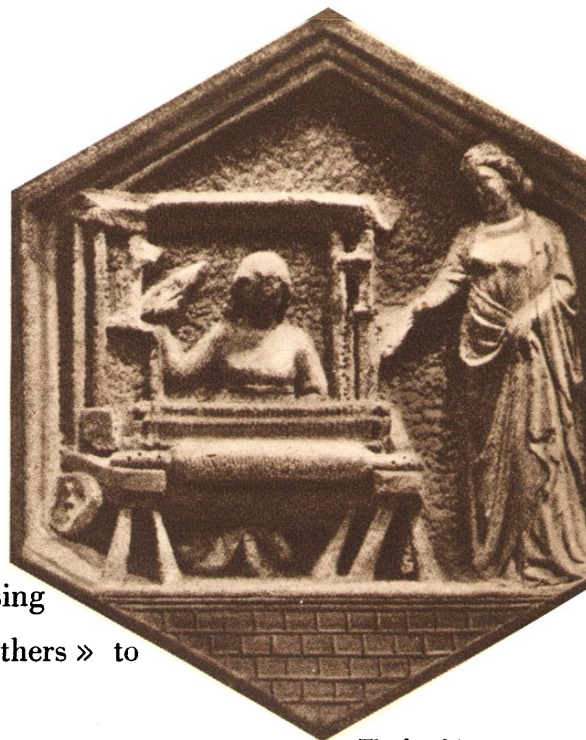




Giotto's Campanile with a side of the Cathedral, built by the Woollen Guild

and a special, and four consuls, from among whom was elected a « prior » (the priors of the bigger guilds governed the city). A steward looked after the expenditures and he was required to be « sparing with and watchful of » whatever passed through his hands and « not to commit fraud in spending or receiving »; and at the expiration of his term of office to render an account of his stewardship, together with the consuls and all the other officials of the Guild, to three members, « mercantile accountants ». Among these officials

were the bookkeepers and the holders of the keys of the premises and probably also of the cash and the cloths stores managed by the Guild. The steward kept the seal in a satchel sealed in its turn with the seals of all the consuls. Six officials were also appointed for the purpose of facilitating purchases of cloth from beyond the Alps and of supervising « dyers, stretchers, folders, menders and others » to whom work was given out.

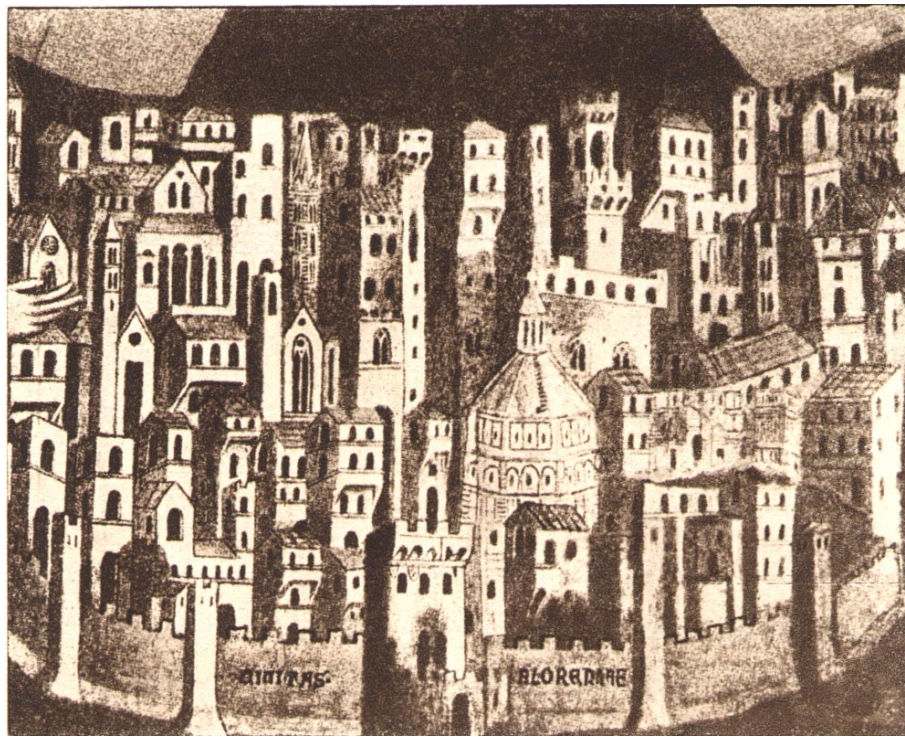


Woolmaking represented in a baso-rilievo in Giotto's Campanile

There was great activity in January (although in those days the year began with the Incarnation on March 25) in connection with the elections, the appointments, the chief investigations, and the registration of the members of each company. All offices were assumed on oath, a point of considerable importance, no less than the penalties inflicted for its violation, in view of the deeply religious sentiment of the period. The « prologue » of the by-laws in question says that they are made « to the honour of God and of the Blessed Virgin Lady Holy Mary and of the blessed saints Giovanni Battista, Pietro and Paulo, Filippo and Jacopo, and Miniato, Zenobi and Liparata, and of all the saints of God. » John the Baptist, protector of Florence and of the Art of Woolmaking, deserved particular mention, as did also St. Miniato, St. Zenobi and St. Reparata, other special Florentine protectors. To St. Reparata was consecrated the cathedral which afterward took the name of Santa Maria del Fiore. The members of the Guild — a membership which required the payment of a tax — had (says the first article of the by-laws) to observe, honour and keep the Catholic faith and help the municipality to combat heresy. Nobody in the court of Calimala (adds the second article), under penalty of twenty-five « livres »,

may « revile God or his Saints or the Holy Mary or wickedly or dishonestly name them ». A fine of the same amount was inflicted on « whomsoever utters reproofs or vile, foul or insulting words or rustic blasphemy in Calimala or in the court of the Consuls ».

Among their many offices the administrators of Calimala had the care of the venerable temple of San Giovanni — the Baptistery of Dante —; of the Church of San Miniato a Monte, and of the old leprosarium and hospital of Sant'Eusebio; and also for a certain period the care of the hospital of San Gallo, entrusted for a few years also to the Woolmakers Guild, which had the permanent management of the Cathedral. Nor was relief of the poor neglected. Lists have been handed down containing the names of persons to whom the Consuls had to distribute bushels of wheat. For the greater part the beneficiaries were widows of members or citizens who were probably ex-members, reduced to poverty. Large families received special consideration. « To Mistress Tonina, widow of An-



View of Florence
in 1352

drea... with a large family... To Taccio of Varlungo, with six children... to Mistress Vanna, wife of Feo, with a large family... To Salvi Marmi, a shameful poor... ». The distribution to the « shameful poor » was entrusted to members who enjoyed the confidence of the Guild. « To Lapo Niccoli, to give to a shameful poor family at his discretion... To Michele Tenaglia (for the same purpose)... To Bartolo Terucci, to give to certain shameful poor whose name is not stated in order not to expose their shame... ».



The Drapers' House of Gand

And all this « to the honour and glory of our Lord God and His very gentle Mother (note the accent of tenderness in naming the Virgin Mary) and of the blessed master Giovanni Battista in order that God may preserve the city of Florence and the merchants of Calimala... ». Moreover, from Christmas eve to the middle of January the consuls and two merchants had to distribute money out of the Guild funds for the maintenance of the poor and twenty dozen loaves, made from two bushels of wheat, in the Church of San Giovanni, and the bread from four bushels every Tuesday morning in the Church of Sant'Eusebio. Relief in those days assumed these simple forms. As an act of sentimental solidarity it was the custom on the death of a member for all the shops and stores to remain shut on the day of the funeral; but the factors and the « disciples » (these would be the ordinary hands) in the employment of the members were debarred from this honour.

A feature of considerable importance was the help afforded

to members in their affairs. Among the officials appointed in January there were the two consuls for the Kingdom of France, a centre of business on account of the big international fairs of Champagne and Provence, one for the merchants who resided there and the other for those of the Guild who made periodical journeys there. These consuls of the wool traders were the predecessors of their modern colleagues in the consular service. It was therefore the guilds, in particular the Calimala guild or that of the woolmakers, that created an institution which modern states have found so useful. The consuls had to swear before all the Florentines of the fairs and of Paris, specially convened, to defend their interests « in good faith and with all their power » and had authority to mediate in their affairs and to give judgment in suits that did not exceed a certain amount, and, naturally, they had to supervise their conduct and the quality of their goods for the good name of the Guild.

Among other things they had to see that they did not play at dice or allow dice to be played « or any other game whereby something could be lost ». It is a short step from gambling to moral and financial disorder, and not a long one from disorder to dishonesty. Also in Florence, in the shops kept by members of Calimala, gaming, whether by day or by night, was forbidden; backgammon (then called « tables ») and chess could, however, be played openly during the day. It was also forbidden to bring women into the shops. A « disciple » had to remain in each shop during the night, taking care, however, not to leave or to pass from one shop to another after the third chime of the bells. « And that no fires be lit in the shops at night unless they be candles or lamps or for some urgent necessity... and that no bed of straw, unless the straw is in a sack, be kept... ». A fire would have had disastrous results.

If a member had debts due to him outside Florence, in whatever

part, and could not collect them, it was the duty of the consuls, « directly or through the medium of others, to give help, advice and favour to such our merchant both against the debtor and against the men of his land ».

This was the greatest strength of association in a time when individual rights counted for little in foreign lands. With the great development of trade crédit became the basis of a work of larger proportions. The bill of exchange had already been invented — by jews, it is said —, and Italian bankers, with the Florentines at their head, dominated Europe. The by-laws of the Guild of Calimala fixed time limits for sales on credit: three months, with a fortnight extra if the contract had been stipulated by letter, or six or eight, according to the circumstances and the times. It was forbidden to give longer credit. Work was carried on in this way at the fairs, in the emporia, and in the ports from the north of Europe to the ports of call of the Levant. It was therefore necessary that the corporation should answer for its members, and beyond the corporation the city, the state. If a member did not pay, the corporation had to pay, and if the latter quibbled or refused there were tremendous reprisals. The merchants of the nation to which the defaulter belonged would be driven from the state or, at least, their goods and property would be seized. Each answered for all and all for each. The craftiness or stupidity of a merchant let loose a tempest capable of jeopardising the affairs of numerous persons — exclusion from the fairs and territory, suspension or rescission of contracts, a pandemonium. It will therefore be readily understood that bankrupts were dealt with most severely by the guild to which they belonged; they and their children were punished with civil death, i. e. deprived of all civil rights and capacities. Everything reposed on confidence and when this was lost everything collapsed in the storm of reprisals;

which were anything but rare, because sometimes the debit and credit entries were in need of clarification and the guilds wanted to discuss matters, whereas the representatives of municipalities and sovereigns were impatient of demurs and proceeded to action. Naturally, matters were subsequently adjusted, but in the meantime considerable damage had been done.

