WHERE CAPITALISM ENTERED ENGLAND

LIBEL OF ENGLISH POLICIE (XVth Century).

. . . . . for the wolle of England
Susteineth the Commons Flemings I understand.
Then if England should her wolle restraine
From Flanders, thus followeth in certaine,
Flanders of nede must with us have peace,
Or els shee is destroyed without lees.
Also if Flanders thus destroyed bee
Some Marchandy of Spaine will never ythee: [develop]
For destroyed it is, and as in cheeffe
The wolle of Spaine it commeth not to preeffe,
But if it be costed and menged [mixed] well
Amongst the English wolle the greter delle.
. . . . . what is Flanders also?
As who sayd, nought, the thrift is agoe [without profit]
For the little land of Flanders is
But a staple [market place] to other lands ywis [I think].
What hath then Flanders, bee Flemings lieffe or loth,
But a little Mader [Madder dye] and Flemish Cloth:
By Drapering of our wooll in substance
Liven her commons, this is her governance,
Without which they may not live at ease.
Thus must hem starve, or with us must have peace.

IF we are to believe Kipling it was somewhere upon the luscious meads of Romney Marsh that the fairies left England for more pleasant surroundings, and, doubtless, a more agreeable climate. Ever from boyhood's days it had been my desire to see what manner of place it was from which they had taken their departure. There, not remote from the silted-up roadstead that had lain between Winchelsea and Rye, harbours of long dead pirates and reformed sea-beggars, appointed wardens of the Narrow Seas, one could almoſt have expected again to have come upon some green-jacketed waif that having ſtrayed aside had been left behind. So desolate and so sparsely populated is that corner of Kent that one could dream away into the loſt ages of Romance, into the England that, if it ever was—and I, at any rate, believe moſt fervently in fairies—muſt have been a very long time ago, away back before even that laſt fine summer we had. Equally anxious had I been, if not so long, yet for many a year, to discover that other corner of the country where—Capitalism entered England.

The other day, careering round the villages behind Lowestoft in a "tin lizzie" that, with its owner, had been pressed into the service of the North Suffolk Labour Party, I came upon that very corner.

Slipping down a slight declivity, along a roadway lined with firs and crab-apple trees, we ran out across a bridge over the Waveney upon the reclaimed estuary of that river which forms, with the Yare, a part of the inter-lacing Broads of North Suffolk and South Norfolk. There, on that flat expanse of reed-fringed land, away to the sea at Lowestoft or at Gorleston in one direction and up country towards Bungay in the other, was where Capitalism made its appearance in our midst. Up the tidal waterways that pierce the line of the Saxon shore, up the Orwell, the Stour, the Waveney and the Yare, but particularly up the last two, came in the ninth century to settle for the first time in this country, the Danish marauders who, as time went by, became as much and more traders than free-booters. Not, of course that there was, from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, much to differentiate them from each other. In the beginning, a trading, a pirate and a war-ship was each in turn and all in one. The "black heathen," whose long-ships ran in and out of every creek and fiord of the Northern Seas, and whose colonies spawned each spring their vigorous bill-men upon the neighbouring and richer coasts between seed-time and harvest, gradually formed the *nuclei* of the German Hanse.

The merchants of the Hanse, ship-men all, became the carriers between the lordships and the enfranchised and ever more wealthy and privileged town on the shores of the Baltic and North Seas and the rivers flowing into them across the German, Polish and Lithuanian plains.

The free-men of Frisia, Holland, Zeeland, Flanders, Norfolk and Suffolk, owning their own ships and following the commingled occupations of fishermen, free-traders and free-booters, developed across the generations of Viking adventure and enterprise an ever more continuous, an ever less intermittent commerce in the yield of the grazing lands and the harvest of the sea.

They carried over from East Anglia, from the manors of Norfolk and of Suffolk—one hundred out of four hundred and fifty-three townships in the latter were in 1316 the property of Holy Church—the wool that the monastic graziers had for export to the weavers of the Flemish cities. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they took an even more considerable proportion of this wool in the form of rough cloth from such villages as Kersey and Worsted, which gave their place-names to the characteristic fabrics that they produced. They conveyed out of the country, cloth dyed with the woad and mallow grown in the marshes and fields of East Anglia.

