe comone profitte of alle..... will not be.....

1. This address is in a different handwriting from the rest of the petition.

Citée and may not be distreyned for ~~pe~~ kinges ferme. And comen  
 and goen in to ~~pe~~ seid Citée and taken aweye the profites advantage  
~~pat~~ shuld falle to ~~pe~~ seid bisechers.....theye ar  
 noght of power to paye to oure soveraign lord the seid XX marc  
 And also the lynnen wevers that su<sup>er</sup>atyme were alle on crafte  
 have made theyme a Crafte be hem selde and will not be.....  
 pore ~~pat~~ they may not paye ~~pe~~ ferme. And so zoure seid besechers  
 moste ~~mede~~ voyde the seid Citée. And oure soveraign lord deseriet  
 and zoure pore lieges distried ffor they ar not of power and.....  
 for evermore but zef hit be zoure gracious helpe remedie in this  
 matier. Plese hit to zoure full high and wise discrecions to  
 concidre alle ~~pe~~ premisses And ~~pere~~ upon to praye to oure soverain  
 lord.....wevers of London be autorite of this presente  
 parlement that alle the wevers duelling with ynne the purseint  
 and circuyte of v myle nexte aicynauntz aboute ~~pe~~ seid Citée of  
 London as other..... And to theire Successours  
 And with hem chargeable in paying and zelding to oure soveraign  
 lord and to his heires the seid ferme. And on that to be under  
 correccion and oversight of ~~pe~~ seid bes..... lord consideraunt  
~~pe~~ grete any<sup>w</sup>using fe<sup>w</sup>ve in nombre grete poverte of zoure seid  
 besechers causes above seid and hem graciously to graunte the matier  
 above seid for ~~pe~~ love of go.....

Data.

Date.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this petition as it is included in a volume of transcripts mainly containing petitions submitted in the parliament of 1427-8.

Melcombe 1420.

Ancient Petition 6246 (125)

Record Commission Transcript<sup>s</sup>. Series I vol. 114 no. 12.

Soit baille as Seigneurs

A les tressages Communes notre Seigneur le Roy assemblez en  
cest present parlement

Supplient humblement les Burgeys & tenantz<sup>z</sup> notre Seigneur le  
Roy de sa ville de Melcombe en le Counte de Dorset considerer  
coment le tres noble Roy Henri qe dieu<sup>u</sup> assoille pier a notre dit  
Seigneur le Roy pleyn<sup>e</sup>ment enformez en son parlement tenez a  
Westmonstier le VIII<sup>e</sup> iours<sup>ur</sup> de Maii lan de son roialme un<sup>m</sup>ziesme  
de la poverte de la dite ville qe estoit destrutz par enemys en  
diverse manere del assent des seigneurs<sup>e</sup> espirituelx & temporelx &  
toute la Comm<sup>u</sup>nalte de dit roialme graunta a les ditz Burgeys la  
fee ferme de levandite ville tange a fyn de x ans apres le VIII<sup>e</sup>  
iours<sup>ur</sup> de Maii proschein ensuantz Rendant ent durant mes<sup>m</sup>ure le terme  
chescun an XXs. & pain<sup>a</sup>tz pur lour dis<sup>m</sup>es & quinziesmes par mes<sup>m</sup>ure le  
temps a tant de foitz come ils seroient grauntiez pur chescune  
dis<sup>m</sup>e & quinzies<sup>m</sup>e VI. VIII<sup>d</sup>. tantseulement sicome en les lettres  
patentz<sup>a</sup> le dit nadgairs Roy ent faitz est contenuz pluis a pleyn  
le quel terme fuist fine le VIII<sup>e</sup> iour de Maii darrein passe &  
outre ce de prier notre dit seigneur le Roy qe luy plese a  
entendre qe les ditz suppliantz pur diverses enchesons unges  
devant ces heures ne furent cy poverez come ils sont a present &  
de sa grace especiale en relevement de mes<sup>m</sup>ures les Burgeys graunter  
a eux la dit fe ferme avoir a eux pur le terme de X ans apres la

