

ART. VII.—*A foot-note on the Flemish tradition at Kendal.*

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THE tradition of a settlement of Flemings at Kendal is so firmly established, and has been accepted with so complete an assurance even by painstaking writers on local history that it may be worth while to examine the origin of the belief, and to point out how slender is the actual evidence on which the story rests.

The legend does not appear to be of long standing, and therefore it cannot claim the respect which, with reservations, we may accord to genuine tradition. It does not appear to be traced further than the unsupported statement in *Nicolson and Burn* that "So early as the 11th of King Edward the third, the King's agents having solicited a great many men from the Low Countries, well skilled in cloth-making, sent a colony of them (amongst other places) to Kendal."

Subsequent writers have enlarged on this and have given us the definite statement that it was a certain John Kemp who came with his workmen from Flanders to Kendal to set up his looms. This statement has even been incorporated in the great Oxford dictionary under the word *Kendal*. Now John Kemp is an authentic personage, well known to historians, although very little can be discovered regarding him. So far as Kendal is concerned, probably our local writers have been led astray by the very positive statements of the second edition of Cornelius Nicholson's *Annals of Kendal*, which has been freely drawn upon by later writers.

It is worth noting that the second edition of this useful work omits the passage which in the first edition of 1832

lets out that these definite assertions are based "on the testimony of Encyclopaedia Londinensis," and not on any ancient sources or local tradition.

It is, therefore, scarcely worth while to spend time in considering Kendal's claim to John Kemp, since no valid evidence has ever been put forward in support of it, and so far as any evidence regarding Kemp is available, it is against the theory. The Letters of Protection issued to Kemp in 1331 give no clue to his domicile in England, and no other evidence can be discovered unless we assume that he is to be identified with the John Kemp, merchant of Ghent, who was declared in 1341 quit of all tolls payable by aliens (*Close Rolls*, 1341), and the John Kempe of Norwich, attorney of the merchants of Almain in 1347 (*ibid.*, 1347). If, as seems not unlikely, these are references to the same man, it is clear that Kemp settled in the rich and important city of Norwich, a staple town of the wool trade.

Apart from John Kemp himself, there remains the question whether or not at this or any subsequent time Flemish weavers settled in Kendal. On this point it is impossible to be dogmatic, but it may certainly be said that no direct evidence of a Flemish settlement has been adduced, and that as it is not one of the districts which had a close connexion with Flanders, such as East Anglia or the coast towns of Kent, the absence of evidence goes a long way to negative a fairly recent tradition.

There were two classes of Flemish immigrants in mediaeval times; those who were brought over under Royal patronage and those who, flying from civil disturbance, were forced to leave their country and arrived in a destitute condition. These destitute aliens naturally concentrated in counties nearest the east coast, and we should hardly look for them as far afield as Westmorland. Those who were invited hither by the Government settled in what were then the wool-growing and manu-

facturing districts, it being the policy of the Crown to prohibit the export of wool to Flanders, and to promote manufactures in this country by attracting an industrial population.

So far from being of such a quality as would attract skilled craftsmen, the wool grown on the Westmorland fells was of an inferior quality and unsuited for the finer sorts of cloth, although it was well adapted for certain coarse makes. In fact, the Statute of 1389, which all our local chroniclers cite as containing the earliest reference to Kendal cloth as a distinct make, recites that "a great part is made of the worst wool within the realm, that cannot well serve for other cloth," and the inferiority of Westmorland wool is borne out by the market price, the lowest in England, as assessed for the royal "aid" in 1337 and at later periods (*Close Roll* 1337).

The Statute of 1389 is one to exempt these coarse cloths from the measuring and sealing of the aulnager, for reasons which are not very obvious, but probably connected with its being a cheap and inferior kind of cloth.*

In support of the supposition that the trade had been introduced by Flemings, it has been pointed out that the "cloths made in divers counties" called "cogware and Kendal cloth" are described as being made of a length of three-quarters of a yard, which is the equivalent of the Flemish ell of 27 inches. There may be some grounds for regarding this as evidence of a Flemish origin of the species of manufacture (Cunningham, *op. cit.*, i, 435). On the other hand, these cloths were sold to "cogmen out of the realm," and may have been made of a length required for

Possibly on account of the difficulty of conforming to a strict measure in the case of this manufacture (v. Cunningham, *English Industry and Commerce* i, 322), or even from an absence of temptation to illegal stretching.

Ashley (*Economic History* ii, 193) suggests that it was considered advisable to exempt cloth made for sale to the poorer classes. But according to the Statute these cloths were for export.

foreign markets accustomed to trade with the cities of Flanders.

Moreover, it is clear that cloth of this kind was made in different parts of the country, and that the term "Kendal" had by this time become a trade name for a kind of cloth wherever it was made,* so that this evidence, unsupported by other indications of the presence of Flemings at Kendal, is obviously of little value.

At this point we shall no doubt be reminded of the so-called Flemish aisle in the church. Here again, in spite of definite and circumstantial statements in a recently issued guide, we have a tradition which appears to be of quite recent growth and to have assumed concrete form out of the cautious suggestion of a possibility.

Finally we have the presence of the surname *Fleming* in the neighbourhood. The name is undoubtedly not uncommon, but it is questionable whether those bearing it are so numerous as not to be accounted for by the descendants of the well-known family of Rydal. We know that the descendants of younger sons soon sank into obscurity, and that even the "great squire" called cousins with humble folk.

It is recorded that one of the Dukes of Norfolk conceived the idea of entertaining all the scions of his house, but was deterred from the plan when it was calculated that he would have to invite some ten thousand persons. Remembering the prolific families of old days, it is probably unnecessary to look further for the origin of the name *Fleming* than the ancient family which has played so important a part in our local history.

* The name *Kendal*, in addition to being generically applied to a coarse friese, seems from the 15th century onwards to have been applied to a cloth of fine quality, used at the Courts of both England and Scotland. Was this term sometimes applied to the colour rather than to the make of the cloth? We read for instance of "Kentish Kendal," which would hardly be made of inferior wool.

We may conclude then that there is no reason for supposing Kendal to owe anything to Flemish teachers, and we may believe that it is due to the enterprise of Westmorland men that our remote valleys were the seat of a trade which in the days of domestic industry flourished in England from north to south and east to west.
