# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANSE TOWNS IN RELATION TO THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT.

BY

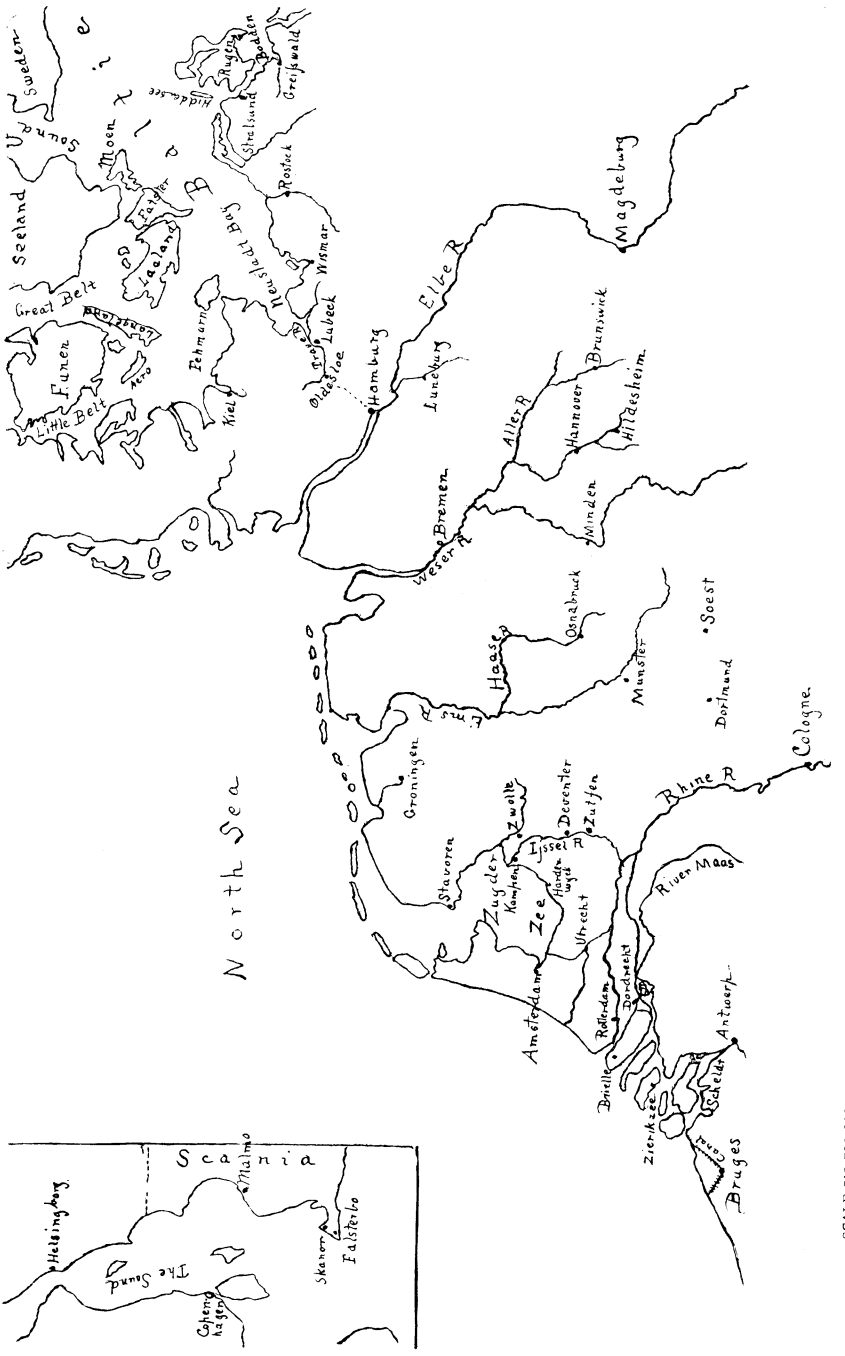
ELLEN C. SEMPLE.

Inclosed sea-basins have always been the nurseries of maritime trade and of naval power. The more land-locked the body of water, the more indented its coast, and the more numerous its islands, the more favorable are the conditions for an early maritime development. The eastern basin of the Mediterranean offered such conditions in an ideal form; soon after the dawn of history it had developed a race of seamen in the Phœnicians, whose trading vessels took the sea for their highway and the coasts for their markets. From them the Greeks learned the higher principles of the art of navigation, and soon rivaled their teachers, driving them out of the eastern Mediterranean into the less hospitable western basin. Here ports were fewer, inlets rarer, islands more sparsely scattered; but the less favorable conditions served as a spur to Phœnician seamanship. It developed; but the commercial supremacy it secured was destined to be overthrown by the rising maritime power of the Romans. This nation soon grasped the sea-sovereignty of the whole Mediterranean, because not satisfied like their Punic neighbors, with a narrow foothold here and there on the margin of the continent, they first acquired a broad, solid territorial base from which to operate in commerce and conquest. The Roman Empire died, but its most desirable heritage fell to Genoa, Pisa, and Venice. The Italian cities, by their merchant marines, became the most potent factors in Mediterranean history. A capacious, protected harbor, a happy situation at the meeting point of a great continental land route and of a sea route, the instinct of the trader and the seaman,—these were the elements which brought Venice and Genoa to the sovereignty of that sea.

