CHAPTER IX.

Borough Monopolies—Labour and Capital—De Lostock—Campeden—Sports—Fairs—Chapmen—Tradesmen—Spinning—Wigan College—Church—Charters Ratified.

AT this period of its existence the borough entered on a career of prospective prosperity, for almost all the national trades were represented within the the walls. Every trade begets another, and the prospering weavers of Wigan provided an abundance of work for bleachers and dyers. Its manufactured goods were to be found in all the home-markets, and were frequently exported to foreign countries. But the laws of political economy were unstudied because unknown. The inhabitants gloried in their monopolies, and the importance with which they surrounded them. The secret of a nation's wealth was supposed to consist in keeping as much money as possible within the kingdom, and in prohibiting foreign competition. The Wigan burgesses reasoned after the same manner, and never doubted the soundness of their logic. With them money was the measure, not the representative, of wealth. The Guilds looked after the interests and monopolies of the town, and individuals considered their own special trades as personal properties on which no one had a right to encroach or trespass, and the inhabitants or consumers never deemed that competition is not only the life of trade, but the very origin of cheapness. It was believed by all that special privileges to towns and individuals were the source of general prosperity, consequently monopolies which were fashionable in Wigan kept prosperity comparatively stagnant instead of progressive. Every dealer was compelled, both by local and national laws, to restrict his sales to one kind of merchandise, in order that guilds, fraternities, and tradesmen might be protected. Every tradesman had to declare what his special merchandise was, and to that he was restricted as closely as if he had received a special licence for that alone. Prices were regulated by law, and specified places and times for buying and selling adhered to. The great mistake was made of attempting to regulate domestic matters by Act of Parliament. Parliament foolishly and vainly attempted even to dictate what quantity and quality of dress should be worn. Servants were forbidden to wear cloth of a greater value than two marks (£1 6s. 8d.) for the entire dress, and

workmen's dresses were not allowed to exceed twelve-pence a yard. Many of the trades now practised only by men were then the daily labours of the women of the borough. This arose from the fact that every man was compelled to be ever ready for war, and the women, in the absence of the men, had habituated themselves to these necessary labours. They were the brewers, bakers, carders, spinners, and tailors of the day. Labour was plentiful in Wigan, and it had fewer slaves than many of the large towns. Moreover, it was one of the few English boroughs from which workmen could remove, in search of work, at their pleasure. As a consequence of these special privileges, the first great struggle of labour against capital, which had its climax in 1350, caused less agitation in Wigan than might otherwise have been expected. With the advancement of civilisation slaves had struggled for freedom, and craftsmen combined for extended liberties. Unions became common, but, happily, strikes did not exist until the Black Death itself seemed to favour the unionist projects. By it the labour class had been decimated, and the abundance of labour and scarcity of labourers gave the working classes courage to be determined in driving hard bargains with the capitalists, who considered the labour revolution the death-blow to their prosperity. To liberate slaves of all ages suddenly is very questionable wisdom. Many of those set free at this time had been bondmen for a lifetime, and the peasantry of England lost the golden opportunities of 1350 because they were uneducated and unaccustomed to such brightened prospects. Where they had been accustomed humbly to obey they then insolently demanded; because there was pressing need for their services, they made exhorbitant charges for them, and those awoke the active sympathies of Parliament in favour of capitalists. As it was in rural districts, so it was in the towns, where workmen had combined, and strikes were frequent; men were reduced through their own hasty overbearance by Act of Parliament to a more servile condition than before. It was enacted that:—

"Every man or woman, of whatsoever condition, free or bond, able in body, and within the age of three score years, and not having of his own whereof he may live, nor land of his own about the tillage of which he may occupy himself, and not seeing any other, shall be bound to serve the employer who shall require him to do so, and shall take only the wages which were accustomed to be taken in the neighbourhood where he is bound to serve."

Harder conditions still were made with workmen, so that they were reduced to great poverty. Piers Ploughman describes the condition of a farmer at this time thus:—

"I have no penny pullets for to buy, nor neither geese nor pigs, but two green cheeses, a few curds and cream, and an oaten cake, and two loaves of beans and bran baken for my children. I have no salt bacon nor no cooked meat collops for to make, but I have parsley and leeks and many cabbage plants, and eke a cow and a calf, and a cart mare to draw a-field my dung while the drought lasteth, and by this livelihood we must all live till Lammastide, and by that time I hope to have harvest in my croft."