dit VIII<sup>e</sup> iour de Mai darrein passe proschein ensuantez Rendant  
ent a Roy durant mes<sup>m</sup>re le terme chescun an ~~XVs.~~ & paiant a  
Roy en le mes<sup>m</sup>re temps pur chescun d<sup>s</sup>me & quinzisme ~~VIs.~~ VIII<sup>d</sup>.  
en manere & fourme come ils paierent par virtue de la dit graunt  
de dit ~~Madgairs~~<sup>n</sup> Roy pur die<sup>u</sup> & en oevre de charite. Entendantz qe  
si les d<sup>i</sup>tz suppliantz ne p<sup>o</sup>urront estre quitz de les aunciens  
charges qe iadis soloient estre paiez a les progenitours notre  
seigneur le Roy pur la dite ville cest assavoir pur la fee ferme  
dicelle VIII marcz par an & pur les dismes & quinzismes quant ils  
soloient estre grauntiez IX li Xs. tange<sup>q</sup> la dite ville soit  
amende & autrement releve lour besoigner de lesser la dite ville  
desolate des inhabitantz en icelle & de quere leurs mansions en  
autre lieux en destruction sibien de les Suppliantz come de la  
dite ville & de le port dicelle a grand damage de notre dit  
seigneur le Roy de ses custumes & d<sup>u</sup>autres ses profites illoques  
& grand arre<sup>a</sup>rissement de tout la pays ~~ex~~<sup>a</sup> celle ville adioignantz.  
Date.

This has been definitely established from internal evidence.  
Henry IV's grant was made 8 May 1410 (C.P.R. 1408-13 pp.201-2)  
As it was for 10 years it expired ("fuist fine") 8 May 1420,  
and the next parliament met in the December of that year  
(R.P. IV 123).

Melcombe. 1426.

Ancient Petition 6388 (128)

(~~Very faint endorsement~~)

~~Soit baille a lez Seigneurs.~~

(Very faint endorsement)

Soit baillie a lez Seigneurs.

A les tressages communes assemb -----parlement.

Supplient humblement lez poverez Burgeys & tenantz de la Ville  
 notre Seigneur le Roy de Melcombe en le Counte de Dorset qe  
 come iadys devant qe mes<sup>m</sup>re la ville fuist arcz & destruz par  
 enemyes du Roy les Burgeys & tenantz de mes<sup>m</sup>re la ville adonques  
 esteantz tenoient mesme la ville du Roy ove les franchises a  
 icelle grauntez. Rendant ent a luy pur la fer<sup>e</sup> ferme dicelle VIII  
 Marcz par an & paiant pur lez dismes & quinzismes de dite ville  
 a tant de foitz come eles seroient grauntez IXli XVs. apres  
 queles arsure & destruction les Burgeys & tenantz de la dite ville pur  
 le temps esteantz furent pardonez par icelle encheson tout outrement  
 sibien de lour dit an<sup>n</sup>uele ferme come de lour dismes &  
 quinzismes a la dite ville appertinantz tanqe a parlement tenuz a  
 Westmonstier le VIII<sup>e</sup> iour de Maii lan du regne du Roy Henri  
 aiel notre seigneur le Roy ---- est unzisme en quele parlement  
 considerez les destruccion & povertie du dite ville le dit aiel de  
 sa grace especiale & del assent des seigneurs espirituelx &  
 temporelx & tout la Communalte assemblez en le dit parlement en  
 eide & relevacion de la dite ville graunte mes<sup>m</sup>re la ville ovesqe  
 les libertees & fraunchises a icelle appertinantz durant le temps  
 de X ans apres le dit VIII<sup>e</sup> iour de Maii adonques proschein  
 ensuantz rendant par an pur le dite annuele ferme durant mesme le  
 temps XXs. par an & paiantz a Roy pur chescune disme & quinzisme  
 a estre grauntez a Roy par mesme le temps VI. VIII<sup>d</sup>. tant —