While the Crusades were stimulating to the fullest the maritime development of the Mediterranean cities, there appeared in the north the small beginnings of a sea power which was destined to influence profoundly all the lands contiguous to the Baltic. Already the steady current of trade, moving down the Rhine with little interruption since the time of the Romans, had given rise to the flourishing commercial cities of the Netherlands and north-

western Germany; and it had especially developed the maritime strength of Holland and Flanders, whence the wares coming northward by the Rhine trade, or around by sea from the Mediterranean, were exported to England. The Dutch became the sea power of the north. The early and rapid development of city life from Hamburg to Bruges soon raised this whole region to the industrial centre of Northern Europe, which began then to seek with indomitable energy new markets for its manufactured products among the less progressive people in the vast lands to the east and northeast. There already existed, as early as the tenth century, a well-established commercial route northeastward from Cologne through Westphalia and Saxony, *via* Soest, Brunswick and Magdeburg to the traditional town of Vineta at the mouth of the Oder, whence an active trade was carried on with Kief and Constantinople. But this was a land route,—slow, costly, dangerous and susceptible of little development. Rapid commercial expansion could come only by sea, and, in consequence of the condition of navigation in the Middle Ages, required middlemen. A movement in the national life of the Germans at this time supplied the want, because it led to the establishment, along the whole southern coast of the Baltic, of those commercial settlements which came to be famous in history as the leading spirits of the Hanseatic League.

In the middle of the twelfth century there began an energetic and systematic effort on the part of the Germans to regain the country east of the Elbe, which had been wrested from them by the encroachments of the Slavs. The movement started from every point along the length of the boundary stream, but it was particularly well conducted under Henry the Lion of Saxony, who extended his sway over the Slavonic tribes in Mecklenburg and Pomerania. The native population was killed or driven out, and replaced by colonists from Westphalia, and especially from the Netherlands. Along the coast there sprang up cities like Lübeck, Wismar, Rostock, Stralsund, Greifswald, Wolgast, Stettin and Colberg in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The religious motive also, aroused by the Crusades, was active to some degree in this colonizing movement; but, in the conquests of the Teutonic Knights, it was the dominant actuating impulse. The Order won to German civilization and to Christianity all the country of East Prussia between the Vistula and Niemen. The cities of Danzig, Dirschau, Culm, Thorn, Elbing, Königsberg, Memel, and others arose under the influence of the active traders from Bremen and Lübeck, and the protection of the Teutonic Order.

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But the movement, once started, spread with surprising rapidity, reaching the eastern extremity of the Baltic a few decades after the founding of Lübeck. The establishment of so many successful colonies reacted immediately upon the home conditions out of which the expansion grew, and stimulated there the commercial spirit which set out to find even the remotest markets. It made a peaceful invasion of Russia. Riga, founded in 1158 by a few Bremen merchants as a store house at the mouth of the Düna, soon passed into the hands of the Teutonic Knights, who conquered also Dorpat and Revel, evidently at the instigation of German traders, who had located in both places. There had been a trading settlement of Germans at Novgorod as early as the eleventh century; but it was stimulated to greater activity and secured special privileges in dealing with the province the latter part of the thirteenth century, doubtless owing to the development of German commerce throughout the Baltic provinces of Russia. About the same time, or soon afterwards, we find Germans established at Pskof, Ladoga, Narva, at all the outlets of the Novgorodian lakes, where the trade from the interior had to pass.

When German expansion was confined to the interior of the country, as it was in the beginning of the movement, the advance was slow,—a stubborn though energetic protrusion of the eastern frontier; but when it struck the sea, it went forward with strides and bounds, leaving in between great gaps of unsecured territory, aiming with singleness of purpose to wrap in its embrace all the desirable coast of the Baltic. A glance at the map of Germany shows the intimate connection between the presence of the sea and the course in which the race poured itself along to the east in those days: the erratic northeastern frontier, the long arm of East Prussia stretching up towards the Gulf of Riga, is no accident. There are finger-prints of the hand, moreover, left all over Livland even to-day in the scattered groups of German population there. Expansion by water is much safer and simpler than by land, communication with the home region is cheaper and quicker. Every large colonizing movement has at bottom a predominating economic motive; for this reason the young settlements must keep up their connection with the mother country, in the trade with whom lies their chief hope of wealth and growth. The southern coast of the Baltic, along which the Germans spread, offered most desirable sites for commercial colonies, combining excellent harbors with generous facilities for trade with the interior and over a narrow sea with other lands. No wonder then that many of these cities

attained a size and importance which they did not surpass for four or five hundred years afterwards, but which, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, made the glory and the strength of the Hanseatic League.