The Rectors De Langeton and De Lostock both resigned their livings in Wigan, but for what reason it is not known. The former only retained the office for a few months, and the latter for two years. When De Langeton resigned, the patron of the living, Robert Langeton, presented De Lostock who was instituted on September 4th, 1359, and when he resigned, the patron, Ralph Langeton, was a minor, and thus his father, Robert, must have died during the short period in which his relative held the rectorship. John, Earl of Lancaster, the guardian of Ralph, appointed Walter de Campeden, who was instituted January 4th, 1361. He was rector for nine years, during which time, on August 24th, 1366, he obtained a licence from his bishop to absent himself from his Church of Wigan "as long as he pleased."—(Not. Cest. Lib. V., fol. 19-6). This unlimited leave of absence was probably granted because of ill-health, as he died within four years of receiving it; moreover, it seems to be a proof of the bishop's great confidence in the rector's fidelity. No further particulars of him are known. At the time of his death the patron, Ralph, had attained his majority, and he appointed his relative, James de Langeton, who was instituted August 24th, 1370. When he had held the living for three years he applied for and obtained licence of non-residence for one year from his bishop.—(Not. Cest. Lib. V., fol. 28 b.) This long vacation seems to have been more for pleasure than for the benefit of his health, as the bishop certainly had scruples as to the propriety or right of allowing an extension of the privilege. The first application was made in August, 1373, and on the 11th September, 1374, he requested to be granted one year more. The bishop granted his second request, but duly fined him five marks (£3 6s. 8d.) for the concession.—(Not. Cest. Lib. V., fol. 30a.) Whether he resigned or held his office is unknown. Nothing more has been ascertained about him, except that he was alive in 1400.

The sports of the people were imperative, and it is questionable whether the natural love of field sports in Englishmen did not really originate with the compulsory sports of the middle ages. Cannon of a rude sort had been used in the late French wars, and if the introduction of such instruments of death caused a panic amongst military authorities, the only effect produced was an increased faith in the skilful use of the bow and arrow. The laws for practising archery, in order to ensure accuracy of aim, were made more stringent and severe. All the manly sports enacted by law were constantly practised on the school common in Wigan. Sunday afternoon was the time when practising was chiefly enforced. That afternoon, when the weather permitted, was always like a fair-day on the common. Games, sports, and compulsory athletics invariably gave place, in the twilight, to the more blithesome and welcome science and art of flirtation, which was by no means unknown to our revered ancestors. During the comparative peace before 1363 the

practice of archery had given place on the school common to throwing of stones—or putting the stone—wood and iron, handball, football, and stickplay, and to the fighting of dogs and cocks to such an extent that it had to be put down by proclamation, and give place, on every feast day, to the practice of archery by using bows and arrows, or cross-bows and belts, under the penalty of imprisonment.—(Rymer, vol. III., page 704-770). Besides these sports on the school common there were leaping, jumping, running, and, no doubt, bull-baiting and bear-baiting. The archers of the neighbourhood were famed in war and sport; knights, gentlemen, and yeomen of Wigan were distinguished for their hospitality. The dress of the ladies was simple and graceful—a loose gown, girdled round the waist, and surmounted by a veil hanging from over the head. Marriageable but unmarried ladies were distinguished by an additional robe over their gowns.

The great times of peaceful excitements at this period were the fairs held twice a year on the site of the present Market Place and sloping fields, on which the new Market Hall now stands. These fairs were on a very large scale, and were regulated by special laws. Tents were erected in rows, and the different articles for sale were displayed in appointed places, and the town and fair were entirely passed over to the rector for the time, the keys of the gates being ceremoniously handed over to him the night before by the mayor and burgesses, just as the keys of London were customarily handed to royalty in passing Temple Bar. The rector posted his toll-keepers at every gate where merchants had to pay the required rate. Old inhabitants may remember when this lingering custom was enforced at the toll near the London and North-Western Railway bridge. To these fairs merchants came from all parts of the country, like the travelling cheap-Jacks of the present day. Everything was brought that was likely to bring a price, whether for ornament or use. Showmen, too, formed a prominent part of the travelling town. The merchants in the town had to shut their shops and sell in the fair; if they did not, their goods otherwise offered for sale were forfeited to the lord of the manor. Often goods were brought to those fairs that local tradesmen had not in stock. Foreign merchants brought and sold the goods of other districts at great profit to themselves, and bought up local produce at the lowest price, in order to sell at other fairs, so that often there was a good exchange made, although more money was frequently taken out of the town than was left in it. In still later times cheap-Jacks, with Sheffield cutlery and Brummagem wares were there; cloth merchants, from Leeds and other towns, sold narrow for broad cloth, and unshrunken, for shrunken, goods; cheese from Cheshire, cakes from Eccles, and home-made gingerbread and home-brewed ale were to be had in many a booth. Lads treated their lasses to a pennyworth of sweets at the stalls. Singers, with stentorian voices, screamed their ballads to popular airs; reciters gesticulated at the rate of a