The Guild of Calimala proceeded with energy combined with prudence, for foreign trade was necessary and in the matter of reprisals Florence would have been left behind. « If it should happen that any of the said our merchants sustains loss in any country over the value of one hundred « livres », the consuls are required at his request to send an

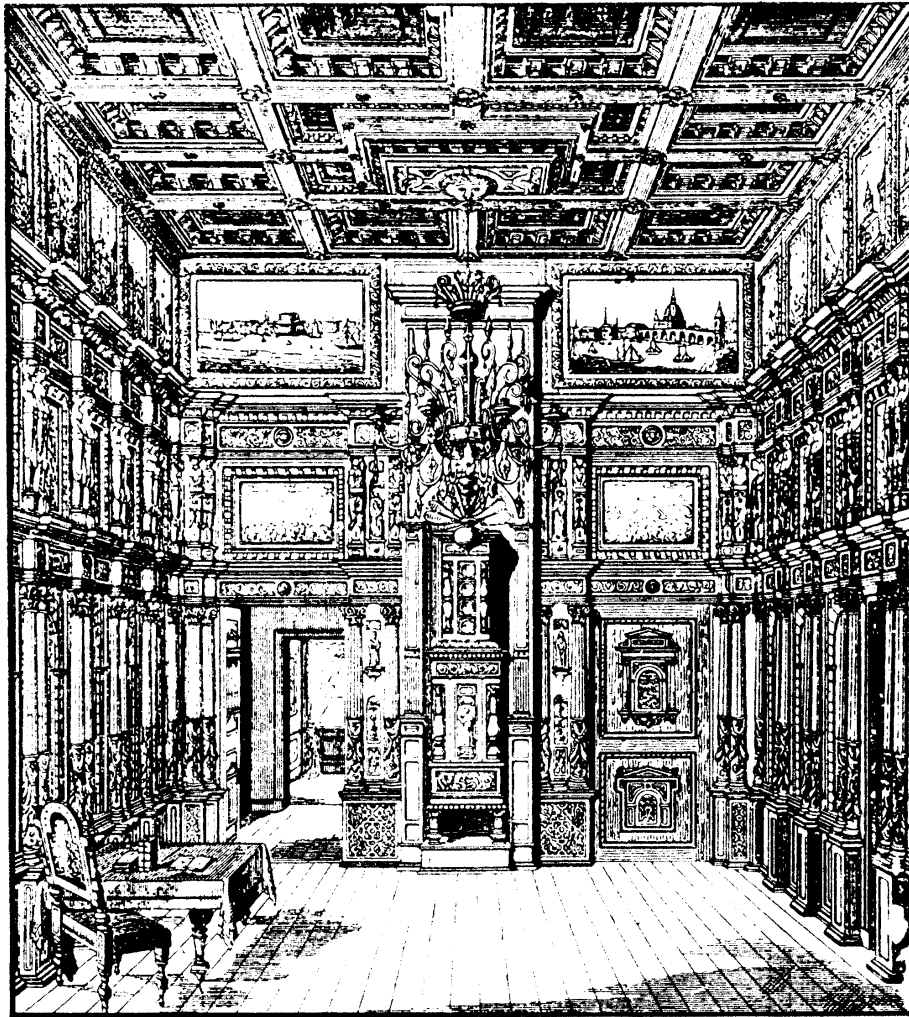
ambassador to recover that loss »; to whom a given sum, for himself and three mounts, was assigned. If the expense was greater, the person sustain-



Seal of the Florentine Merchants beyond the Alps

ning the loss was required to contribute. But the consuls had also to take into account cases in which the member was not « sufficient to the expense », meaning that

he could not defray them all. If it was possible and when there was no other way, they seized the person and property of the fellow-countrymen of the merchant who had failed to keep his engagements. This was also another reason why persons not belonging to the guild were energetically prevented from selling cloths from beyond the Alps. In return, however, the Guild exacted strict discipline from its members and subjected them to a supervision which today would seem oppressive.



The Fredenhagen
Room in the Mer-
chants Hall at Lü-
beck

THESE merchants were grouped together in societies, known as companies, into which every member put up a certain capital sum and received a proportionate part of the profits. The companies also accepted capital from outsiders, mere « shareholders ». Membership in other companies was strictly prohibited, and the company was under no obligation to answer for the deals that a member concluded by himself or for his personal debts. The supervision of the conduct of the individual members reached a point which best illustrates the degree of supervision and of severity of the restrictions.

When one of them returned from abroad with his earnings,

he had to be on the watch not to give the impression of having gained too much. He was shadowed and his probable wealth calculated. If there were rumours, or if information was laid against him, that he had made more than was lawful, he was prosecuted and relieved of the excess and more besides. There was a reason also for this. A greedy member, operating for his guild abroad, could do good business for himself. The position is much the same as in our days. The representative is instructed to make purchases; he seizes the more favourable moments and fails to apprise the company, to whose account he sets the less favourable purchases. And there are the ups and downs of the exchanges. All this was even then possible. But in those days the guild stepped in to examine the purse of the artful merchant and put matters to rights. — Thou hast worked so long. These are thy rights. Thou canst not have earned more than so much. The remainder is illicit and we will take it away from thee and chastise thee —. Everybody knew one another in Florence; curiosity was penetrating and malice played its part, and also envy.

In order to bind members still closer to their companies and guilds and to prevent them from establishing interests elsewhere, the by-laws actually ordered « that no companion, factor or disciple of any company or merchant of the Guild of Calimala, may dare or have the presumption to take a wife from outside the city or district of Florence without the permission and against the will of his companions or masters... unless before marrying he returns to Florence to give a full account of himself... and expressly takes leave from them, leaving behind all the goods belonging to the said Guild ». There is no reasoning where the heart is concerned, but there has to be reasoning where the common interest is involved before yielding to the dictates of the heart. The interests of the companies were certainly well looked after.

Another safeguard had to do with the rents of the shops and stores. The landlords might attempt to raise the rent, counting on finding a merchant who would be prepared to pay more for the privilege of having a shop in Calimala. His attempt would be unavailing, however, for the Guild stepped in here, not only with its own authority but with that of the other twelve major guilds, to prevent this speculation. No member could lease a shop or a store, directly or indirectly, if the previous lessee had not left spontaneously or had not left at least a year before. If, however, a member insisted on a reduction of the rent, the landlord could let the premises to others.

And in order that there should be perfect equality among the members it was forbidden to chase after customers or to have the cloths sent out to be inspected, except to persons of consequence, and this only with the consent of the Guild authorities. The merchant was not allowed to « display his cloths at his pleasure outside his shop so as to occupy half the width of the street »; though owing to the narrowness of Calimala Street (which however the Guild had had paved and kept clean) there could not have been much light.

Careful attention had to be paid in measuring the cloth. « Everyone who sells cloth from beyond the Alps is required to place the cloth on the bench from which all other cloth woollen or linen has been removed, and to lay out that cloth in good faith, raising his hands and every other thing above it... and then place the rod along the selvage so that the said selvage does not hang over the edge of the bench; and mark with chalk at the end of the rod and then cut the cloth... ». (The customer must have felt sure about his purchase. In Milan the vendors had to allow the buyers to place the goods on one or the other pan — as they choose — of the scales to ensure that the weight was genuine). The Guild had an iron rod which served as a standard, and all other rods had to be cut to its length and

checked with it every so often.

Each piece of « Flemish or Brabantine » cloth had to bear a tag indicating « the true cost rightly and loyally, in good faith and without deceit », and there had to be a corresponding written statement giving the value of the currencies at the time of purchase and all the expenses for customs, tolls, and carriage, so that the buyer might know exactly what the cloth cost to the vendor. This straining after honest dealing was carried to such a pitch that if for some reason or another a discount had been allowed on a cloth bought from beyond the Alps the amount had to be deducted from the price shown on the cloth's « passport ». Then there was the cost of the various operations to which the cloth had been subjected in Florence — dyeing, preparing and giving it that finish which made it so highly appreciated. In this way they arrived at the selling price, which, in view of the clear-cut distinctions in quality and origin (the place of origin had also to be marked on the ticket or statement), must have been practically the same from shop to shop. Obviously, in the midst of such corporative harmony, all the costs, especially those relating to the finishing of the cloth, were kept up by common agreement, and the gain handsomely recompensed these industrious and disciplined men.

Brokers often had a hand in the sales. They had to be Guelphs (the Guild members also had to be Guelphs: the politically factional nature of the turbulent time of Dante persisted), take oath, and give guarantees. They had to swear, among other things, to deal with all shops and stores without discrimination, not to claim more than the fees scheduled in the by-laws, and not to belong to any company or have interests in common with dyers or other employees of the Guild.