The body of water which these early German traders took as their natural field of activity, is a land-locked sea in the northwestern part of Europe, connected with the open ocean only by the three narrow straits dividing the islands of Fünen and Seeland from each other, and from the adjacent peninsulas of Sweden and Jutland. It is a long crescent-shaped basin, attaining at no point a considerable width. In the southwestern portion it appears more contracted than it really is, owing to the crowding together of the Danish Isles and the fragments of land like Fehmarn and Rügen, cut off from the German coast. Just where the sea begins to broaden, between Pomerania and southern Sweden, the island of Bornholm serves as a half-way station for vessels plying between the two coasts. In the same way, further north at a still wider point, Gotland breaks midway the long stretch from shore to shore; while the numerous islands, large and small, off the coast of Sweden and Esthonia make easy the transition to the open ocean. These frequent stopping-places were of incalculable advantage to seamen in an age when navigation was far from being a developed art. Not less so were the numerous bays, gulfs, fiords, sounds, *Bodden*,* and *Haffe* of the much indented coast of the whole Baltic basin. There were plenty of harbors to put into in stormy weather, and, better still, to trade in when the promise of business was good. Furthermore, the estuaries of the German coast and the fiords of Sweden took the ship of the merchant well back from the coast; while the larger inlets, the Gulf of Riga and the Gulf of Finland, afforded waterways into the very heart of the most progressive part of Russia, and made that region one of the most active quarters of the Baltic trade.

In consequence of the long, gradual northward slope of Europe from the continental highland in the south and the land-swell which forms the watershed of Russia, the Baltic is the drainage basin of a large part of the continent, and therefore receives a great number of rivers. These are navigable for a long distance inland, owing to their gentle current; even the smallest were available for the light-draught craft of the Middle Ages in opening up the country to trade, while the longer ones made connection over mountain

* Irregularly ramifying bays with rounded contours, separated from the sea by islands, peninsulas, or lines of dunes.—(RATZEL.)

passes or lower watersheds with the head waters of the Mediterranean rivers and brought the commerce of the south and far east into the Baltic sphere of attraction. This is the explanation of the fact that even such remote cities as Breslau and Cracow, the emporiums of the upper Oder and Vistula, were eventually drawn into the commercial league of the coast towns.

The German colonial cities took up the best strip of the Baltic coast in their expansion from Kiel to Revel and Narva. Here were the most numerous inlets and ports, the deepest estuaries, the longest rivers, and a back country rich in all the resources of forest, field and mine, resources which had never been developed and which needed only the demand of trade for their active exploitation. More than this, these commercial cities occupied a geographical position intermediate between the advanced industrial centres of Flanders, the Netherlands, and western Germany on the one hand, and the undeveloped lands to the southeast, east and north on the other. Manufactured articles and the rich wares of the Rhine trade could be exchanged for the raw products of Scandinavia, Russia and Poland; and for this trade the German cities of the Baltic were the natural middlemen. Nor was this their final advantage: they belonged to a race that was superior to their Scandinavian and Slavonic neighbors, in whom therefore they could never find dangerous competitors. They had been settled in large part by colonists brought from Holland and Westphalia, the two sections which had been earliest in developing the trade of western Germany; and hence they were adapted in a peculiar way to become the commercial and maritime conquerors of the Baltic.

The German coast cities and trading settlements in the Baltic owed their early development not only to their situation along the great sea route of northern Europe, but also to the fact that the whole country to the south of them was a vast passway from the Mediterranean, and also from the Black and Caspian Seas. They formed the northern termini of the routes of trade traversing this country, and they thrived or declined according to the commercial activity along these great continental highways. They entered into close relations with the inland cities which grew up along these routes to supplement the work of the coast towns, and formed with them city systems, in which each sustained a definite relation to the others, but in which the coast town invariably held the dominant place. For this reason, we shall find that the Hanseatic League, obscure as its origin is, was formed first by a federation of maritime cities for purposes of protection to their common trade

on the sea, but that it rapidly drew into its union all the considerable towns of the interior from Holland to Livland, yielding to these inland members, however, only limited privileges.

The Russian trade-routes were perhaps the most vital arteries of the Baltic commerce of the Middle Ages. They utilized the great rivers of the country which rise near the eastern border of the Baltic, and are separated from it only by low watersheds, which


Eastern Routes of Trade

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in their turn can be reached by excellent waterways of rivers and lakes from the sea. Previous to the thirteenth century, the journey into Russia was made chiefly by water, through the Gulf of Finland and the Neva River into Lake Ladoga, thence southward by the Volkhof to Novgorod; but after the wars of Sweden with Denmark and Russia had made this route dangerous, and after the Teutonic