seulement siccome en les lettres p<sup>a</sup>stentz de<sup>u</sup> dit a<sup>u</sup>iel ent  
 faitz est contenuz pluz a pleyn le quele terme de X ans  
 fuist fine le VIII<sup>e</sup> iour de Maii lan du Roy Henri R<sup>n</sup>adgairs  
 Roy dengleterre pier notre seigneur le Roy septisme apres quele  
 VIII<sup>e</sup> iour de Maii le dit an septisme les arrerages de les  
 dismes & quinzismes quont este<sup>^</sup> outre VI<sup>s</sup>. VIII<sup>d</sup>. pur chescun  
 disme & quinzisme amountent a la summe de XL li. III<sup>s</sup>.<sup>III d.</sup> pur  
 ceux arrerages les ditz suppliantz sont distreintz par procces de  
 lesch<sup>er</sup>ker du Roy & en tant enpoverez par icelle encheson & par  
 autres infortunes qils sont en purpos de lesser le dite ville  
 tout desolate & denquere leur sustinance en autre leu sanz ce<sup>o</sup>  
 qils purront estre remediez en celle partie qe plese a voz  
 tressages discrecions de pri<sup>er</sup> les seigneurs espirituelx &  
 temporelx assemblez en cest present parlement de mover notre  
 tressoveraigne seigneur le Roy que considerez les maters &  
 poverte suiditz luy plese ov assent de son conseil de graunter  
 un comission a estre directz a certains gentz de le dit Counte a  
 surveier sibien lestat de le dit ville come les defautes des-  
 truccion<sup>s</sup> & empoverte dicelle & sur ce<sup>o</sup> de faire enquere par  
 loialx gentz de mes<sup>m</sup>re le Counte pluz pleynement quele summe les  
 ditz Suppliantz purront porter sibien pur la dite annuele ferme  
 come paier pur ch<sup>escun</sup> disme & quinzisme a icestz iours savantz  
 leur continante et mesme lenquest issint apprendre en la  
 chancellarie notre dit seigneur<sup>u</sup> le Roy a retorner & de graunter  
 respyt as ditz Suppliantz de les ditz arrerages en le mesme temps  
 et apres la dit enquest issint retourne de graunter a eux la dite

ville ovesqe les libertees a icelle appertinantz rendant sibien pur la fee ferme dicelle par an durant le temps de X ans prochein ensuantz come pur chescun disme & quinzisme a estre grauntz mesme le temps tant de summe de money come serra trove par la dite enquest qe les ditz Suppliantz porront porter pur icelle & en outre destre pardonez de les arrerages avant ditz pur dieu & en o<sup>ev</sup>re de charite & en eide & relevement de lavant dite ville.

(In dorso). Soit faite une commission directe al Evesqe de Bathe, William Cheyne & John Juyn qils ou deux de eux en<sup>qu</sup>vergent de la matiere comprise en ceste petition & e<sup>n</sup>t certifiant en la chancellerie notre seigneur le Roi & en outre soit fait un brief direct as Tresorer & Barons de lescheker de respiter le paiement del arrerages dont la dite petition faite mention tange al prochein parlement.

Date.

This has been definitely established owing to the fact that in another petition which the same town submitted in 1433 (R.P. IV. 468. A.P. 6267 (126)) the above supplication is referred to as having been presented and dealt with in the parliament held at Leicester in 4 Henry VI.

Melcombe. c. 1437.

Ancient Petition 6371 (128)

Record Commission Transcripts. Series I. vol. 118.no; 65.

per cancellarium 11<sup>e</sup> die Martii

Soit baille as Seigneurs.