The dyers constituted the most important body of workers

Juxta scripta sunt et in hoc libro nomina et cognomina ac signa mercatorum
 mercatorum Liborice lanarum publicorum in Civitate Mediolani habitantium

LIBORICE LANARUM
 PUBLICORUM
 CIVITATIS
 MEDIOLANI

In portis horizontalibus:

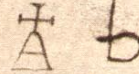
D. Marcellus Curcellus filius d. gaudet per portum ad Babilem



D. Beltramolus pauper filius d. petri per portum ad Babilem



D. Ambrosius de mospo filius d. jost et d. rudi per portum ad Babilem



Thommas de garezio filius d. johannis per portum ad Babilem



D. petrus de bignari filius d. andree per portum ad Babilem



D. petrus de lomo filius d. thommas de per portum ad Babilem



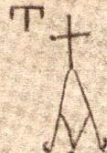
D. Dionysius de pombis et filius d. jost per portum ad Babilem



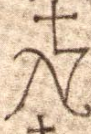
D. Bertramolus de poto filius d. jost per portum ad Babilem



D. philippus de mospo filius d. jost per portum ad Babilem



D. thommas de poto et filius d. jost per portum ad Babilem



Amel
 ysaeh
 johannes et
 petrus
 filius d. thommas de mospo per portum ad Babilem



D. Beltramolus de pombis filius d. jost per portum ad Babilem

First Sheet of the Roll of the Milanese Fine Wool Merchants of the Fifteenth Century

among those who worked for the Guild, for in the fine Florentine dyeing lay the chief merit of the finishing of the raw cloths from beyond the Alps. The dyers were more carefully supervised than the other workers. A watch had to be kept that merchants and dyers did not arrange with each other to make mixtures from cheap and inferior substances: the scarlets, which were the cloths par excellence for the gentleman (Cosimo dei Medici the older cynically said that eight ells — the Florentine ell was about three-quarters of a yard — of scarlet cloth would make a real gentleman), had to be died « with proper and pure cochineal », which was very expensive. Vegetable substances like madder and archil were used for the cheaper cloths. Now, « to maintain the honour and the old usage » of the Guild, members were forbidden to sell or cause to be sold in the city of Florence or district « any cloth, whole or pieced, dyed with archil », but it was permitted to dye cloths « with cochineal and madder mixed together, as they pleased, calling such cloth... scarlattina or semi-cochineal... », but the cloth had to be marked as such on the ticket. Archil, which was considered the poorest dye, was obtained from the putrefaction of certain herbs (mixed with urine) brought from the East by a member of the Rucellai family along with the secret of their usage. Madder, on the contrary, which was obtained from the plant of that name, was worth more. There was also Dyers' Rocket, another herb which when pulverised served to dye blue; without mentioning saffron and various kinds of gall. But cochineal, the animal dye, held the place which Tyrian purple once held.

The workers had to work with the greatest care and to co-operate with the governor of the Guild to prevent fraud. The darners and the folders (who had the delicate task of folding the cloth) had, before beginning their work, to see that there were no stains or

defects in the cloth, and if they noticed any or if they found faults in the dyeing, to inform the « cloth master » immediately. And they were forbidden to give the work to others to do or handle cloth from beyond the Alps of persons not enrolled in the Guild or cloth which was not sealed with the « lead seal of the Guild of Calimala ». Gaming, with the exception of backgammon and chess, was also forbidden in their workshops. The dyers were forbidden to buy cochineal for the purpose of re-selling it: each to his trade. The charges were fixed from year to year.

The Guild even had its checker, to whom was entrusted the task of checking the cloth within one month from the date of sale to see whether there were any defects. If during this time the vendor had not carried out the check, the buyer was released from his engagement. In short, the Guild did everything possible to give the highest guarantees to the world clientele of Calimala and by its scrupulousness it rendered valuable service to its members because it established the authority of the name and maintained at a high level that confidence on which the lasting prosperity of the business was based. He who wanted a given kind of cloth, coming from a given fair, dyed in a given manner, had no reason to be perplexed at the offers: everything was written and verified. He could take the piece without opening it out because it had been examined. He knew that a merchant of Calimala was absolutely forbidden to keep native cloths and even to have his shop alongside one where Florentine cloths were sold, « inasmuch as in the wall or partition separating the said stores or shops there might be some outlet, window, pigeon-hole or breakage ».

Thus the golden eagle on a red field above a white torsel, the emblem of Calimala, was able to roam the world sovereign until the decadence of the big French fairs contributed to its decadence.

We have purposely dwelt on the details of the constitution of Calimala because in it there is manifest the spirit that also governed the woolmakers guild properly so^r called: the great discipline, the great severity with infringers, the great supervision for the safeguarding of its good name; which spirit, joined to the skill of the workers, gave to the Italian woollen industry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and up to the middle of the fifteenth a primacy which is a title of nobility of Italian history.

THE Woolmakers Guild imported only the raw material and worked it with the standards adopted in Calimala to obtain the best results and guarantee the genuineness of the goods to the customers. This guild also comprised only the managerial elements of the business, the employers of our days, while the workers, from the dyers downward, belonged to the guild inasmuch as they were employees. The guild had its own premises in Florence, which still remain, restored, near the Church of Or San Michele. The Lamb of the Baptist with the aureole and the streamer, under the rake with the lilies, was known throughout the world almost as well as the Guild of Calimala.

It was long thought that the revival of the woollen industry in Italy was due to the Order of the « Umiliati ». In reality, the members of this Order found the industry already well developed and they merely contributed to its progress by reason of the growth of the Order and the even too excessive prosperity — which eventually contributed to its ruin — they experienced through following the industry. Anyhow, they represent a curious episode, characteristic of the times, in the history of the woollen industry.

The Order arose about the middle of the twelfth century in the midst of those popular movements of religious reform which fomented such a leaven of heresies and which were, in part, canalised in the following century under the discipline of the Church into the two great creations of St. Francis and St. Dominic. Legend attributes a romantic origin to the Order. Henry II, the emperor of Germany, in the war against Arduino, the king of Italy, took back

to Germany as prisoners some nobles of Milan and Como who, induced by their sad fate to live a life of penitence, clothed themselves poorly and worked in the woollen industry, already notably developed beyond the Rhine. The sovereign, noticing the change, exclaimed — Here you are, humiliated at last — and released them. The word pronounced by the emperor remained the name of the Order, because upon their return to Lombardy these nobles stayed united



The Woollen Mill
of the Umiliati:
*Twisting and
Spinning*

in their mission of penitence and labour and made proselytes in great numbers.

In reality it seems that the legend was one of the usual flowers of the imagination that in those days blossomed with the birth of all important events. It is, however, a fact that woolmaking was more developed in Germany, as also in the Low Countries and France, than in Italy on account of the abundance and better quality of the raw material; for which very reason discerning Italians at an early date dedicated their energies to trading in cloths from beyond the Alps, which they imported into Italy for finishing and then re-sold in the places where they originated, especially in the East, that stupendous commercial colony of mercantile and maritime Italy of the Middle Ages. And it is a fact that the occupation of the Umiliati was solely that of woolmaking, and their numerous houses (Lombardy bristled with them; there were 150 of them in the Milan diocese alone in the first half of the thirteenth century) spread throughout northern Italy, Romagna, Tuscany and elsewhere, increasing the number of looms enormously. In the province of Milan they were like a chorus of crickets in the towns and the countryside.

Numerous companions hearkened to the call of the founders of the Order, which was constituted in the usual form of the religious associations of those times, beginning with the basic association of the Catharist heretics which were the more or less direct inspirers of all others. There were the clerics, who were the masters and directors of the spiritual life, the laymen gathered together in the houses of the Order, and the tertiaries, who lived with their families but had ties with the religious and industrial centres. For some time men and women were housed in the same building, although suitably segregated; afterward there were separate houses for males and females. And everywhere they spun, wove and the profit on the cloths sold augmented the common capital, which in the centuries that followed became enormous.

The large number of enrolments in the Order is easy to under-

stand. The very wretchedness of life, with the deplorable example set by not a few prelates and the violence and oppression of the governing bodies, drove many mystic souls and poor people toward God, the Strong of the Strongs, and toward any form of association that gave promise of constituting strength. Their ardent sermons hovered in the air like pollen of the Gospel and blossomed into humility, goodness and imitation of Christ. And, moreover, the



The Woollen Industry of the Umiati: Carriers, Stretchers and Examiners of the Cloth

Caplin. x.
 Littere p[ro]p[ri]e f[aci]e[n]t[ur] f[aci]e[n]t[ur] m[em]bri de t[em]p[or]e religiose post l[oc]os canonicos q[ui]bus
 antiquitas i[n] s[an]c[t]o d[omi]n[ic]o m[em]bri p[ro] h[um]ilitate p[ro]f[er]u[n]t p[ro]f[er]u[n]t s[ec]u[n]d[u]m m[od]u[m] an
 tiquitatis quousq[ue] fuit eis p[ro]hibitus p[er] alexandru[m] papa[m] quatuor / Anno d[omi]ni
 octo / In claustris sepius exercebat arte lanam: p[ro] e[ss]e comoditate
 l[oc]i q[ui] p[ro]p[ri]a f[aci]e[n]t[ur] habebat / Capellani p[ro] celebratio[n]e miss[ae] et sacrificior[um] m[em]bri
 t[em]p[or]e d[omi]ni fieret f[aci]e[n]t[ur] ut i[n] b[er]o[n]a :

Church, the abbeys, the monasteries, had they not become an immense centre and solid nuclei of power? Take refuge in God and in the community; and work in safety. Weaving was not a difficult occupation. Every woman had followed it from time immemorial, and, as the woollen industry took on an industrial character, male weavers increased in number alongside female, gradually, constituting, so to speak, the background of the urban population: an uncertain, restless, tormented and, in certain circumstances, tormenting background. Weavers, symbol of social discomfort up to Heine, up to Hauptmann. In France, the heretics were actually called weavers; in Italy, the Order of the Umiliati, which absorbed large numbers of weavers, fluctuated between heresy and obedience to the Church, was excommunicated, reconsacrated and went ahead until, full of worldly riches and having abandoned the industry that, like prayer, had sanctified its beginnings, and objecting to the spiritual discipline which San Carlo was gradually restoring (he had a narrow escape from being killed by a shot from the arquebuse of an « umiliato »), it was dissolved by Pius V and its very name relegated to the archives and libraries.