Knights had extended their sovereignty over Curland, Livland and Esthonia, as far as Lake Peipus, land roads came to be used more to reach the centres of Russian trade. The merchant went overland from Narva to Novgorod; or from Revel and Pernow to Dorpat, thence by the River Embach to Lake Peipus, and thence to Pskof, the sister republic of Novgorod, on the navigable Velikaya; or he disembarked his goods at Riga and carried them across country to Pskof or farther on east to Novgorod. Pskof had been a commercial settlement from the very earliest times, because the Velikaya had been a channel for the trade with the south from remote antiquity, and in the thirteenth century it became an important station for the trade between Riga and Novgorod. In the next century it became a member of the Hanseatic League. But a more important point was Novgorod. Under the stimulus of German trade this town rose to be the most renowned emporium of northeast Europe. The merchants sought it because of its commanding commercial situation. Its trade extended by way of the Volkhof and the Volga to the Caspian Sea and the Orient; and southward down the Dnieper to the Black Sea and Constantinople. These commercial connections had existed from the earliest history of the city, and many of its political disturbances were due to the conflicting economic interests of those of its citizens who were engaged in the trade with the far east, and those who had established commercial relations with Constantinople and Greece. The former wished the alliance of their eastern neighbors, the princes of Suzdal, who commanded the Volga route; and the latter that of the princes of Kief, who controlled the road to the south. Under Hanseatic influence Novgorod became a German market, and the merchants secured the practical monopoly of trade throughout the province.

The commerce of the Dnieper was accessible to the German merchant also from Riga by way of the Düna as far as Vitebsk, and thence by a short road to Smolensk on the upper Dnieper. Even so small a stream as the Niemen was utilized for the trade of its immediate vicinity. Products were brought into Kowno, the head of navigation, carried thence down the river to the Kurisches Haff, and there absorbed in the great Baltic commerce.

During the Middle Ages there seems to have been very little direct commercial intercourse between North and South Germany except in the Rhine district, where the wines of the south country attracted the merchants of Lübeck and Hamburg; for the rest, the two sections had few products to exchange. The great commercial

roads passing through Germany, therefore, forwarded products coming from beyond the confines of the Empire. One route followed the Vistula southward along the northern slopes of the Carpathians, over the watershed to the head streams of the Dniester, and then went down this river to the Black Sea. Austrian and Hungarian products were brought out by this route; especially the yew tree from Austria, which was used for the English crossbow, was transported in great quantities down the Vistula to Danzig. This city rose to splendor through its English trade. Another route led northward from the Danube along the March to where this river approaches the headwaters of the Oder, then down the Oder to Stettin and the Baltic. But the great commercial thoroughfare of Germany was the Rhine. The roads over the Alpine passes, the St. Gothard, St. Bernard, Splügen, and Brenner, followed the Rhine valley to Constance and Basel, then went down the river, receiving important tributary streams of trade from the Main and Moselle, and ended at the Dutch cities on the various mouths of the Rhine. Some of the trade over the Brenner, however, passed directly northward *via* Ratisbon, Nuremberg, and Erfurt to Magdeburg and Hamburg on the Elbe, or to Lüneburg, Brunswick, and Bremen. Magdeburg and Brunswick were also on a line of trade between North Germany and Bohemia; hence they early formed two of the most important inland members of the Hanseatic League.

From this survey of the commercial highways of northern Europe, the fact becomes evident that they fall into two groups where greatest activity reigns,—an eastern one, reaching from the Vistula to Lake Ladoga and bringing its raw products to the Baltic; and a western one from the Elbe to the Rhine and the Scheldt, depositing its manufactured commodities on the shore of the North Sea. Between these two areas of crude production and skilled industry, we find stretched along the coast of the Baltic the long line of middlemen cities, Kiel, Lübeck, Wismar, Rostock, Stralsund, Greifswald, Anclam, Stettin, and Colberg, known in history as the Wend cities and as the *civitates maritimæ*. Between the great western emporium Bruges and the eastern one Novgorod, along the highway of the Baltic, moved hundreds of ships yearly, engaged in a trade that formed the chief source of wealth for these German cities. Russia was their largest, most remunerative market. Here they could buy cheap and sell high, for they acquired a monopoly. They brought hither silks, linen, and cloth from the looms of Flanders, Germany and England, metal wares, beer, and other products of city industry, and exchanged these for furs in large

quantities, leather, skins, and tallow. The Russian forests yielded them wax, which was so much in demand for the candles used in the church rites in the Middle Ages. The same exchanges were made, though on a smaller scale, in Finland and the neighboring coast of Sweden; but the latter country furnished in addition copper and crude iron, and the products of her northern forests, such as lumber, potash, pitch, and tar.

The value of this quarter for trade had been known even in the heathen days, and it was that which had so early attracted hither permanent German settlements when the Empire was just beginning to acquire a foothold on the Baltic. At a time when small vessels and the lack of the compass restricted seamen to short voyages, the island of Gotland was a natural halting-place for all ships bound for this northern market, whether to Stockholm, Abo on the Finnish coast, Novgorod, or Riga. For this reason it early became a distributing point for the northern trade, and remained such even after the Wend cities had organized the commerce of the Baltic. Its capital, Wisby, became a great emporium and the wealth of its citizens fabulous. In addition to its permanent German burghers, it had a floating population of German traders, representing at least thirty cities from Cologne to Revel, who for mutual protection formed there a union or confederation known as the *Gotland Genossenschaft.* This is the oldest and most important union of its kind. Furthermore, it was a powerful agent, by its retroactionary influence upon the home towns, in bringing them to form the union which was known as the Hanseatic League. The law of the *Gotland Genossenschaft* was given to the new German town of Riga and the factory of the traders in Novgorod; and the Wisby code of maritime laws was for a long time the highest authority among the seamen of the Baltic. The dues of the association, together with all extra money from the factory in Novgorod, were kept in a church at Wisby, and four aldermen, one each from Wisby, Lübeck, Soest, and Dortmund, had keys to the treasure. Afterwards, when the Hanseatic League succeeded the *Gotland Genossenschaft*, the money went to Lübeck. Though Gotland was a political dependency of Sweden, the Germans, by their energy and numbers, dominated the island. The city council of Wisby had to be composed of "people of both tongues," Gotlanders and Germans. The control of a point commanding the trade of Russia and Sweden was thus reserved to those most interested in the protection and increase of that trade.

