

MARIAKIRKEN, WESTERN DOORWAY.

## THE HANSEATIC SETTLEMENT AT BERGEN IN NORWAY.<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION.

In the year 1909 I read a paper before the Society of Antiquaries on the later history of the Hanseatic settlement or Steelyard in London.<sup>2</sup> It was while specially interesting myself in that subject that I paid a visit to Norway, and landed at that flourishing but remarkably wet town, Bergen, on the west coast, the average rainfall of which is said to be 72 inches. Our steamer came to the end of her voyage near a long row of picturesque wooden buildings which line the quayside (plate II), to the north-east of the harbour, some of them with quaint signs standing out in front, such as a stag's head, a Janus, a unicorn, a northlander in quaint costume, and so on. These old houses had formed part of the once powerful Hanseatic quarter at Bergen, and in one of them is a museum<sup>3</sup> containing many relics of the Hanseatic time. Plate III shows two rooms which form part of it. Herr Christian Koren-Wiberg, the creator of this museum, has also fitted up a room in like manner at Lübeck, and written three admirable treatises on Bergen the old German factory there, and its connexion with the Hanseatic league, to which I owe much information.<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Mr. N. Aall, first secretary of the Norwegian consulate-general in London, for further help. No attempt has been made to give an account of the Hanseatic league, except in as far as it affects Bergen.

In various German cities there are relics of the palmy days of that remarkable confederation, not the least being in Lübeck, which became the Hanseatic capital after a prolonged rivalry with other leading cities. The visible

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Institute, 10th June, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia*, lxi, 389.

<sup>3</sup> This is quite distinct from the important and interesting Bergen museum.

<sup>4</sup> *Det Tyske Kontor i Bergen*, Bergen, 1899; *Bidrag til Bergens Kulturbistorie*, Bergen, 1908; *By og Brygge, Billeder fra Bergen*, Kristiania, 1912.

monuments of its power outside Germany are, however, not numerous,<sup>1</sup> in spite of the fact that in the fourteenth century, for trading purposes, it had control over the trade of from eighty to a hundred towns in the north of Europe.

The chief factories of the Hanseatic league established in foreign countries were the so-called Steelyard in London, and those at Novgorod, Bruges, and Bergen, but they all disappeared some time ago, except that of Bergen. The latter, although it has been curtailed, and what is still left of it was rebuilt in comparatively modern times, has retained its ancient character. Apart from their quaint beauty, the remains are of value for two reasons: they throw light on the commercial system of the Hanseatic league, and are also rare examples, not of German, but of old Norwegian building. For it is interesting to observe that the Germans, who for centuries largely dominated Bergen, did not introduce their own methods of architecture, but getting possession of parts of the Norwegian town, used what was already in existence, and afterwards imitated it. The buildings, therefore, differed from those of all other factories belonging to the league.

The following notes, through want of space brief and inadequate, relate to the history of Bergen and the architecture, administration and trade of the Hanseatic factory there. Those who wish to know more on the subject must study Mr. Koren-Wiberg's books, and other foreign sources of information.

#### HISTORICAL NOTES.

Bergen, which in the middle ages was the largest town in Norway, was founded by the Norwegian king Olaf Kyrre about the year 1070. It soon became a trading place of importance, and was at first more or less cosmopolitan. Here met as competitors, English, Germans, Danes and Swedes, in a motley mixture of foreign nations.

<sup>1</sup> By far the finest are the splendid architectural remains of the island of Gothland in the Baltic, above all those in its capital, Wisby, which, although nominally forming part of the Swedish kingdom, was

for more than two centuries a most important Hanseatic city. It was sacked by Waldemar IV in 1361, and its effective connexion with the league then came to an end.



NO. I. THE HANSEATIC QUARTER FROM THE HARBOUR.



NO. 2. THE HANSEATIC QUARTER FROM THE QUAY.

Two causes working together deprived the Norwegians of the trade of Bergen, which for a time was doubtless theirs unchallenged. One was that they weakened themselves by internal strife; another that the nobles, who at first held sway there, after a time thought it inconsistent with their dignity to soil their hands with commerce, and retired to their estates in the country, leasing the business parts of the town to strangers. These took full advantage of the favourable opportunity to push out the natives, who had among them no industrious citizen class capable of replacing the nobility.

At an early date the English appear to have succeeded fairly well as traders in Bergen, but even in the twelfth century the Germans were already obtaining much influence over the commerce of that city, and were protected by royal privileges. In 1250 the Norwegian king, Haakon Haakonson, tried to check them by treaty with Lübeck, but without effect. In the year 1276 the Germans, who had hitherto only been tenants, were granted leave to own the blocks of building in which they carried on business. Shortly afterwards the king extended their rights. There is evidence that about 1350 the Hanseatic factory was already organised in Bergen. By degrees they ejected their competitors, ruthlessly and methodically, monopolising all the trade. As years went on, the Germans dominated Bergen; in 1437 they acquired part of the town-hall and the wine-vaults adjoining, and in 1480 even the market-place. The whole Hanseatic settlement came to be called the Tyskekontor (German office). It is also known as Tyskebriggen, or the German quay, a term first used merely to denote the landing-place which ran along the whole of its front, facing the harbour.