The first Umiliati found pious persons who gave or lent them money for the purchase of the wool and the necessary equipment. It is possible, moreover, that there was some truth in the legend as to the Order having been founded by some noblemen. These movements are not usually started by individuals from the common people. It is therefore probable that the first Umiliati had themselves sufficient money to begin the woollen industry and therefore to place proselytes beyond the reach of exploitation by the merchants, while subsequent gifts and legacies augmented the financial power of the association. In addition to gifts, legacies and profits, the Order accepted money from people who, without having any say in the management of affairs and without being liable for a greater sum than they paid in, were remunerated according to the capital they brought; the modern limited partnership. Thus a big business, half commer-

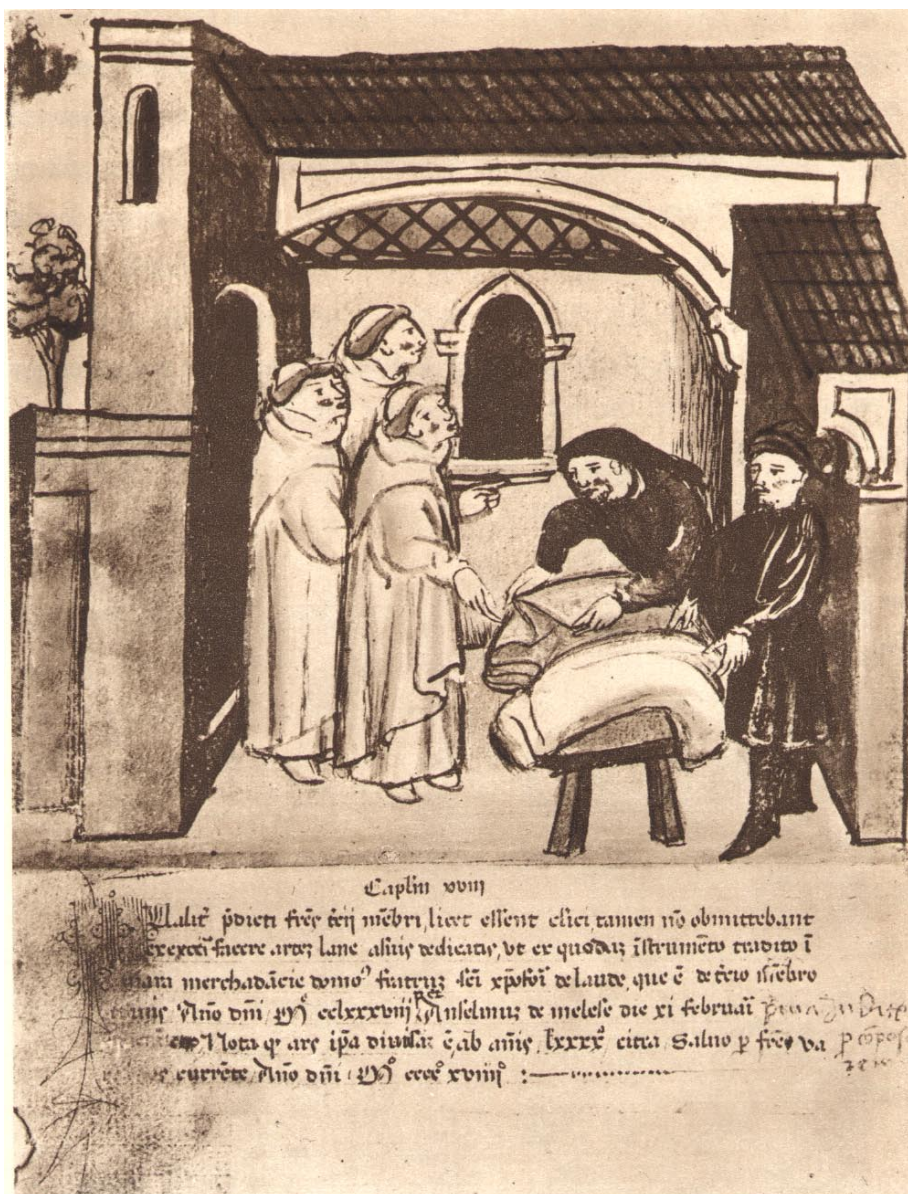
cial half religious, gradually grew up and spread throughout Italy, with hundreds of houses and a considerable output, especially of cloths for use by the common people. The prosperity of the Order undoubtedly helped to stimulate trade, and trade to stimulate the woollen industry in the various cities; to such an extent, in fact, as to exceed in importance the trade in cloths from beyond the Alps and to rise when the latter was already on the decline.

The first seat of the Umiliati, after Milan, was Verona. It is highly probable that they spread from Verona to Vicenza, promoting the rise of the industry along the banks of the Bacchiglione and in the valleys of the Vicenza region where the neighbouring mountains offered an abundance of wool. They settled in Florence and in other cities of Tuscany during the first half of the thirteenth century.

Their houses were usually situated alongside watercourses where they could wash the dirty wool in baskets and where they could set up their fulling mills. The washed wool was dried in the open air — not by the sun, which would have parched it — and then beaten, opened out and cleaned, beaten again, carded, combed, sprayed with oil, spun, warped and woven. Then followed the operations on the cloth by the fullers who felted it, the cleaners who cleansed it, the dyers who gave it its colour, the stretchers who made it smooth and equal, the teasers, the cutters and the folders, whose jobs we already know.

The Umiliati did not, however, make materials for persons of quality; they worked for the poor folk, with native wool for the greater part, and produced cloth, usually called « humiliated cloth », which was placed at the bottom of the list of textiles, even in the customs tariffs, alongside the « bigallo » (a coarse grey cloth) and the « mezzalana » (half wool half flax), at the opposite pole to the scarlet. The spread of their houses, their good reception in the cities, and the invitations they also received, depended in part on the fact that they did not stand in the light of the Guild of Calimala, already powerful, did not compete with the business of finishing cloths from

beyond the Alps, which had undergone great development not only in Florence but in many other Italian cities, especially Bologna. Moreover, they were well organized and used methods of work which others found it helpful to know and imitate, and in the places where they settled they probably engaged workmen not connected with the Order, thus contributing to the economic prosperity of the city and to the progress of the industry. It is quite likely that, being a reli-



The Woollen Industry of the Umi-
liati: *Selling the
Cloth*

gious order, they had almost a monopoly in the furnishing of supplies to convents, which were then numerous: friar Bonvesin della Riva, who in the thirteenth century extolled his Milan, said, among other things, that ten thousand persons consecrated to God « partook of the Ambrosian bread » (St. Ambrose is the patron saint of Milan) and among these the Umiliati numbered some thousands.

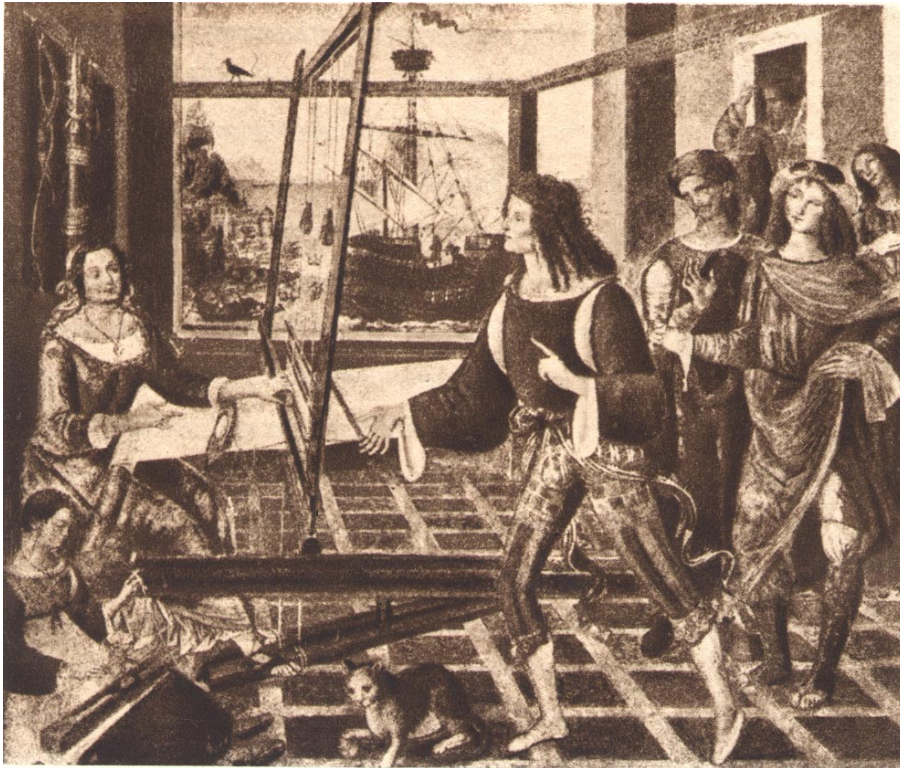
All the cities naturally were bent on encouraging the development of trade and industry, and of all the trades and industries those of the wool were by far the most important. In the Middle Ages, the woollen industry was, it might be said, the life of Italy and an essential force of her brilliant rise. Many cities therefore encouraged the immigration of workmen and industrialists from other places; they allowed them tax exemptions, facilitated in every possible way the carrying on of the industry, had moderate rents fixed for them and granted them the right to choose a workshop and a dwelling without the owner of the property being able to raise an objection. Toward the end of the fifteenth century Duke Sforza established a principle of public utility in Milan in favour of the woolmakers. He who considered a particular house suitable for installing his business had the right to take it: the house was expropriated and paid for at its appraised value. Milan and other northern cities took in, among others, a certain number of workmen from Germany and the Low Countries, not because they had anything to teach the Italians, but because good workmen were always welcome if only to keep those of the district in their place. The Florentine wool manufacturers, for example, engaged workmen from Germany to reduce the cost of labour, as in those days it was the foreigners, not the Italians, who were content to work for less outside their own country. In Vicenza during the fifteenth century, when the industry was at its height, there were workmen from Verona, Bergamo, Como, Dalmatia, Germany and the Low Countries.

The Umiliati with their discipline and simple life were, among other things, a moderating element in the midst of the men of the

various trades dependent on the woollen industry, who not infrequently were turbulent and often — not without reason — discontented.

Like the by-laws of Calimala, those of the woollen guilds of the various cities — in a period in which the whole of Italy wove with alacrity — were animated with the same spirit of regulative strictness and discipline, although with a substratum of religion and good faith. Members of the Milan corporation and of the corporations of other cities in Lombardy were protected and helped, but had to observe numerous obligations, which in the case of the unskilled workers were even more stringent.

A glance, for example, at the by-laws of the *Fraglia* of the woollen traders of Vicenza (this also affects our Valdagno) which was set up between the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, reveals regulations which, except for some peculiar details, will give a fair idea of the manner in which the industry was orga-



The Woollen Industry in Art:
Penelope at the Loom in a Painting by Pinturicchio

nized during the Middle Ages and up to the Rinascimento.

The management of the Vicenza Fraglia was in the hands, not of consuls as in Tuscany, but of two « gastaldi » (administrators) to whom was added a rector, two councillors elected by the chapter or meeting of members, a notary, a syndic charged with collecting the dues of the Fraglia, accountants appointed by the administrators, one or two commandants who transmitted and executed higher orders, and other minor officials like the « seekers » or « finders » who were charged with investigations and examining denunciations, sealers who stamped the cloths with the Venetian seal (cloths from the city of Vicenza on both sides and those from the country on one side only in order that buyers from outside could distinguish the origin) and appraisers who appraised both the wool offered for sale and the cloths.