The Germans attained ascendancy also on the mainland of

Sweden. They secured the right to nominate some of the principal magistrates in most of the maritime towns of importance, and to fill half the places in the city councils with Germans. They had no factories in the country, but under the circumstances hardly required any. Stockholm came to be regarded as a Hanse town, and Calmar put in an application to be admitted to the League. Trade with Sweden fell gradually into the hands of the Wend cities exclusively, as was to be expected from their geographical position in relation to the northern peninsula. For the same reason these were the chief cities participating in the Danish trade; they secured common privileges for their merchants as early as the middle of the thirteenth century. Agriculture was the predominant occupation of the Danes. There were no cities worthy the name in the country, and no city industries. The German merchants, therefore, furnished the people with everything beyond the commonest necessaries of life; even the retail trade fell into the hands of the German pedler who penetrated into the rural districts. The kingdom of Denmark was not large, its population neither dense nor rich, for the people had been impoverished by the long wars carried on by their ambitious monarchs and by the never-ending struggles between nobles and kings. Nevertheless Denmark drew the German traders like a powerful magnet. The attraction was the herring fisheries.

Scania, the southwestern portion of the present land of Sweden bordering on the Sound, was till 1658 almost exclusively the property of Denmark. Its value to that kingdom lay chiefly in the control of the Sound, but its importance in the commercial history of the Baltic rested upon its herring fisheries. The herring came in shoals every summer and autumn to the shores of Scania, in smaller quantities to Rügen and the coast of Pomerania. When all Europe was Roman or Greek Catholic, and consequently the numerous fast days occasioned a heavy demand for fish, catching and salting herring was a great industry. In the late summer of every year fishermen of various nationalities, though chiefly German, gathered on the coasts of Scania. A Lübeck record of the sixteenth century says that in one season 7,500 fishing boats were present in its waters. From July 25th, till September 29th, greatest activity reigned, for numerous traders and artisans followed the crowd of fishermen. As the Germans and Danes salted their fish on the ground, there sprang up a regular trade in salt, which was brought *via* Lübeck from Lüneburg, the chief source of the supply along the Baltic, and also from Colberg. The demand for barrels was enormous, so

the cooper industry flourished. The barrels were made in the northwestern cities of Germany, but were exported to Scania in the form of loose staves and bands, and then set up when they reached the market. To protect the industry in the home cities, no new barrels were permitted to be made nor old ones to be repaired on the fishing grounds. Beer was imported in vast quantities for the thirsty multitude of workmen. At those times the Scanian towns, Skanör, Falsterbo, and Malmö were busy markets for the traders and pedlers who came with their various wares.

Customs on the goods imported and taxes on the fish caught were paid to the Danish king, and formed one of his most important revenues; while the just regulation of the same was repeatedly the subject of treaties between the Danish monarch and the Hanse towns. As the result of a successful war with Waldemar of Denmark, the League gained possession of Scania in 1368. That year the Hanse records show that 34,000 tons of fish were taxed, the following year 33,000 tons. The most active part in these fisheries was taken by the Wend cities, though English, Flemish, Walloon and German fishermen from the North Sea shared in the catch. When the season was over, the fish was carried by the traders to all the markets of northern Europe.

There were also excellent fishing-grounds off the Norwegian coast north of Bergen which, together with the advantages for trade, attracted the German merchants to the western half of the Scandinavian peninsula. The country was inhabited by a simple, but rough and wild population. It was difficult to get trading privileges, harder still to hold them, and the dangers threatening the merchant were numerous. Nevertheless, there was large profit in the exchange of southern products, such as grain, beer, wine, and manufactured goods, for the raw products of the country. The Hanseatic League had its factories at Tönsberg and Opslo on the Christiania Fiord, and a more important one at Bergen, which as early as the eleventh century was one of the most active trading centres of western Norway. But here the German merchants came into sharp competition with English and Scotch traders, especially after the industrial development of England which began in the reign of Edward III.