Going through the country-side in Suffolk one is struck by the extraordinary number of churches—there were 398 recorded in the Domesday Survey—many of them with old round towers of obvious Norman style and date, standing on mounds or high ground, evi-

dently stockaded settlements of an early and very troublous past. One notes that, often, super-imposed on the rude round towers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries are upper courses of fourteenth and fifteenth century work of finer finish. The villages are of great age, the chancels and the porches, the naves and the aisles of their churches embellished with the craftsmanship of the period of the French Wars. The population has declined, the houses have long fallen into decay. It is a dead and yet a speaking past whereon one looks.

The Saxon settlers must have been most numerous. In the period of the Danish raids, of the sombre visitations that the cunning clergy attributed to the approach of the Millenium and the preparatory unchaining of the Devil to go ravening over the earth, the manors of Suffolk seem to have come to have quartered upon them more churches than almost any other part of Christendom. The clergy were cashing the credulity of their flock into donations of their earthly goods as security for celestial seats and golden harps.

When the Norman and Plantagenet kings established stable government, when brigandage by land and sea became negligible, Holy Church put its lands under the mild-eyed sheep, those bleating prototypes of the shorn flock of Christ. Richest of all the English monasteries of the Middle Ages was St. Edmunds at Bury, with its 300 manors, many of them in Suffolk. The tenantry of Holy Church were encouraged to weave and full and dye, contributing tithe of their industry to their patrons.

By 1315, so considerable had become the trade in cloth that "worsteds" and "aylehams" were ordered by the King, at the instance of those Flemish merchants who lent him money in return for the right of export, to be of a carefully regulated length and breadth.

In 1336, Edward III. settled at Sudbury and elsewhere in Suffolk a whole colony of Flemish *master*-weavers whose activities in his cause and against their lord, the Count of Flanders, had made their native land too "hot" for them. The King's dependence on his Flemish capitalists may be judged from the fact—kept out of the school-histories, of course—that, when he returned home to plead with Parliament and his merchants for money, the said capitalists kept the Archbishop of Canterbury or even the Black Prince as security and, on one occasion, kept the King himself till they got "something on account."

By 1376 dyed cloth had become a staple manufacture of Suffolk, and in 1381, at Hadleigh, one in five of the adult males was in the cloth trade.

The antagonism of the small tenants, weavers, especially the smaller men, to the landed interest of the Church, was revealed

in the Peasant Revolt, when the two parties, joining forces, slaughtered a number of high-placed clerics and the whole shire seems to have risen almoſt *en masse*. Loweſtoft and Bungay were especial hot-beds.

In the next half century, the Waveney Valley was saturated with Lollardism and, we are told, "the offenders were moſtly of the working classes."

At this same time, the merchant clothiers, who employed the weavers, were, in their piety and their self-advertisement, building new churches, reſtoring chancels, naves, aisles and belfries, founding charities and endowing chantries. Some, like Spring of Lavenham, were marrying their daughters into the earldoms and were buying up manors right and left.

In the sixteenth century, when these same merchant clothiers were glutted with merchant capital, ready to inveſt in induſtrial expansion and wanting not to reſiſt but to reinforce usury and to buy land, they welcomed with aplomb the Proteſtant Reformation. "Foreign elements," we are assured, were ſtrong amongſt them. They bought up the gold and silver of the churches and, as church-wardens, deflected the proceeds of the holy vessels not to providing for the ſtarving, but to defray the outlay on ordnance and harness for armed forces, charges that had otherwise fallen on their tax revenue. They let, in the Suffolk Archdeaconry alone, in 1561, 136 parishes be without a resident ordained miniſter, and, by 1602, had permitted the chancels of twenty-four churches to go to ruin. They had even ſtripped the linen from the communion tables. In 1528 they had caused such a clamour againſt the King's foreign policy and had dismissed so many weavers on the plea that they could not sell their cloth, that Cardinal Wolsey had summarily threatened to take the cloth trade into the King's hands! In fact, in the shady years of Bluff King Hal and the spacious days of Good Queen Bess, the audacity and brass-faced impudence of the Suffolk capitaliſts had to be encountered to be credited!

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