penny a stanza; sleight-of-hand men were gazed at with open mouth; there were shows with genial clowns that made the peasants laugh until their sides were sore. Trade, fun, frolic, and pickpockets all flourished at the fair.

These were the harvest-times for quacks. There are people at this day who idiotically believe that if they, their sons, or friends, become pupils of a famous school, they must necessarily become famous, as if teachers were brain manufacturers, instead of brain trainers, as they really are. So the appearance of the quacks' display of anatomical subjects and verbose oratory was a certain proof to the gullible crowds that they could cure all diseases incidental to humanity. Pills of common bread and phials of coloured water were sold by "philanthropists" at fabulous prices, and miracles performed on the spot on unknown accomplices to the wonderment of gaping gulled ones who immediately purchased the invaluable drugs, often with their last penny, to have them ready in no improbable emergency. Prevention was better than cure, and the possession of these quasi-drugs acted like a charm on the possessors as long as they were in good health.

Although the following is but a nursery rhyme, very like a parody in "Froggy would a wooing go," there is no doubt that much love-making went on in the market towns at fair times.

Little John Jiggy Jag,
He rode a penny nag,
And went to Wigan to wo-oo-oo.
When he came to a beck
He fell and broke his neck:
Johnny, now, how dost thou do-oo-oo?

I made him a hat
Out of my coat-lap,
With stockings of pearly blue-ue-ue,
A hat and a feather,
To keep out the cold weather:
So Johnny, dear, how dost thou do-oo-oo?

A volume could not contain a full description of all the quaint customs and manners of ancient Wigan. It may be interesting to hear all about the old local punishments, but no pleasure is more entertaining to old and young than the rehearsal of wedding customs, nuptial tales, love gossip, or the descriptive accounts of drinking bouts. Wigan was a comparatively small place at this period; everybody knew everything about everybody. The inhabitants formed a sort of clan, and, although there were the inevitable internal disagreements, yet genuine brotherhood and real goodwill to all, as is generally the case in small communities, prevailed. Although marriages were common, each one was an event to be chronicled. Great interest was taken in the nuptials of the humblest couple in the town. When courtship begot

engagement and brought about the climax of matrimony, every inhabitant acted as if claiming some sympathetic connection with the ceremony. Marriage was the chief hope of the young, and the most marked event in the memory of the old, and even old maids, of nameless age, never entirely divorced their hopes from it. As the day of any local marriage approached etiquette and blank formality, the productions of higher civilisation, were discarded. The marriage of young couples was always treated as a laudable action and most commendable example, and the fact was not overlooked that the "settling down" in life of two poor persons was an expensive proceeding, especially in those days when money was scarce. The sympathy of the inhabitants took a practical form, without causing the assistance to look like a charity, and so avoiding offence to the proud young settlers, many of whom were poor on the morning of their marriage, and comparatively rich before the fashions of the day had passed away. The whole borough turned out to see the ceremony performed at the church door. After the couple came from the altar, where they received the holy sacrament immediately after the ceremony proper, the churchyard became a public playground. The bride and bridegroom did not hasten away from the hilarious throng to enjoy their honeymoon, but remained to be the centre of joy and to reap the harvest which the custom of the times presented to them. It was a day of hearty and pleasant labour and cheer for the proud pair, to whom presents were rarely formally presented. Music, dancing, and singing filled up the evening, and those amusements required the accompaniment of refreshments. A booth was especially erected in the churchyard, in which the bride presided and sold "bride-ale" at an exhorbitant price to all consumers. The profits, which were sometimes great, were the bride's perquisites. Men and women considered it a pleasant duty to drink the health of the young couple. One good drink required another, and thus while heads grew light and hearts were merry the bride was reaping profits that were often sufficient to furnish her house. A drink of "bride-ale" was considered as lucky as a rub of the bridegroom's shoulder. Thus, moreover, the poorest man's marriage was made memorable. As rice was not then imported into the country, wheat was thrown at the couple on their return from church. The bride-cake, too, was an important item. It was sometimes broken in pieces over the bride's head, and then the pieces were distributed amongst the people, who each treasured the little bit and slept with it under the pillow, in the belief that in a dream the future partner would auspiciously appear. Sometimes, as a post-prandial ceremony, the newly-wed pair kissed each other publicly over the cake before it was broken, after which the cake was cut into small pieces, and each piece, before it was given away, passed superstitiously through the wedding-ring. After writing became more common, invitations to marriages were issued in the names of the about-to-be happy pair, and had generally an expressive postscript to the effect