The woollen manufacturers, the masters, who were the real members of the Fraglia, bought the wool, had it spun by women here and there, and gave it out to be worked by the master workmen who with the men in their pay performed the various operations in their workshops. Their wool purchases were subjected to restrictions: they could not buy more than four thousand pounds of native wool at a time, and it was strictly forbidden to buy wool for the purpose of warehousing it and re-selling later at a profit. Naturally members were prohibited from buying such warehoused wool. They had to observe certain rules and prohibitions in the use of the raw material. They were not to cheat by using say ox hair instead of the fleece of the sheep, or by inserting flax fibres in the warp with a view to selling the fabric for cloth of pure wool, or by using inferior wool from other regions, like the wool from Puglia. (It was a long call from the glories of the Tarantine wool of Roman times!).

The master workmen answered for their own work as also for that of their assistants and apprentices, and they were also responsible for fraud on the part of the masters which called for their connivance. The looms had to be sealed. Uncompleted work had not to

be taken off the loom, and the weaver was forbidden to accept work from another person before finishing that in hand. The manufacturer, for his part, could not give work to a master workman who had left unfinished that given to him by another or had in any way behaved contrary to the by-laws. The cloths had to be woven wide (we have seen that the making of narrow cloths was reserved to the towns) in a number of lots as indicated in a special index of the by-laws for the various types. The teasers had to consign the waste from the teasing to the owner if they wished to be paid and had to be careful not to confuse the right with the wrong side of the cloth at the risk of having the cloth burnt in the public square. All cloths not produced in accordance with the by-laws were as a rule burned in the public square; for example, those in which waste had been mixed with the wool.

Like the looms, also the warp beams had to be sealed with the seal of the Fraglia after having been measured « with the common rod of the woolmakers »; and the « chiodare » — frames provided with hooks on which the cloth was stretched for drying — had to be of a given measure.

No worker could leave a master unless in agreement with him and then only on the last day of the week. Woe to the rebellious! The manufacturer or worker who had been put beyond the pale of the Fraglia was no longer able to do anything. Nobody could work for him or give him work to do. If he had erred, the best thing for him to do was to pay the fine and bow his head. No one was permitted to borrow money on cloth or wool or instruments of work at the risk for the borrower of being prosecuted as a thief

The Woollen Industry in Art:
A Painting by
Mirabello Cavalori



and for the lender of seeing his loan lost. The investigators had the right to enter houses and make searches at their pleasure. Anybody who attempted to prevent them was « debarred for a year from practising the said wool trade and treated as a suspect and deprived of all the privileges of the said Fraglia ». The fullers secretly re-sold the soap they used for felting the cloths, just as the teasers tried to make away with the waste. No code has ever succeeded in making an honest man of one who is not. The by-laws of the Fraglia tried to put an end to the « matter of theft and loss », prohibiting masters and master workmen from buying soap from the fullers and the fullers from keeping more soap than they received from time to time along with the cloths to be felted.

Every master workman, from the weaver to the dyer, had to place his mark on the cloth, thus shouldering his responsibility. Before beginning his own particular job, however, he had to examine the cloth carefully and point out any defects he might find, thereby fixing the responsibility of each party to the cloth's preparation. And each had to attend to his own work. A manufacturer could not, for example, act as a broker, or a worker be engaged in the commercial side of the business. The fullers had to use a given quality of soap or soapstone for a given quality of cloth and no other and in the dyeing given colouring materials and no others had to be employed.

Debtors, as is known, were thrown into prison, but their arrest could be made neither in church nor in their homes « inasmuch as the home and the church are and must be the refuge and receptacle of everybody ». In Milan, on the contrary, fugitive merchants could be arrested in their homes, in church, and even in the house of the Duke. Bankrupts and fugitives were treated with the utmost severity: mere debtors were handled more leniently. The right of refuge existed at Vicenza and religious sentiment dominated. Members of the guild and dependent workers were obliged to take part in the processions and observe feast days, which were fairly numerous. These feast days, which were clearly set out in the by-laws, number-



The Woollen Industry in Art:
The Syndics of the Cloth Manufacturers (Rembrandt)

ed thirty-seven including three days for Christmas, besides Sundays; in all eighty-four days a year without counting extraordinary occasions. It will be admitted that intervals of rest were anything but rare. The Guild of Calimala was particularly liberal in the matter of holidays for its merchant members: fifty-two Sundays, twenty-eight days of religious feasts lasting twenty-four hours, then December 25 up to the eighth successive day, Easter and the three following days, and up to the eighth day if the Guild members were willing; if not, it was permitted to « open and sell ». Nor was the possibility of other feast days, « according to the will of the consuls », excluded.

As regards welfare work, the Vicenza Fraglia helped needy and ailing fellow-members with money and oil. Christian charity provided for the rest, founding hospitals to which woollen manufacturers in all parts of Italy contributed and not neglecting to enter houses afflicted with misery and death.

Naturally, the big cities like Florence and Milan were far ahead from the standpoint of organization and action. The Woollen Guild

of Florence at the beginning of the fourteenth century (more than a century before that of Vicenza reached its highest point of development) gave work to no fewer than 30.000 persons, had 300 workshops in addition to all the houses where they wove and spun, and produced 100.000 pieces a year, to which must be added the 20.000 pieces of cloth from beyond the Alps which the twenty large companies of Calimala and the smaller merchants imported and finished, equal in value to 300.000 florins. Some decades later, when the chronicler Giovanni Villani celebrated the prosperity which the Woollen Guild had reached in his city, the number of pieces had dropped somewhat, due chiefly to the fact that more « genteel » cloth of a better quality was being produced which fetched more. At any rate, the 70 or 80.000 pieces of the year 1336 represented a value of 1.250.000 florins. The new cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore, which was erected under the care of the Guild, was a splendid symbol of the size of the Guild, and in the adjoining tower of Giotto a basso-rilievo represented weaving among the capital and eternal arts of life.

The Guild had its own installations where members could send their cloths to be washed, stretched and dried. It had its own fulling mills. It imported, for distribution, wool, colouring materials from the East, alum, Dyers' Rocket and saffron; lent money to those who wished to set up workshops at the service of the woollen manufacturers; had a cistern dug on its premises for storing oil which it bought in Ancona, Gaeta and elsewhere, and which it distributed to members according to their needs, especially for soap making. It bought up large quantities of metal teasels, which had been invented in those days and came from Milan, to obviate that the frequent wars should prevent manufacturers from periodically replenishing their supplies and thus enable them to produce their quota of cloth, which had not to exceed 220 pieces per head a year. With a view to making themselves independent as to means of transport, the Guild bought big galleons or had them specially built for carrying the bales of

wool from England, Spain and Morocco, and for carrying the cloth to the East when it was at loggerheads with Venice. It accumulated the small copper and silver coins necessary for the workmen's pay, placing them at the disposal of the members of the Guild according to their requirements. And naturally it intervened in the political economy of the City for obtaining free entry of the raw material and for the imposition of heavy dues on the entry of outside finished cloths which might have competed with and prejudiced local production. It even provoked wars to ensure its industrial and commercial hegemony.

In course of time a quarrel developed between Calimala, which desired to facilitate the importation of cloths from beyond the Alps, and the Woollen Guild, which wanted to protect its own production. In 1393 heavy customs were levied on cloths from outside and Calimala received a blow which contributed to its decline just as much as did the collapse of the big fairs of Champagne. In 1458, not content with the customs, the Woollen Guild actually succeeded in having the importation prohibited, in this way promoting the production of those types of cloth which used to be imported and at the same time following with assiduous vigilance the variations of taste and fashion in the various centres that dictated laws in this field in Italy and outside Italy. Where experience was lacking they had workers brought over from the places where the « speciality » had blossomed, offering privileges and good wages, and afterward occasionally breaking the contract under the pretext of negligence or excessive cost when the business had been learned.

For economic convenience the Italians, especially the Florentines, set up cloth mills abroad or financed foreign mills. The woollen production of southern France was for a certain time controlled by the Italians. Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici started mills in England, where for more than a century wool exports had been kept fairly low, with the view of protecting the national textile industry, and competed with the Florentine cloth mills; but the profits went to

the mother country. And the Florentine workmen in the pay of the Medici became the teachers of fine craftsmanship to the English who later in their turn became the masters. These are details which are worth while remembering.

These Italians went everywhere, tried everything, and with their ingenuity and alacrity often managed to predominate. With indomitable pertinacity the Italian merchant opened roads and wove the trade of Europe of the Middle Ages. He was the herald of future times immediately after, it might be said, the fall of the western Empire, if not when the Lombards conferred on them the right to bear arms, (which was then the right of free men), at least when the first civic nuclei, the first seats of modern civilization, were created and « mercator » became synonymous with « civis » in Lombard writings; and when, in Milan, toward the end of the twelfth century,



The Woollen Industry in Art:
Margaret at the Wheel in Goethe's Dramatic Poem

the woollen consuls were called upon to ratify peace treaties.

Milan, by reason of its position and size, took the greatest pains imaginable to procure all possible travelling conveniences and safety for its merchants along the roads of Lombardy toward Genoa and Venice and beyond the Alps. It helped in the building of roads that crossed the mountains and led to the fairs of Champagne, and then, with the decline of these, to the fairs of Lyons and Geneva. It made arrangements for guaranteeing the passage of the Simplon; fixed customs and tolls in favour of the Bishop of Raron, who had re-opened roads and bridges and had to keep them in repair; negotiated with Duke Leopold of Austria in connection with transit over the St. Gothard Alps; and sent ambassadors to all the feudal lords who might have disturbed the business of its merchants, arranging with them to provide escorts and protect them and to make good their losses in case of robbery. It also had relations with inn-keepers.

The inn-keepers of the Middle Ages were an important factor in commerce. They were trusted men who did not limit their activities to providing board and lodgings, but undertook to make fair charges, give useful information, serve as centres of inter-communication, protect their guests even vis-à-vis the local authorities, and give them reliable news regarding foreign exchange quotations. If an inn-keeper — so runs an article of the by-laws of Calimala — is indebted to a member, the Guild will write to him (at the expense of the member) to pay up, and if he does not pay, will order all the members of the Guild to forsake his inn. Moreover it bound the Florentine inn-keepers to keep to their business and to abstain from dealing in cloths on their own account.