A tressages communaes de cest present parlement

Supplient tres-humblement les poveres Burgeis & tenantz de la ville notre Seignieur le Roy de Melcombe en le Counte de Dorset que come ils naguairs en le parlement tenuz a Leycestre le quint iour de Fevrier lan du Reigne de notre souveraigne seignieur le Roy quor est quarte averont moustrée leur graunt poverté & les .....tablez charges de le dit ville sibien de laucien fee ferme de VIII marcs par an come des dysmez & quinzismes dicelle ville les queux amontent a IX li.XVs.quant ils sount graunte au Roy par quoy par assent des Seigneurs espirit<sup>z</sup> .....mporelx & a la Request de tout la Cominalte dengle ..... ssemblez en mesme le parlement monseignieur levesqe de Bath seignieur<sup>z</sup> William Cheyne & seignieur<sup>z</sup> John Juyn furent assignes par commission du Roy de sur<sup>vi</sup>er la di<sup>e</sup> ville & les destruccions & defautes dicell & denquerer par enquest en due forme apprendre quel some lez ditz Burgeis & tenants pur la dit annuel ferme rendre & quelle somme pour chescun dysme & quinzisme a estre grauntez a Roy ils pourront paie<sup>r</sup> savant leur contenement & de ceo & dautres articlez & circumstaunces contenuz en mesme la commission certifie

en la chauncerie notre seignieur le Roy sicome en mesme la com-  
 mission est plus au plain compris. Par force du quel commission  
 les avantditz William & John ~~font~~<sup>ir</sup> survieus si bien de lestat du  
 dit ville come le defautz destruccions et povertes dicelle &  
 auxi ils pristerent un enquest au dit ville de Melcombe le Joesdy  
 prochain le fest de Seint Michell lan du Reigne de notre dit  
 seignieur le Roy <sup>n</sup>noefisme devant eux par le quelle fuist trove  
 que pour les causes ~~contraries~~<sup>inues</sup> en la dit petition & pour autres  
 infortunes au dit ville de iour en iour emergeantz les dites or  
 Burgeis & tenantz pour le dit annuelle ferme de VIII marcs par  
 le ~~chenson~~ des ditz infortunes la some de XXs. & nemie outre  
 pourroient rendre & pour chescun dismes & quinzisme au estre  
 grauntez au Roy le some de XLIIIs. lllld. & nemie outre savant  
 leur ~~contement~~ pourront paier come en la dit inquisition  
 plainement ~~peurrent-paier-come-er-la-dit~~ appiert le quel non  
 obstant les ditz Burgeis tenants sont cotidiament distraintz  
 par processe de leschequer du Roy pour la dit ferme de VIII marcs  
 & les ditz dismez & quinzismes al some de IX li. XVs. avantditz  
 & par celle encheson ..... & par autres infortunes qils sont  
 vrayment in purpose de lesser la dit ville tout desolat & de ~~querer~~  
 leur sustenance en autre lieu saunz ceo quils pourroient estre  
 remedies in ycell partie ceo considere Please a voz tressagez  
 discrecions de prier lez seignieurs espirituelx & temporelx .....

present parlement de mover notre tressouveraigne seignieur le Roy par consideracion dez premisez en eid & relevacion du dit ville qu luy please de sa benigne grace par la<sup>vi</sup>re de sou<sup>n</sup> tressage counseill grauntier aux ditz Burgeis & tenantz leur heirs & successeurs la dit ville de Melcombe ovesqe ..... ises a ycell appertenantz a avoir & tenir a eux & a leurs heirs & successeurs par le terme de se~~ss~~saunt ans prochein<sup>s</sup> avenir Rendant pour la f<sup>y</sup>ee ferme dicell par an XXs. tantseulement & pour chescun disme & quinzisme <sup>u</sup> estre grauntes au Roy XIIIIs. iiii d. acc ..... par la dit inquisition quils pourront paier & rendre savanz leur cont<sup>ne</sup>ment Et en cultre quil please au votre dit seignieur le Roy pardonner as ditz Burgeis & tenantz toutz lez a<sup>r</sup>verrages du dit auncien ferme de VIII marcs & des ditz aunciens dismez & quinzism ..... au notre dit seignieur le Roy par les ditz suppliants devant ces heurs au mes<sup>me</sup> le Roy ou a auscuns de ces progenitours grauntez. Et que les ditz Burgeis & tenantz pourront avoir lettres patentes & briefs du Roy bo<sup>i</sup>rsoignables en celle case pour dieu & en oevre de char .....