that they "would be thankful for all favours conferred on them that day."

Many of the wealthy burgesses of Wigan were chapmen. All market-towns were the home-residence of such tradesmen. They are not distinguished anywhere in the recorded history of the town, but they were, nevertheless, a well-known and important class of inhabitants. They are frequently found as parties to, or witnesses of, deeds, wills, and indentures of no real interest to the reader. It is indeed chiefly from such documents that the staple trades of the town have been ascertained, and only people of social or monetary influence are directly connected with such concerns. These chapmen, or local travelling tradesmen, are to this day represented in Wigan by a worthy class of "Scotch drapers." Their articles of merchandise were only limited to the class of goods for which there was a demand. That is, they were prepared to supply the demands of every purchaser. They were the hawkers of the middle ages, and travelled to all country houses and villages with pack-horses, and, knowing exactly what the wants of the people were, never over-burdened their nags with useless wares, but provided themselves with the proper stocks at the Wigan Fair, in which they were well known as good, though hard, customers. Local chapmen purchased wholesale from the more princely chapmen who attended fairs only, and retailed their goods by a house-to-house visitation. Special clauses were inserted in the charters for the benefit of the wholesale or foreign merchants. Those retail hawkers were always welcome, chiefly because they were the vehicles of news and gossip. Their mercantile intelligence generally brought them comfortable pecuniary rewards, and their education was generally far above the average, for their signatures to documents are not attested by "their mark," but in their own handwriting.

Local trade was still in a prosperous state, but the commercial, rapid progress of the middle ages can scarcely be appreciated, or even recognised as progress, by those who take the advancements of the latter half of the nineteenth century as their standard of measurement. Progress in the present day is made with giant strides, but then it was as slow and imperceptible, although as sure, as vegetable growth. Tradesmen were considered to be doing well when their ample expenditure was less than their income. The weavers and leather merchants of Wigan, as well as the dyers, bleachers, and other tradesmen, were slowly and distinctly, yet most laudably, separating themselves from the lower classes in the town, or even from the social sphere of their own ancestors, by their superior tastes and aspirations after greater home comforts, as evidenced by their erection of superior houses, which were recorded by historians of two reigns afterwards as having been remarkable for being substantially built of wood or stone. Wigan, Lancaster, and Preston were particularly mentioned as being commendable for their good and comfortable houses, in which were the luxuries of glass windows, but rather draughty doors. Wigan

yeomen were considered to be well off with a living of five pounds a year, and a gentleman had quite an independent competency when possessed of an income of ten or twenty pounds, whilst a knight with one hundred and fifty pounds was little inferior to royalty itself.

Every great invention produces a new trade to supply its own demands or expands those already in existence. The introduction of weaving added to the websters of the town other tradesmen whose services were required to perfect the commodity for the market. The linen and cotton goods had to be bleached, and many of the neighbouring meadows were used for this purpose. Master dyers and calico printers were rich and influential burgesses. The numerous cattle reared in the neighbourhood were remarkable for the fine quality of their horns, and their skins made excellent leather; consequently horners, tanners, and leather merchants were numbered with the prosperous tradesmen. All these were employers of labour and occupiers of superior houses. The population could not have been far below 3,000, for even after the ensuing wars and civil disturbances, when the town deteriorated and many excellent houses fell into decay, it was still about 3,000.