An inn-keeper of Basle, Conrad Sitze, with whom the Milanese merchants used to lodge, wrote in May 1356 to the Abbots of the Merchant's Chamber of Milan (such was the name given to the heads of this authoritative institute) to acquaint them with the progress of the negotiations of a delegate sent by them to treat with a Swiss feudal lord who harrassed the merchants and of the treaty

he had managed to conclude with various lords providing for safety along the road that crossed the Lorraine. The year before the abbots had written thanking him for the letters coming from Flanders which he had forwarded on to Milan and for the zeal and faithfulness with which he looked after the interests of his Milanese customers. Basle, for that matter, was the city of transit that showed itself to be the most friendly to Italian merchants. These inn-keepers were prominent characters. The Duke of Austria used the inn of Heinrich Stan-ner, at Lucerne, which was frequented by Italians, in order to keep in contact with them. In 1372 Count Rudolph of Hapsburg, when granting safeconduct to the merchant subjects of the Viscontis, un-dertook to give two months' notice in case he denounced the agree-ment by notifying the revocation at another inn of Basle, the Balhof, and at the Oschibach of Constance. These inn-keepers, therefore, sometimes acted as a kind of vice-consul.

In the States and the large cities and in the places where im-portant fairs were held there were, as has been said, consuls vested with the authority of judges, appointed directly by the chief guilds, like the woollen and the merchants' guilds. The Chamber of Mer-chants of Milan had consuls almost everywhere, in London, Paris, Madrid. The existence of a Milanese consulate for the Kingdom of Napies is revealed by a decree of King Ferdinand of Naples in which he ratifies the election as consul of Paolo Rotoli of Milan. The de-cree, which is of 1464, is dated at Lanciano, in Abruzzo, the seat of one of the big yearly fairs of Italy in those days.

There was no postal service then, but these innovators of all modern conveniences, the merchants and the guilds, had always couriers on the road who travelled with sealed pouches in which they carried the mail; not merely that of the companies by whom they were employed but (here is the beginning of the postal service) also that of private individuals who made use of these very frequent occasions to send personal letters, paying a certain tariff. The Guild of Calimala had a circuit of horsemen that would have been the envy

of a prince; for example, of Filippo Maria Visconti, who ordered certain letters to be carried « day and night in haste by means of a horseman of the post (a halting place for post-horses) under penalty of hanging ». The Latin of these orders is very comical. « Curri cito cito, curri cito » («Run quickly, quickly, run quickly»). Or: «Portentur diu noctuque non celeriter sed fulminantissime, sub pena mille furcarum. Cito, cito, cito, cito, cito, cito ».



Collemaggio
Church, Aquila

OTHER couriers roamed about Europe for the account of Italian bankers, whose relations with the cloth merchants and with the woollen guilds were so close as to constitute not infrequently a network of common interests. The merchants became bankers and the bankers also operated as merchants, dealing chiefly in wool for their own account or for the account of others, especially in England. Everywhere the Lombards (as they were called, with a word which extended to the whole of Italy the name of a region and on the other hand restricted its application to a single occupation — only too repugnant to the public —, that of money-lending in a form which today would be called usury, and as such at that time was not unjustly considered by many) the Lombards dominated the economy of Europe for about two centuries, overshadowing the very Jews, who preferred to lend on pledges, and becoming confused with the « caorsini », another synonym for usurer in the contemptuous judgment of Dante and his contemporaries.

In Florence they formed another of the major guilds, the Exchange Guild (*Arte del Cambio*), which by the middle of the thirteenth century already comprised eighty companies. The Woollen, Calimala and Exchange Guilds represented the economic power of the city and gave the greatest impetus, even in the midst of internal dissensions and wars, to the growing beauty and marvellous exuberance of its artistic life. Painters and sculptors kept shop, like the merchants of Calimala, like the woollen manufacturers, like the

bankers that held the threads of credit and did business in money with the bill of exchange and clinking gold.

Italian bankers were to be found in Europe and the Levant in any place where trade of any importance was carried on. They had famous seats in the big centres, from Barcelona to London, from Paris to Bruges and Antwerp and in the principal cities of the Germanic Hanse. Some of them settled down definitely in the countries where they had made their fortune, especially in France, also adapting their name to the tongue of the country of adoption. Musciatto Franzesi, the record of whose name and fortune is met with in the first tale of the Decamerone, and his brother Albizzo — natives of Figline in Valdarno — became Mouche and Biche, and had influence at the court of Philip the Fair; and Cassinel (Bettino Cassinelli) was like a finance minister. His female descendants had the dubious honour of amusing three kings of France — Francis I, Charles IX and Henry IV — in their amatory caprices. They belong to history just as they belonged profoundly to the life of their time: Lombard Street is the heart of the London money market and there is also a street named after them in Paris. They were in close relations with the companies of the guilds and frequently involved in their affairs; they themselves constituted powerful companies which lent money to sovereigns... and sometimes failed to get it back.

Arms of the Florentine Guild of the Cambio

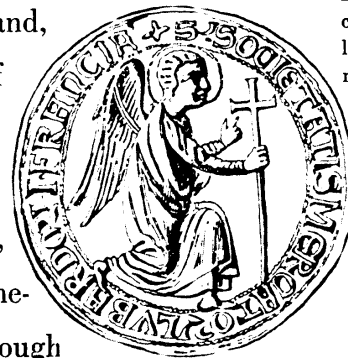


The misadventure of the Bardis and the Peruzzis in England is famous in Italian economic history of the Middle Ages. Italian merchants and bankers, chiefly Tuscans and Florentines, began to arrive in England as lenders of money to Richard the Lion-Heart, who was always picturesque and always full of debts and who,

during the third Crusade, had often had need of the Pisans, among others; and they had established themselves firmly there, dealing chiefly in the purchase of wool from the convents, which with their large estates had almost a monopoly. For many centuries English wool fed the greater part of European weaving.

The Ancient Britons, who up to the time of Julius Caesar went about covered with skins and had only a faint idea of more civilized clothing through contact with the Gauls across the Channel, learned weaving from the Romans who had set up plants in their military colonies for the needs of the troops. They only utilized the instruction thus received in the making of cloth for local consumption, however. The production was generally of poor quality even after the Flemish, the French, and especially the Italians had attained a high degree of refinement. It was not until later that the English sovereigns, particularly Edward III, realized the advantage of manufacturing good cloths at home with native wool instead of selling the wool to foreigners and subsequently buying it back woven at a high price; whence embargoes on exports and the development of the British woollen industry, which progressed from century to century until in more modern times it became one of the country's major industries, being surpassed, from the eighteenth century onward, only by the cotton industry.

In the face of these obstacles the Italian merchant bankers, who had controlled the raw wool trade in England, maintaining relations with all the convents (of which the Cistercians were the largest) and selling the wool not only to their own nationals but also to the Flemish and the French, found themselves in a difficult plight and remedied matters as best they could by buying through



The Arms of the Lombards of France, namely the Italian Bankers operating in France

the agencies their houses had established in Spain and Africa. (The vicissitudes of Spanish wool are rather curious: in the Middle Ages they felt the need of crossing Spanish sheep with English sheep to improve the breed; toward the seventeenth century, on the contrary, the merinos of Spain were so valued that their exportation was strictly prohibited; and it is related that a small flock of them sent to Queen Elizabeth as a present served to improve the English strain).

The national feeling of economic independence in the British people was heightened by the antipathy against foreigners, who were accused of exploiting the native wealth; against the Germans of the Hanse (a league of cities for commercial association which began in Hamburg and Lübeck) who also cornered as much wool as they could; against the Flemish workmen, whom the English sovereigns had not hesitated to bring over to teach good weaving to their subjects or had benevolently received when they fled their turbulent countries to escape from the persecution of princes and patricians; and against the Italians, who were the most active and able and pumped money more plentifully as lenders to the Court and to private individuals and as collectors of the tributes due to the Church of Rome, which in England had its best milch cow. The collection of these tributes, to which was added the collection of other dues granted to them on account of loans made to inveterately needy sovereigns, ended in being a source of trouble to the Italian merchant bankers — and not only to those in England; people always pay taxes unwillingly, and with eternal simplicity are prone to detest the agents, the collectors, the immediate representatives of fiscal vampirism.

The Bardis, one of the largest Florentine companies before the rise of the Medici, installed themselves in England toward the middle of the thirteenth century; the Peruzzis arrived later, toward the end

of the century. They began by taking advantage of the expulsion of the Jews in 1299 — another target of popular hostility — but their chief activity remained for a long time the buying and exporting of wool. Another big Florentine company, that of the Frescobaldis, which was charged with the collection of duties at the ports, was expelled, and the Bardis gained rather than lost by the occurrence — *mors tua vita mea*; but the hate of the London population was now directed against their power and reached such a pitch that in 1326 the company's warehouses were sacked and burnt down.

Edward III, the very king who later was to decree the ban on the exportation of wool and promoted the development of weaving in the country with the help of Flemish workmen, favored the Bardis and the Peruzzis for a certain period because he had need of their money to make war first on Scotland and then on France, and received huge sums. He protected them when the other Lombards were arrested wholesale and their property seized. But the war with France swallowed up the florins of the Italian lenders and their activities were then paralysed by the bombshell which exploded in the shape of a royal decree — May 6, 1340, a truly memorable date — which suspended payment to creditors of the State. To be exact, the Bardis and the Peruzzis were not included in the suspension; but the good intentions of a sovereign on his beam-ends, who was waging an unsuccessful war, were worth nothing. The tills of the merchant bankers were empty; outstanding loans could not be collected, and the shareholders of Florence and other cities (there were Roman prelates and Neapolitan families among them, as these companies had establishments almost everywhere and, like banks, received money on deposit, paying interest on it) finally demanded repayment of their money, thus driving the two companies into bankruptcy.

As to the sums owed to them by the King, Giovanni Villani

says that, after the first expedition against France, the amount due to the Bardis was 780.000 florins and that to the Peruzzis 585.000 florins: 1.365.000 florins « which was worth (the chronicler notes with bitterness) a realm ». In 1346, according to Villani's calculations, the figures were even higher — 900.000 florins the Bardis and 600.000 the Peruzzis. They tried to salvage as much as possible, awaited the computation of committees appointed for this purpose, and received bills and long instalment payments. The accounts became complicated because of the collections made by the Bardis, so complicated, in fact, that one fine day they found themselves in prison as debtors, from which they owed their release to the good offices of the King. In short, although they may have recovered something, they certainly did not recover what was due to them, and the fact remains that the real failure was that of the King of England. But this disastrous failure swept away the Bardis and the Peruzzis for having had too much confidence in the British Crown and having thereby lost their money. According to some calculations the loss would seem to have been equal to 60.000.000 pre-war lire.