DATE.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this petition because it is included in a certain volume of transcripts containing other petitions, similarly minuted for a day in March, which have been definitely dated 1437.

(cf. Andover and Lincoln.)

Shrewsbury. 1433.

Ancient Petition 6919 (139)

Soit baille as Seigneurs

As tressages Comunes en cest present parlement assemblez

Please as tressages comunes en cest present parlement assemblez dentendre coment sovent foitz devant cez heures diverses discussions & discords ont este mervez parentre les Bailliffs ..... ministres notre seigneur le Roy du la ville de Salop et la Comunaltee de mesme la ville sur diverses choses touchautes la governaunce & le prise dez issues et profites survenauntz de la fee ferme di celle ville par lez progenitours notre seigneur le Roy as ditz bailliffs et comunalte a tiel ferme dauncien temps grauntez Sur quoy certaines accordes par maner de composicion .....este faitz parentre lez bailliffs illeogues iadys esteaunte et la dit comunalte lez queux nount deveuz a ascun bon effecte a cause que la dit comunalte ne p<sup>u</sup>erroit user null action devers le bailliffs avant ditz pur le countereveig<sup>er</sup> de cell accorde pur ce qils de comunalte avant ditz sont et tout ditz apres le temps que bailliffs illeog<sup>es</sup> feurent estoient de la comunalte avant dite. Et soit ency que lez bailliffs de la dit ville ore esteautes & la dit comunalte a<sup>u</sup> present sont accordez dez choses susditz en la fourme come est contenuz en la cedula a cest peticion annexe. <sup>Que</sup> ~~que~~ please a voz sages discrecions de prier a notre seigneur le Roy en cest present parlement que par

lassent dez seigneurs espirit<sup>u</sup>nels & temporels en mes<sup>m</sup>ure le  
 parlement assemblez & par auctorite di cell de ennacter touz  
 choses compris deinz la dit cedula en le dit parlement & qe mesne  
 lez choses soient faitz ley & ensement tenuz parentre lez Bailiffs qe  
 sont & pur le temps serrount et la dit comunalte pur touz  
 iours et qe la dit comunalte auxi sovent come lez bailliffs et  
 autres ministres on ascuns deux deinz y<sup>c</sup>elle cedula compris  
 countreveigne ascun article en la dit cedula contenuz dount  
 la peyne apartient au dit comunalte purra user action de lez somes  
 de money accordez destre paie<sup>r</sup> au dit comunalte vers celuy o<sup>u</sup> ceux  
 que countreveigne ou countreveignent ti<sup>e</sup>l article pur le nient  
 perfourmier de chose compris deinz tiel article en lez courtes  
 nostre seigneur le Roy devant les ditz bailliffs pur le temps  
 esteauntez en la Gildenhalle de dit ville on devant les Justicez  
 nostre dit seigneur le Roy a Westmonstier solount la voluntee del  
 comunalte avant dite. Et si ascun article soit countreuenuz dount  
 la peyne doit aparteyner a nostre seigneur le Roy ou sez heires qe  
 celui de la dit comunalte que voet suer pur la some de ti<sup>e</sup>l  
 peyne i<sup>e</sup>it ent la t<sup>i</sup>erce parte al comune profite del comunalte  
 sus dit.

(In dorso) Fiat prout petitur pro tribus annis proximo  
 futuris & usque proximum parliamentum ext<sup>c</sup>un<sup>um</sup> prox<sup>x</sup>im<sup>um</sup> tenendum.  
 Proviso deinceps quod si libertates ville Salopie rone abusione  
 earunden libertatum ante hec tempore facte vel medio tempore

siendas in manus Regias seisiri deberent praeiudicium vel  
impedimentum aliquod eidem domino Regi in hac parte colore  
praesentium nullatenus generetur.

Date.