England's commerce with the German cities passed through two successive phases. Before the development above referred to, England had only raw products to offer for exchange, and trade was in the hands of German merchants, who therefore reaped the greater share of the profit. These merchants at this period came

from Cologne, Bremen, the Westphalian towns, and some of the Dutch and Flemish cities. Their ships carried to England Rhine wines, silk, silken garments, and fine cloth, bringing away cheese, hides, and especially wool, which went to supply the Flemish looms. Cologne enjoyed a pre-eminence in this trade, and as early as the middle of the twelfth century had its guildhall and *Hanse*, or union of merchants, in London. In the early part of the thirteenth century, however, a change begins. In 1226 there is mention of Lübeck merchants in England, and, indeed, in connection with unjust taxes and abuse which they have suffered there at the hands of their colleagues from the North Sea cities. The latter felt that the Lübeckers were poaching on their preserves, but they could not help themselves, for we soon find that the energetic leader of the Wend cities has broken the monopoly of Cologne and her followers. In 1237 the English King grants freedom of trade in his country to the "Merchants of Gotland", meaning thereby the German merchants of Gotland. Thirty years later Lübeck secures the right to establish its own *Hanse* or union in London, and its traders visit the markets of Boston and Lynn. The result is, that England is open as a market to the merchants of the Baltic, and the interests of the two sections become merged. In 1260 we hear of the "guildhall of the Germans", and a little later of the *Hanse Allemaniens*, showing that the merchants had united in London as at Wisby. The Germans were the chief exporters of English cloth after the British had learned the art of weaving from their Flemish neighbors; in fact, they nearly monopolized the commercial operations of the country.

Though the North Sea and the Baltic cities were rivals in the English trade, in all other commerce there was co-operation, because the Baltic merchants were the natural middlemen for the western commodities. For this reason, it was imperative that the intercourse between the two sections should be uninterrupted. There were two routes of communication, one by water, the other by land. For people so accustomed to a sea-faring life as were the dwellers in the North German and Netherland cities, the most natural route was that which led through the Danish waters, through the Sound, the Great Belt, and the Little Belt. Always cheaper, water transportation was moreover in that day more expeditious and safer, in spite of the dangers which assailed the trading vessel. The products which found their way from the eastern Baltic to the North Sea were in general of large bulk and relatively small value, such as grain, fish, lumber and ores; they could not therefore stand

the heavy cost of wagon transportation over poor roads across the neck of the Jutland Peninsula and the double transfer to and from ships.

The voyage through the Sound, however, was anything but safe Denmark, by her possession of Scania, and at times of the fortified town of Helsingborg on the Swedish coast, commanded the passage and was not slow to take advantage of her position, which, by its strategic value, seemed to promise her supremacy in the Baltic. She was therefore able to lay a heavy hand on German trade, until the Hanseatic League made good the rights of the merchants. The iniquitous *Strandrecht*, the right of appropriating stranded goods from wrecked vessels, held in Denmark as elsewhere on the Baltic littoral, though the cities had secured the promise of exemption therefrom by treaty with the Danish kings. Their experience was, however, that when the cargo of a lost vessel was washed ashore in Denmark, it was confiscated, and there was no redress. Those early sea captains, sailing without compass or map, were forced to hug the shore for fear of losing their way, thus increasing the danger of being stranded or wrecked. Moreover, pirates abounded; many of these gentlemen when at home were lords of the castles along the coast of Denmark and western Sweden. But this danger threatened everywhere on the Baltic. In 1259 the cities of Lübeck, Rostock and Wismar formed a union against the land and sea robbers, and invited the neighboring towns to lend them assistance in the good work. A little later, in 1280, Lübeck made an alliance with the Germans of Wisby for ten years, to preserve peace and security on the sea from the Sound to Novgorod. In 1290 the five leading Wend cities, Lübeck, Rostock, Wismar, Stralsund and Greifswald entered into an offensive and defensive alliance. These are the names which appear again and again in the leagues of the next century also; for upon the Wend cities, situated as they were just opposite the three Danish channels, fell the duty of keeping open the sea route to the German ocean.

If the possible dangers arising from *Strandrecht* or the attacks of the Danes deterred the trader from the voyage through the Sound, he had recourse to the land route between Lübeck and Hamburg, especially if his merchandise were costly and could stand the more expensive transportation. The road was not long, for the Baltic through Neustadt Bay and the broad open mouth of the River Trave penetrates to within thirty-two miles of the Elbe. The termini of this highway were the two flourishing towns of Hamburg and Lübeck. They owed their importance to the fact that they

flanked the neck of the Jutland peninsula at its narrowest part, and each at the same time occupied the point of convergence of two great sea routes, while presiding over a natural thoroughfare. But land travel was hard and slow. Very scant attention was paid to constructing or repairing roads and bridges. To balance *Strandrecht* on the sea, on the land there was *Grundruhr*, which entitled the lord of the territory to appropriate any merchandise which might through accident fall to the ground within his boundaries. He had, therefore, every motive for keeping his roads in the worst condition possible. Furthermore, every few miles taxes in the form of tolls were levied. Land pirates also abounded, and the caravan had to move with an armed escort.