In Sir Richard Steele's *Spinster* (1719) the new innovation was called by industrious spinsters "the tawdry, pie-spotted, flabby, ragged, low-priced thing called calico: a foreigner by birth: made the Lord knows where by a parcel of heathens and pagans that worship the devil and work for a halfpenny a day." The rock or distaff was sometimes put to a bad use.

"I bought my wife a stone of lint,
As good as e'er did grow:
And all that she has made of it
Is one poor pound of tow.
Quoth I: 'For shame, thou idle dame!
Go spin your top of tow.'
She took the rock, and with a knock
She broke it o'er my pow."

Even in the 19th century it is said that a salmon was caught in the Douglas. It was once an excellent trout and salmon river, from which the inhabitants derived the greater part of their fish supply; but it was enacted in 1389 that the rivers "in the county of Lancaster be put in defence, as to the taking of salmons, from Michaelmas Day to the Purification of Our Lady (2nd February), and in no other time of the year, because that salmons be not seasonable in the said waters in the time aforesaid, and in the parts where such rivers be there shall be assigned and sworn good and sufficient servators of this statute."

Nothing of the nature of a school in Wigan is known to have existed at this time, but the College of Wigan, mentioned long afterwards by Kuerdon, may not

improbably have entered into existence. There was the Collegiate School at Upholland, but whether Wigan derived any direct scholastic benefit from it is not known. The parish of Wigan, in common with other parishes, was ordered to pay, in 1371, 22s. 3d. as a subsidy to the King; but it was discovered that the parishes had been represented as five times greater in number than they really were, consequently the amount produced was far too small, and the tax on every parish was, therefore, raised to 116s., and that amount paid. The rector of the parish then was James de Langeton, who had been presented to the living by Ralph de Langeton, the patron in 1370.

In the second year of King Richard II. (1378) the previous charters were ratified and confirmed to James de Langeton, the parson of Wigan. The same liberties and powers were allowed to him and the burgesses whose predecessors and ancestors had reasonably used and enjoyed the liberties and quittances aforesaid "from the time of making the letters and charters aforesaid." The following is a copy of the original Latin, with the English translation:—

2do. RICHARDI II.

"Richardus Dei gratia Rex Angliæ et Franciæ et Dominus Hiberniæ Omnibus ad quos præsentes Literæ pervenerint Salutem: Inspeximus Cartam Confirmationis Domini Edwardi nuper Regis Angliæ avi nostri in hæc Verba: *(reciting preceding charter.)* Nos autem Concessiones et Confirmationes prædictas ratas habentes et gratas eas pro nobis et Hæredibus nostris quantum in nobis est dilecto nostro Jacobo de Langton nunc Parsonæ dictæ Ecclesiæ de Wygan et Successoribus suis Parsonis ejusdem Ecclesiæ ac præfatis Burgensibus et Successoribus suis *concedimus et confirmamus* sicut Carta prædicta rationabiliter testatur et prout prædictus Jacobus et Prædecessores sui Parsonæ Ecclesiæ prædictæ ac Burgenses prædicti et eorum Antecessores Libertatibus et Quietantiis prædictis a tempore Confectionis Cartæ prædictæ huc usque usi sunt rationabiliter et gavisi—In cujus Rei testimonium has literas nostras fieri fecimus patentes—Teste me ipso apud Gloucestriam secundo die Novembris Anno Regni nostri secundo."

2ND RICHARD II.

"Richard, by the grace of God King of England and France and Lord of Ireland. To all to whom the present Letters shall come. We have inspected the Charter of Confirmation of the Lord Edward, late King of England, our grandfather, in these words:—*(reciting preceding charter.)* And we, esteeming the grants and confirmations aforesaid authentic and agreeable, do grant and confirm them for us and our heirs as much as in us is unto our beloved James de Langeton, now the parson of the said church of Wygan, and his successors, parsons of the same church, and the aforesaid burgesses and their successors like as the charter aforesaid reasonably testifies, and as the aforesaid James and his predecessors, parsons of the church aforesaid, and the burgesses aforesaid and their antecessors have hitherto reasonably used and enjoyed the liberties and quittances aforesaid from the time of making the charter aforesaid: In testimony of which thing we have caused these our letters to be made patent. Witness myself at Gloucester, the 2nd day of November, in the second year of our reign."