An ingenuous descendant of the victims, Marquis Vincenzo Peruzzi, sent a « memorial » to the Government of Edward VII in 1907 to see whether he could get anything out of the muddled ac-

The Wool Exchange in Melbourne:
Selling to the Highest Bidder



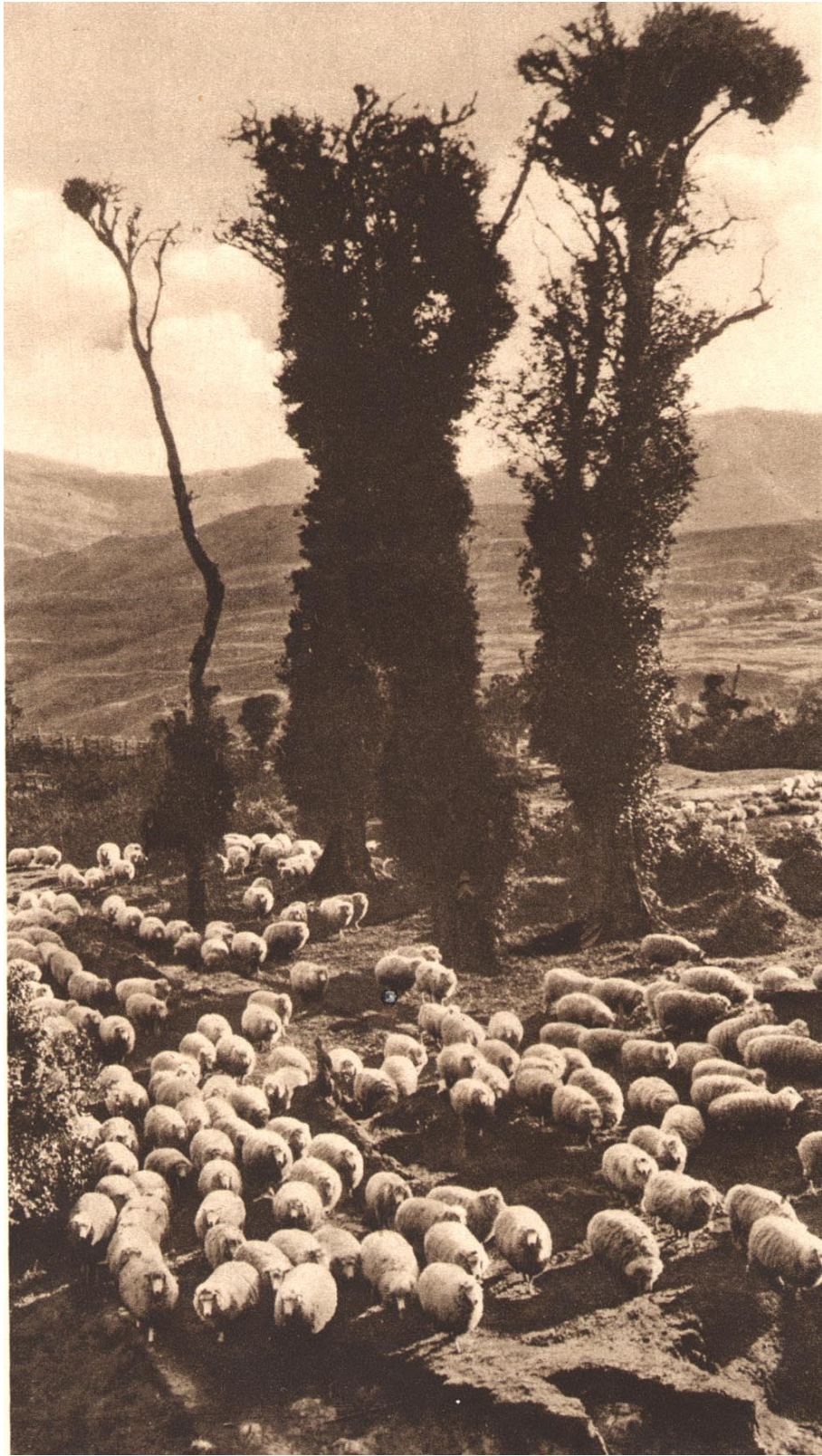
counts of Edward III; but it may be assumed that his efforts were unavailing.

The failure of the two big banks was a real disaster for Florence, a disaster which coincided with that of the famous plague described by Boccaccio. It accelerated the downfall of the Exchange Guild, which had 140 companies at the end of the thirteenth century and only 58 after the middle of the fourteenth.

A century or more later, however, the rolls of this guild were adorned with a name which is immortal in the history of Italy and in the rebirth of culture and the arts — the Medici, who were also the merchants and bankers of the world.

Calimala also declined as it was almost one with the Exchange Guild, but the Woollen Guild continued to prosper for the better part of the fifteenth century.

Then foreign competition made itself felt more intensely, the last to arrive and the most overbearing being the English; and the very development of the silk industry helped the woollen industry on its downward path. Political conditions also constituted a contributory factor. The political preponderance of foreign powers weighed increasingly on the country and the inertness of the ruling families hastened the decline of the industry. Another cause, also political in origin, was the detachment of the big families, the nobility, from trade and industry, which came to be considered degrading occupations. This in an Italy where once the finest names of the aristocracy and the upper classes were to be found on the rolls of the bigger guilds, or blossomed from them continuing or creating an aristocracy which drew glory and life from labour and lives in history and, in part, in contemporary life.





ITALY was great when work was honourable.

And she really was great when she wove fine cloths, finished those of foreigners, and carried the ones and the others over the mountains and the seas and caused gold to flow to her blossoming cities from across the mountains and seas.

The moral fibre of the Italian of the Middle Ages up to the *Rinascimento* was marvellous. This may be asserted without bombastic rhetoric, and for that matter historians throughout the world have acknowledged it. As a sailor he made the Mediterranean his own lake; as a producer he overcame with his genius and energy the handicap represented by the lack of raw materials; as a man of the municipality or party he fought in tussles and wars against his street neighbour, against the neighbouring town, against the king, and against the emperor. He reddened seas with his antagonistic passion, rushed to the assault of the Saracen walls, prayed to God with fervour, pitilessly pursued his vendettas, hated, loved and believed

with equal wealth of intimate vigour; and in a world full of abrupt changes, of surprises and snares, he moved at his ease, quickly, shrewdly, ubiquitously, familiar with the Arab as he was with the Englishman, at home in France, Flanders, Spain, courageous in spending in order to gain, able to raise money easily, attentive with his ear cocked to possibilities, already away and on the spot while the other man was still meditating; the fifth element of the earth, as a pope once said of the Florentines.

Florence was a model. The city born as a market on the Arno, at the foot of Etruscan Fiesole, carried with it the spirit of merchandising. It had no seaboard, was poor in raw materials, and did not enjoy a privileged position with respect to other states; it had only the genius of its inhabitants and the qualities which were then inherent in Florentine and Italian character, namely untiring energy and tenacious daring. They were ever ready to brawl and slay one another in the streets. They saw arrogant sovereigns and temporary tyrants in their city. They fought one another, Guelph against Ghibelline, « white » against « black », republican against Medicean, Medicean against the follower of Savonarola. But the looms beat, the women wove, and the shop windows were full of neatly folded cloths, while other cloths were loaded on horses and mules and men and beasts wove a close mesh of trade extending to the four corners of the earth.

Another model: Venice; with a longer history of dominion, less dramatic than that of Florence but on a broader and more solid basis, which resembled, in more modest proportions, the republican and imperial history of Rome and lasted practically the same number of centuries. A different model with a different expression: commerce prevailed over industry in this maritime city; but in the towns of the hinterland, Treviso — the first conquest — Padua, Vicenza, then Verona and Bergamo, the looms worked, the woollen industry was in high honour, and the loads of cloths reached the capital to be shipped. And from the Venetian ships was unloaded the wool



Flocks
in Australia

which these ships had gone to seek beyond the Pillars of Hercules along the shores of the Ocean.

Those ships! All the winds of the earth filled their sails, all languages were spoken on their decks, all the odours of the East impregnated their holds — cloves, pepper, cinnamon, musk, benzoin, saffron, incense, camphor, wines from the islands. All the wealth of the East navigated under the banner of the winged lion — ivory, pearls, precious stones, gold fabrics, gorgeous silks, wools dyed with the imperial purple, splendid carpets. From the East the navigators brought the marbles that make harmonies of colours, the fanciful style of the Cathedral of St. Mark, with the mosaics and the golden balls; a pyrotechnic poem lit by the sun. They brought away the horses from Byzantium where from aloft on their high pedestals they dominated the races and crowds at the hippodrome, and placed

them in front of the temple where they could calmly contemplate other crowds in which were mixed colours, languages, natures, histories of different peoples converging in the empire of these intrepid and sagacious sailors and merchants. And they took away a saint from Alexandria, the body of an evangelist, and to his place in Paradise they added a lordship on earth. St. Mark! The name thundered from the ships and the resounding echoes reached from the Black Sea to the Red Sea, from the Aegean Sea to the English Channel.

Another model: Milan, the sturdy medieval tree that later, broken and shorn of its branches by wars of foreign predominance waged against its very trunk, seemed mortally bereft of sap in the light-depriving shade of the Spain of Philip II, and, instead, revealed the tenacity and profundity of its roots, growing green again in the years of its Verris and Parinis, with its branches bearing the finest hopes of the Risorgimento. Milan, the artisan population into whom the pugnacious bishop St. Ambrose breathed energy and rectitude: the first looms were beating in the houses of the poor when the weavers dropped the shuttle to take up the lance to go with the flag car to Legnano; and the fine days of the industrial Spring were punctuated with the simple and even rhythm of weaving, when all Italy was a hive of workers and merchants, and cathedrals and palaces arose. The artisan people made the city magnificent. The loads of cloths climbed the Simplon and St. Gothard passes, descended along the rivers and roads to Venice, sought Genoa as the other loading port, and seemed to disgorge in a perennial wave from the gates of the city — with their watchmen and their scales — each load destined for a determinate traffic route. Foreigners, mostly Germans, numerous even then, came and settled in Milan, to work and to trade. Milan, at the foot of the insuperable Alps, in the centre of northern Italy was, as it is now, Europe in Italy, Italy in Europe.

But when the wollen industry flourished within the crown of the Alps and between the three seas, the cities of Italy seething with energy, laborious and daring in trade, were numerous, each with its

own peculiar character. The foreigner who visits Italy admires even today this incomparable variety of aspects and, it might be said, of meanings, that the towns and cities of Italy present. Many places which are now classified as « provincial towns » had a history, an intense life, a resounding name, when trade and industry had created in Italy an extraordinarily propitious climate and signs of prosperity and exuberance abounded.