It was to the interest of the two emporiums, Lübeck and Hamburg, that the road between the Trave and Elbe should be freed, if possible, from danger and obstructions. Therefore, in 1241, the two cities formed a union for the protection of this highway. In 1259 they entered into negotiations for the support of a military force for the protection of traders against land and sea pirates from the Trave to the mouth of the Elbe, probably in imitation of a similar confederation which Lübeck, Rostock and Wismar had formed the same year. In 1304 a treaty in regard to their common currency contained also a clause regulating the escort to guard wares moving between the two towns, and five years later only the escort furnished by them was permitted on the road. In 1306 they entered into a union to demolish every castle within a distance of nine miles on either side of the Trave to Lübeck, and also on either side of the road leading from there *via* Oldesloe (on the upper Trave) to Hamburg. Lübeck was to bear two-thirds, Hamburg one-third of the cost; for the escort maintained, Lübeck furnished thirty-two horsemen, Hamburg, eight. It was the Wend city which was willing to make the greatest sacrifice to secure the safety of the road.

From Hamburg the main line of commerce led westward to Bruges, the great emporium of northwestern Europe, and later the chief factory of the League. The voyages from the Elbe to Flanders followed a course near the land, and could be shortened by the inside passage through the Zuyder Zee and the debouchment streams of the Rhine and Maas to Bruges and the great Dutch market Dordrecht. Naturally enough, we find most of the cities situated along this sea route, or having connection with it by river or canal, drawn into a federation whose chief object was to keep open the land and water communication with the Baltic. The list

of the Dutch Hansa was not an insignificant one; it included Groningen, Stavoren, Zwolle, Harderwyck, Deventer, Zutfen, Utrecht, Amsterdam, Brielle, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, and Zierikzee, with Kampen as the acknowledged leader of the group.

The German products of the Rhine valley which were destined for the Baltic trade, either went out down the river and followed the sea route to the east, or were forwarded to the Elbe by the land road, which was marked out by the Westphalian and Saxon members of the League,—Cologne, Dortmund, Soest, Munster, Osnabrück, Minden, Hanover, Hildesheim, Brunswick, and Magdeburg. These, like all the other inland cities of the federation, gave to it only their moral and financial support. When it was a question of furnishing men and ships to do battle for the rights or for the protection of the German merchants, only the coast cities proved themselves the active members of the League.

Out of the unions of German traders in Wisby and London, out of the federation of the Wend cities to secure the peaceful and safe navigation of the Baltic, and out of the alliance between Lübeck and Hamburg to protect the highway between the Trave and Elbe, grew the Hanseatic League; from the first of these three unions it inherited its scope, from the last two its real function. Geographical conditions made the Wend cities its promoters, and Lübeck its leader. That the League originated along the Baltic was due to the fact that this whole region was far behind the other great commercial districts of Europe in civilization, and therefore at this time presented greater risks and dangers to traders than did the Mediterranean or the North Sea. The Italian cities, for instance, never combined into an organized system for commercial ends. The Dutch towns would never have been under the necessity of uniting, as far as their trade with England and Norway was concerned; they were drawn into the Hanseatic League because of their interests in the Baltic. For the towns scattered along the German and Russian coast from the Trave to the Neva, union was a matter of life and death. Moreover, they were full of the spirit of enterprise and self-reliance engendered by their mode of life. Their inhabitants, lured as colonists to these inhospitable shores by partial exemption from taxation and by certain unusual rights and privileges as citizens, had tasted of the sweets of independence. The condition of affairs in Germany at this time was favorable to the development of free towns, for the emperor was always engaged in vain wars in Italy, trying to make good his claim for dominion there, while leaving imperial matters at home to take their own course. More than this,

the Baltic towns were situated on the newest and remotest frontier of the Empire; they were true peripheral forms, which felt very little the attraction towards the centre. Turning their backs on their own country, they faced towards the foreign lands whence came their wealth; and the dangers which threatened from the same source they relied on their own strong arms to avert. Hence on their own authority they formed a confederation, of which the Wend cities were the moving spirits. The occasion was a bold attack on the German merchants by Waldemar of Denmark in 1361. Representatives of the Wend and Prussian cities met at Greifswald to punish the offender and force from him a guarantee of safety for their trade. This confederation formed at Greifswald was regarded in Lübeck as the origin of the Hanseatic League, though in the forty years previous there had been numerous minor unions of a loose and intermittent character which embraced most of the trading towns of Germany.

Schaefer calls the region from the Elbe and Trave to the Oder the classic ground of the Hanseatic League, as the Wend cities were the most important factors in the growth of the union. They, as we have seen, were most extensively interested in the Baltic trade, in the fisheries of Scania, and therefore most deeply concerned for the preservation of land and water communication with the North Sea. From their geographical position it followed that they were the ones to hold in check the Scandinavian powers who were the greatest menace to Baltic commerce, and to represent all the League in dealing with those powers. From the northern point of Pomerania could be seen the chalk cliffs of Moen; from the Wend coast the descent upon the Danish Isles could be swift and sudden. Moreover, the means were not wanting; the large merchant marine of these *civitates maritimæ* was easily converted into a naval fleet. All that was necessary was to load the vessels with arms and men instead of merchandise. The history of the ten years' conflict of the Hanse towns with Waldemar of Denmark is the story of the rapid evolution of a commercial power into a sea power. The larger, two-mast vessels or *Koggen* were about two hundred tons burden, and could carry a hundred armed men each, besides the necessary sailors; the smaller ships or *Sniggen* were utilized as transports, despatch boats, or in shallow water as lighters. To a people who had themselves spent half their life in fighting pirates, privateering was a natural recourse in war; so letters of marque against the Danes were given to those who might wish to enter this branch of the service.