This has been definitely established owing to the discovery that this is the missing petition referred to in the "Rotuli Parliamentorum" IV 476 which should have been annexed to the schedule here printed and assigned to the year 1433. Further this petition and its answer is quoted in an Inspeimus of the 15 Dec. of this same year. (Owen & Blakeway "History of Shrewsbury Ipp. 208-9).



Truro C.1421

Ancient Petition 1119 (23)

Record Commission Transcripts. Series I. vol.114. No.32.

Soit baillez as Seigneurs.

A les tressages communes de cest present parlement.

Supplient.....poverez Burgeis & hommes de la ville de Truru  
 en le Counte de Cornewayle qe come la dite ville est empovere  
 par pestelence & mort des hommes par invasion & perde par les  
 emymys sur le meer & nomement par la surcharge.....XXIId.  
 qe soient estre pris dicell ville a chescun temps quant disme<sup>me</sup>  
 fuist graunte & leve a Roy qe pur defaute des enhabitantz en mesme  
 la ville & cause de dit surcharge la dite ville fuist & est  
 devenuz si povere qe le ne poet <sup>P</sup>raier ycelle charge de XII li. XXIIId.  
 quel desease fuist monstre a seigneur Richard <sup>na</sup> ~~ne~~dgairs Roy secunde  
<sup>vi</sup> ~~vi~~is le conquest & par avis de son consell un brief assist a le  
<sup>un</sup> ~~un~~visconte de mesme le Counte pur enquerer combien le dit ville  
 purroit <sup>P</sup>raier & trove fuist par les plus sufficiauntz Chivalers &  
 esquiers de tout la pais qe suffist a la dite ville paier a chescun  
 foitz quant disme serra graunte & leve a Roy sinquant soulds seulement  
 sicome par un office ent pris &..... en la  
 Chauncellarie pleinement appiert. Et sur ceo le dit nadgairs Roy  
 par sez lettres patentes graunta qe le dite ville paieroit pur XX  
 anz adou<sup>ng</sup> ~~ng~~es prochein ensuantz a chescun tiel graunte sinquant sould  
 seulement. Et seigneur le Roy pier notre tres souverain seigneur le  
 Roy qe <sup>f</sup> ~~f~~est qe dieu assoil puis les ditz XX anz <sup>in</sup> ~~in~~ fuies par avis de  
 i. ~~This address is in a different handwriting from  
 the rest of the petition.~~

son conseil graunte a la dite ville par X anz ensemblable manere  
 sicome par sez lettres patentes ent faitz pleinement appiert lez  
 queux X ans sount ore passes et par cause qils ount le dit graunte  
 sinon par patent pur certains anz gentz de la dit ville ne fount  
 reparations de lour measons a cause qe null ne voit lour measons  
 lowerine ille<sup>g</sup>es enhabiter pur la cause ~~sinis~~<sup>suis</sup> dite eins la greindre  
 partie de les ditz Burgeis & autres guerpoint & p<sup>u</sup>erposent guerpir  
 la ville & lour enhabiter en autre lieux si rem<sup>u</sup>die & aide ne soit  
 purve<sup>u</sup> en celle partie. Pleise a vos tressagez discrecions  
 considerer coment la dite ville est key & defence de pais envyron a  
 la ven<sup>u</sup> des enymys & supplier tresha<sup>u</sup>nt & puissant Prince le duc de  
 Bedford Gardein dengleterre & toutz les seigneurs espirituelx &  
 temporelx par autorite de cest present parlement de grauntier a les  
 Burgeis & hommes de dite ville a toutz les enhabitours en la dite  
 ville a lour successours & heirs Burgeis & hommes de mesme la ville  
 qe a chescun graunte de les disme & quinzisme qe disorenavant sarra  
 graunte a le Roy ou a sez heirs qils y paient sinquant soulds  
 seulement. Et qe de tout la remanent cest assavoir IX li. XLs. Xd.  
 qils soient outrement discharge envers notre seigneur le Roy & sez  
 heirs Royes dengleterre pour toutz iourz en oe<sup>v</sup>re de charites.

(In dorso) Suent les suppliantz au Roi.