The men from Bologna navigated the river Po, opened markets and fairs of renown, bought and finished cloths from beyond the Alps like the merchants of Calimala, wove and exported, carried on banking, spread their sensual and spirited vernacular among the six fairs of Champagne almost uninterruptedly from one end of the year to the other, served as intermediaries between the northern prelates and Rome in monetary affairs, dealt with the merchants and, for the account of their celebrated Studio, with the scholars of Europe. Piacenza and Parma were also noted for certain particular types of cloth. Cremona had a flourishing woollen guild. Bergamo and its valleys rivalled with the major centres of production. Verona drew fat profits from its woollen industry and from the fact that it was situated along one of the main routes to Germany — the Brenner. Asti and the minor towns of Piedmont were full of enterprising men who ensured for themselves the right of way over the Alps in order to take part in the big fairs of France. The Tuscan cities did not remain inert, notwithstanding the overbearing might of Florence: Pisa, even when its maritime glories were eclipsed; Lucca, already awake with the dawn of the new times, inhabited by a population that knew how to march and seek, that worked and persevered, that dealt in wool and, with better fortune, in silk; Siena, industrious and financial, worthy of preparing for the Rinascimento Agostino Chigi, the friend and patron of Raphael and other artists, « who naturally loved all the men of worth » — said Vasari —, and who was a banker deserving of the title « magnificent », like Lorenzo dei Medici.

To name all would require a long tedious list, and a volume

would be necessary to revivify with details the industrial events of each town, down to Sicily with its emporia where the goods of three continents met, the fine wools from Garb and the rough ones of the island, the textiles of the Levant and from the north; and half-way, in a hollow of the mountains of Abruzzo, Aquila, the seat of more than one Florentine company, among which that of the Bardis, used to hearing Tuscan spoken by the merchants and moved by the Tuscan accent of the Sienese flame San Bernardino, who preached, died and rests there in a fine tomb of the Rinascimento.

Aquila was easily able to furnish itself with wool from the numerous flocks that came from Puglia to pass the summer on the neighbouring plateaux, and its woollen corporation was known as « the magnificent woollen guild »; which, like its Florentine sister, erected its cathedral, built at the edge of the city the beautiful church that bears the name of Collemaggio. Along the grassy roads of Abruzzo named « tratturi » rambled the ovine multitudes, upward with the approach of summer and downward with the chills of autumn; and in the city could be heard the beating of the fulling mills and the looms; and working assiduously alongside the natives

Flocks
in the Argentine





Machine Shearing
in Australia

of Aquila in the industry were Florentines and Milanese, reinforced by Venetians, Mantuans and Veronese. The forebears of San Filippo Neri lived there in the fourteenth century and the historian Bernardo Segni died there in the seventeenth century, all enrolled in the Exchange Guild and the Woollen Guild.

A sizable list could be made of all the great men who were engaged in the woollen industry or those from the houses of these workers and merchants who rose to glory. Giovanni Villani, the greatest chronicler of the fourteenth century and one who spoke of the woollen and banking industries of Florence with the most tender pride and the greatest wealth of detail, worked with the Florentine companies and lived in Flanders and France. To the Bardis' company belonged Boccaccio of Chellino, who during his residence in Paris, had by a Frenchwoman a son, the famous Giovanni, whom he tried to induce him to enter the business. He actually compelled him to follow a commercial career for a time, until the son tired of it, distracted by his passion for letters and seduced by the luxurious and gay life of Naples. Bernardone of Assisi, the father of St. Francis, was a cloth merchant and christened his son Francesco in memory of the time lived in France. He also tried, unavailingly, to get his son

to continue the business. Weaving was the trade followed by the father of the talented architect and painter Baldassare Peruzzi, who left the canvas of the loom for canvases of another kind; and on the rolls of the Woollen Guild of Florence was the name of Francesco Ferruccio, the valiant defender of republican Florence, whose defeat and manner of death add honour to his memory. And in a humble abode in Genoa there was a man busy at the loom and at his side a lad whose fervid imagination wandered far away to mysterious lands and crossed unknown oceans, weaving mysterious adventures: that son of a weaver, that boy who was brought up in the woollen business was called Christopher Columbus...

The history of the woollen industry in its golden age, which perhaps more than any other activity expressed the ingenuity of aptitude, the sagacity of adaptation, the energy of work, the will to win, of all classes of Italians, is like a coat-of-arms of pure nobility which should be raised with devote hands and held aloft here, where an Italian woollen industry is spoken of: as a certainty that what once was, may be again, as encouragement to new daring, with the hope of new victories.

Wool Exhibition
in Australia



ITALY of today has seen her corporations once more. The verb must not be taken too literally, however, for the difference between the old and the present corporations is considerable. The corporations of today are divided between employers and employees, each with its own representation and with equal authority, and with the Government and the Labour Courts over them, the former subordinating the interest of the classes to the higher interest of the Nation, and the latter deciding disputes and setting the law in the place of harsh antagonisms and harmful strikes.

The corporations of the fourteenth century — to mention a century in which their existence played a major part in history — were generally in the hands of the masters, the workmen and clerks belonging to them more to submit to their severe discipline than to enjoy rights.

This state of hard subordination was the dominant motive of conflicts, especially of the clashes in Florence and Flanders which cause a distant century to be still an object of study for the social question — an interesting anticipation of the struggle between capital and labour going on in our time. Flanders saw wars fought by weavers with leaders whose vicissitudes have a notable place in the history of the Low Countries; the struggle in Florence has about one hundred years framed, so to speak, between the figures of Giano della Bella, of the Guild of Calimala, and Michele di Lando, comber, of the Woollen Guild.

Giano della Bella with his « ordinances of justice » gave the government of the city to the guilds in an attempt to undermine once for all the arrogance and riotous intractability of the big men of the city and of that part of the bourgeoisie who, inebriated with riches derived from trade and industry, loved to mix with their betters. Merchants' sons wanted to be «knights», then a title of nobility: the sarcastic Florentines gave the nickname of « knight of the distaff » to one young man whose family, the Della Tosas, had grown rich through spinning. The Ordinances provided that no one could hold public office in the city unless he was enrolled in one of the guilds: a wise principle, at least in theory, since it made work a fundamental of civic dignity.

But Giano della Bella, who displeased both the aristocracy and the common people, who only raise up idols to throw them down, had to leave Florence and died in exile in Paris. Michele di Lando,



Transport of Wool
in Australia

who, about a century afterward, headed a rising of the « small people », workers of the lowest order who were known as « ciompi », and managed to get first his own following and then the best among the rank and file of the guilds into the civic administration, received confinement in Chioggia as his reward and also died in exile.

Between these two extremes the city suffered the short-lived tyranny of Gualtiero di Brienne, Duke of Athens, who, following the practice of his likes, cajoled the common people in order to gain support against the intolerance of the upper classes, allowed the carders to form a union with their own emblem in which was depicted an angel, accorded benevolent consideration to the recriminations of the dyers and soapmakers and permitted the dyers to start a guild for themselves; all which concessions did not prevent him from being chased away ignominiously, and consequently lasted no time to speak of, as the masters gradually suppressed them, although at the same time realising the necessity of better treatment for the workers, just as they made short shrift of the advantages gained by the guild workers and the « small people » during the bloody carnival of the domination of the « ciompi ».

The treatment they received was undoubtedly such as to justify, at least in part, the discontent and social unrest that arose from it.

The dyers alone, who were the cream of the working classes, because the chief merit of the cloths from beyond the Alps finished in Florence was their dye, had a scale of remuneration fixed year by year by the consuls of the Guild. The other workers, « carders, combers, driers, stretchers, folders, darners, fullers » and so on, were at the mercy of the masters, who fixed the prices as low as possible.

It must be considered that importation of wool or raw cloth from distant countries was, as has been mentioned, a serious handicap to Italian woollen manufacturers vis-à-vis foreign competition on ac-



Wagons of Wool
on the Australian
Plains

count of the high cost of transport, which was aggravated by the large number of successive tolls when the bales were forwarded overland and by the dangers of the roads as often as not unsafe. A setoff had therefore to be found in the low cost of labour. The members of the woollen Guild went too far, however. They not only paid little, but that little they paid slowly and badly, i. e. in kind. When the worker had delivered his work the master gave him cloth, on which he made a profit, and the worker naturally sold the cloth at a lower price because he had urgent need of money.

Or he was paid in money, but had to wait; and sometimes he had to wait a long time and be content with receiving something on account every now and then. There was some sort of justification for this where the minor woollen manufacturers were concerned. They did not have much capital and sold on credit — three, six and eight months — and they had to collect what was owing to them before they could pay the workmen, not giving much thought to the fact that the workers were not in a position to wait. And even in this they went too far. Big and small manufacturers thought as all profit strikers have thought in all times, namely that there is always time to pay. In the meantime, the Guild discipline stipulated that he who worked for Calimala could not work for others, could not refuse work given to him by a member of the Guild, could not take more wool than that assigned to him for weaving a piece and so begin another

(obligation was thus hitched on to obligation), could not dye by candlelight because of the risk of poor work, nor could he work after the bells had sounded in order not to disturb the citizens' rest, among other things.

The weaver had only his loom, which the master could seize if he had suffered loss on account of bad work. Wretchedly poor, he had often need of advances in order to eat, and from one advance to another ended in becoming a kind of serf, bound for life under the absolute power of his creditor master. Or it may be that he did not even own a loom, in which case the master would rent him one, and out of his work he had to find the cost of hiring the loom and of living. It wanted a big stroke of luck for a worker to become a master, which, moreover, was as a rule prohibited by the by-laws of the Guild.

Those who worked in the « mills » of those days, that is in the places where they washed, beat and carded the wool, and felted, stretched and dried the cloth, had to begin work punctually on the sound of the bells and work in earnest, for there were the foremen. Michele di Lando, the hero of the rising of the Ciompis, was a foreman carder in the factory of one of the Albizzis after having been a comber. And the remuneration was a mere pittance.

Spinning was generally done in the houses by women who took away the wool from the masters on market day, because many of them came from the surrounding country, and had to deliver it woven on a certain day, taking care that the weight corresponded and that the work had been done perfectly. Porters with carts delivered the wool to spinners living at a distance and called on them to take away the wool when woven. And as these poor people had nothing to lose, the Woollen Guild had the Church order the priests to warn them from the altar to work well, under penalty of, first,