The conflict with Denmark fell into two periods, the first war from 1361–1365, the second from 1367–1370. In the latter, Waldemar had an ally in the King of Norway. Though the Greifswald Assembly of 1361 included councillors from Danzig and Culm representing the Prussian towns, the first war was carried on with no active aid from this section. The burden of the contest was borne by the Wend cities, aided in a small degree by Hamburg and Bremen, though appeals had been sent in every direction from Revel to Bruges. The Wend cities furnished a war contingent of forty-eight ships and two thousand men, Hamburg two ships and Bremen one. All that the other towns of the League did was to stop their trade with Denmark and in some cases levy a tax for the campaign.

Participation in the second war was more extensive, embracing all the leading cities from the Trave to the Neva. Hamburg refused to contribute ships or men because the League would not promise to protect the Elbe in case of an attack there. Bremen could do nothing because she had recently been weakened by some serious troubles of her own. The Netherland cities, under the able leadership of Kampen, rendered valuable aid by a terrific attack upon the coast of Norway, which they laid waste from Gota-Elf to Bergen. Lübeck had the control of the Baltic squadron. In April, 1368, the fleet assembled at the little island of Hiddensee, off the northern point of Pomerania, for the victorious descent upon the Danish Isles; on June 14th of the same year the captains of the League force declared the sea safe for trade. It is a significant fact that only the coast towns were called upon to furnish a contingent or war funds; inland towns were quite ignored, though they were to enjoy the benefits of victory. The Hanseatic seal represented the imperial double eagle, with the inscription, *Signum civitatum maritimarum.* In other words, the League was primarily, both as to origin and purpose, a confederation of coast towns, its leaders the original *civitates maritimæ.*

By the treaty of peace ending the war, the cities secured free trade for the German merchants throughout Danish possessions, regulation of the customs and re-establishment of all their former privileges in Scania; as a guarantee for the fulfilment of these terms, they were to have the most important strongholds in Scania for fifteen years, together with the revenues of the district as a war indemnity. To the modern mind this concession in regard to the castles of Scania might appear as the opening wedge for the permanent acquisition of that valuable bit of territory. But the League looked at it otherwise. At the end of a year, finding the

maintenance of the castles rather costly, it relinquished them to a Danish nobleman, the prime minister of Waldemar, who was to hand over to the cities the net proceeds from the revenues of the district for the stipulated term of years. To the Hanseatics this was a perfectly natural proceeding, for, like all purely commercial people, they had no desire for territorial expansion; they were the Phœnicians of the Baltic. While they put forth all their energy to have their trade ramify as broadly as possible, they found it expedient to keep their base contracted. Ratzel, in his recent work on the principles of political geography (*Politische Geographie*), formulates the principle involved here when he says:—

"In the founding of trading colonies no regard is paid to the acquisition of any more territory than just suffices for city and harbor. Trade does not need much land, shuns the trouble and danger of its defense. Most of the French and Italian maritime cities which had municipal colonies in the Levant never sought land, did not ask for it even when the rewards of victory were being distributed for the aid they had rendered in the Crusades."

This was the same principle which guided the Hansa. When the war with Waldemar was over, some of the neighboring princes wished to have the kingdom divided up piecemeal, but the cities interfered to prevent its partition, and the small portion they acquired themselves by the terms of the treaty they soon gave up. The policy was a short-sighted one, because it left the League too narrow a base from which to operate effectively, and too limited resources within the cities themselves in the event that their office as middlemen should ever be taken from them. And this event was inevitable. Just after their victory over Waldemar, they excluded the Flemish and English from the Baltic, and early in the sixteenth century tried to shut out the vessels of the Netherlands; but the Dutch had become sufficiently strong at sea to force the free navigation of the Baltic, and the monopoly of the League there was broken. Dutch and English vessels then traded directly with the Polish, Prussian, Russian and Swedish cities, and such of these as had been members of the League fell off from their allegiance because their interests were now at variance with those of the confederation.

The great historical event which acted as a death-blow to the sea-sovereignty of Venice contributed also to the decline of the Hanseatic League. After the discovery of the sea route to India and America, the oriental trade which had filtered through Russia to the Baltic ceased. The current of commercial activity, shifting as its nature is, flowed into new and vaster channels, leaving the

Baltic and the Mediterranean for centuries mere sluggish pools. The inclosed basin, the limited environment which had served as a nursery for an infant maritime enterprise, became the prison of the full-grown sea power. The struggle for sea-sovereignty was transferred from the smaller bodies of water to the open ocean. Commerce became the exchange of products between hemispheres. Victory and wealth fell to those nations who were advantageously situated in immediate contact with the Atlantic, and were therefore able to lay hold of the new markets in the new lands.