Date.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to this petition  
 for the following reasons. Henry IV's grant referred to in the

petition was made on 28 January 1410. As it was for 10 years it expired ("sount <sup>r</sup>one passes") on 28 Jan. 1420. However, the petition asks the commons to address their prayers on behalf of this town to the Duke of Bedford, Guardian of England, and the next parliament after Jan. 1420 during which he occupied this office was that which met in December 1421.

York. C.1422.

Ancient Petition 7623 (153)

Record Commission Transcripts. Series I.vol.115.No:5.

le XIV<sup>e</sup>

Au Roy notre seigneur soverayn.

Supplie tres-humblement les Meir & Cominalte del Citée Deverwyk  
 qe come les ditz Suppliantz & lour predecessours ont estez seisez  
 del dite Citée de temps dount memorie ne court. Et Thomas de  
 Arundell iadis Enchevesqe Deverwyk predecessour<sup>ur</sup> a Henry ore Enchevesqe  
 Deverwyk & ses predecessours du temps suisdit ont usez de faire amender  
 & reparailles<sup>r</sup> quant busoigne y avoit une certeyn parcell des mures du  
 dite Citée conteignante in longure M<sup>d</sup> pees quele parcell est assiz  
 sur un lieu appelle le Oldebaille a quele parcell le dit ore Ercheves-  
 .....predecessours ont ewez & le dit ore Enchevesqe <sup>u</sup>ng<sup>a</sup> ore  
 as fraunk tenement immediate agisant dun parte & da<sup>u</sup>tre parte Et ensy  
 est tresgracious seigneur qe graund partie du dite parcell des mures  
 conteignant en longure CCC pees pur defect de reparacion del dit  
 Henry ore Enchevesqe est eschie<sup>v</sup>.....temps ad este cest assavoir

del qua<sup>r</sup>nt iour Doctobre lan du<sup>e</sup> regne le tresnoble Roy votre pier  
 qe dieu<sup>u</sup> assoille ceptisue tan<sup>q</sup>e a present en defaut du dit ore  
 Enchevesqe par ount la dite Citte cy pres esteant a les Enemys  
 descoce & graund partie de .....la Citte..... mes<sup>m</sup>es les  
 Suppliautz graundement esclaudrez & blamez si bien de le tresnoble  
 seigneur le Roy votre dit pier qe dieu<sup>u</sup> assoille come de tout la pays  
 la envyron quel chose nest pas en defaut des ditz Suppliautz pur ceo  
 qe la reparacion du dite parcell des mures appartient.....come  
 devant est declare . Et sur ceo les ditz Suppliautz ount prie le  
 dit Henry ore Enchevesqe de repailler la dite partie es<sup>n</sup>sy eschieu<sup>u</sup>  
 quell chose il ne voilloit faire ne unq<sup>r</sup>ne voet as damages des ditz  
 Suppliautz de deux M<sup>l</sup> li. Please a votre tresgracious seigneurie<sup>u</sup>  
 .....myschiefs queux purront aveigner a votre dite<sup>Citee</sup> & as ditz  
 Suppliautz & a tout<sup>u</sup> la pays la envyron et sur ceo dordeyner par  
 auctorite de cest present parlement qascune certeyn persone par votre  
 limitation eit pleyn poiar de faire venir devant luy par tiel process  
 r.....le dit Henry ore Enchevesqe & ses successors en  
 propre persone on par attourne et sur ceo doier trier par les Gentils  
 del Counte Deverwyk terminer & executer celle matere & toutz les  
 circumstances diceit & damages & costages as ditz Suppliautz ou leur  
 Successours.....son sage discrecion & bone foy & conscience.  
 Et en cas qe le dit Meir ou<sup>ou</sup> ascun de ses Successours devie on<sup>u</sup> cesse  
 devant ceo qe la dite matiere soit termine ceo non obstante eit  
 mesme la persone poiar de proceder.....bille parentre ceux  
 qui sont en<sup>vi</sup>ve a celle temps et les Successours de celuy qui serra

ensy mort <sup>u</sup> ou cesse <sup>u</sup> parentre les Successours des ditz parties  
 en cas qils soient ambideux mortz ou cessez & mesme la matiere  
 oier trier terminer & executer & damages <sup>&</sup> and costages agarder  
 .....manere come est dit & ceo par la <sup>u</sup> autorite suisdite  
 pur dieu <sup>u</sup> en ovre de charite.

(In dorso) Suent les suppliantz deinz escriptz la commune  
 leix sur la matere contenuz en ceste peticion.

Date.

The above date has been conjecturally ascribed to the above  
 petition for the following reasons. The Archbishop of York referred  
 to therein is Henry Bowet who acceded to the archbishopric in 1407.  
 His neglect to repair a portion of the city wall is said to have  
 dated from the 4th of October in the 8th year of the reign of the  
 father of the king to whom the petition is addressed. This means  
 that the petition must have been submitted to Henry VI, for 4th  
 Oct. 8 Henry IV came in the year 1406 when Bowet had not acceded  
 to the archbishopric. Further the petition must have been sent  
 to one of the first of Henry VI's parliaments by reason of its  
 being contained in the above volume of transcripts and owing to the  
 fact that Bowet died in 1423.

An objection to this solution is that it only dates the  
 archbishop's shortcomings from 8 Henry V-1420, while the petition  
 conveys the impression that they were of much longer standing.

It is therefore possible that the petitioners made a slip in the regnal year to which they wished to refer, and that they really meant to imply that the present archbishop had not fulfilled his obligations right from the date of his accession in 9 Henry IV. In this case the petition was probably submitted in the last parliament of 1421. There is a further possibility that although thus sent up to Henry V, it was not dealt with until Henry VI's reign, which would more easily account for its being included in this particular volume of transcripts. A point to be noted in this connection is that so many petitions were brought into the parliament of 1422 that a number were referred at its close to the council for determination.

# CHART OF TOWNS PETITIONING OCT. 1399-APRIL 1414

TOWNS	PARLIAMENTS														PETITIONS										
	1399		1400		1402		1403-4		1404		1406		1407			No writs de expensis en- rolled		1410		1411		1413		1414	
	S.	E.	S.	E.	S.	E.	S.	E.	S.	E.	S.	E.	S.	E.		S.		S.		S.	E.	S.	E.	S.	E.
Cambridge												X	X	N.		X		X		X		X			1402.
Dunwich	X											O	O	X		X		X							1402
Grimsby	X	/			X				X	/	X	/	X	/	N.		X		X						1402
Ipswich	X				X	/					X	X	X	X	X		X		X						1402
Lewes	X		X	/	X						X	X	N.		N.		X								1400.
Lincoln	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X		N.		X		X	/					1399. 1402.
Lyme	X				X						X	X	X		N.		X		X						1402. 1407. 1410.
Melcombe	X						X	/			X	X	X		N.		X								1399. 1407. 1410.
Norwich	X										X	X							X						1410.
Oxford	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/			X	X	X		N.		X	/							1410.
Shrewsbury	X	/			X		X	/			X	X	B.	X		X		X							1406. 1407.
Southwark	X				X						X	X	N.		N.		?				X	/			1406
Truro	X				X						X						X		X						1402. 1410.
Winchester	X				X						X	/	X	/	N.		X		X						1410.
Yarmouth	X						X	/			X	X	X		X		X		X						1399. 1407.

## Key to Abbreviations

S. : writ of summons.    X. : reply thereto

O : no "

N : no returns found for county

E. : writ de expensis.    / : enrolment of issue.

B. : payment of M.P.s entered in borough records.

N.B. London is not included in the above list.

The following towns also petitioned in these parliaments, but never enjoyed parliamentary representation under the Lancastrians.

Berwick 1410.

Calais. 1399. 1400. 1411.

Darlington & Raiznall. 1414

Hatch 1410.

Ilchester 1407.

1. The name of the borough is torn off the return, but one M.P. mentioned sat for Southwark in 1406.