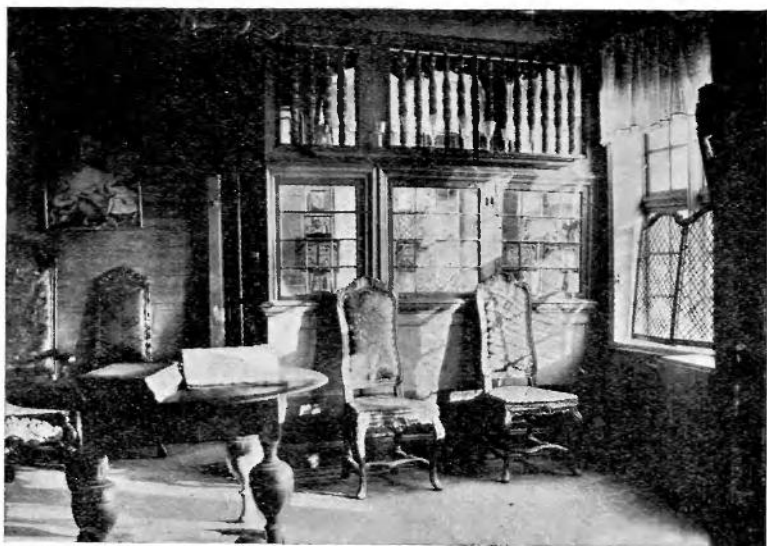
The power of the Hanseatic league probably reached its culminating point in the fifteenth century, and declined rapidly soon after 1550; it was much shaken by the thirty years' war, and in 1630 most of the cities comprising it formally renounced their alliance. Nevertheless a general Hanseatic diet was held nearly forty years later, in 1669, and after this for many years the Kontor in Bergen was able to continue its activity under the direction of Lübeck, working in common with Bremen and Hamburg, sole survivors of the great mediæval confederation. By degrees,

however, through force of outward circumstances, the Hanseatic hold on Bergen was altogether relaxed. The Norwegians made no violent effort to push out their rivals, but the trading yards gradually passed by purchase out of Hanseatic ownership, until the last property held by the league was sold in 1764.

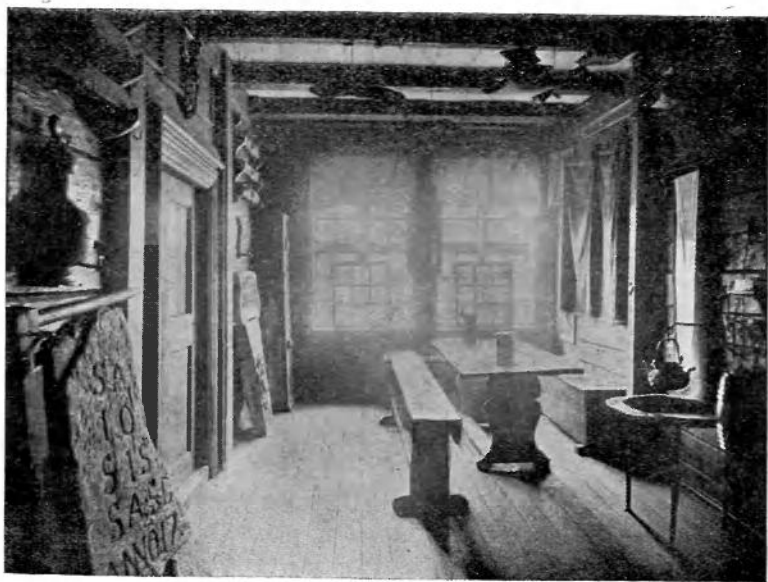
In spite of these changes, the merchants of the Kontor were still at that time Germans or of German origin, and as they gave up their connexion with the Hanse towns to become Norwegian citizens, they petitioned the Norwegian king to allow them to retain to some extent the old Hanseatic laws of the Kontor. The result was that on 27th November, 1754, the former Hanse merchants founded what was called the Nordiske or Norwegian Kontor, which in the form of its trading, and in its domestic discipline, was a copy of the Hanseatic Kontor. It should be added that there was German immigration to Bergen till about 1790. The Norwegian Kontor was dissolved in 1898, and in the same year the destruction of the old trading yards with their buildings was begun. Now only about half of the Kontor, as rebuilt in 1702, exists. The long continuance of Hanseatic influence is brought home to one by the fact that sermons were preached in the German language till the year 1870, in the old Hanseatic church of St. Mary (Mariakirken), which had been taken over from the Norwegian Kontor; they had been preached there as early as 1408, when the Germans first got possession of it (plate 1).

#### ARCHITECTURE.

The Kontor consisted of a succession of long narrow courtyards, with dwellings and storeplaces on each side, which extended from the quay in the direction of the Upper Street or Ovregade, the whole distance to this being from 120 to 140 metres. Its front was 300 metres in length. Occasionally there was only a single row of houses, and sometimes two courtyards shared a passage from the quay, as shown in the instance reproduced in plate iv, no. 1. Nearest to the Upper Street were gardens, of which every merchant had his own strip. From six



NO. 1. MASTER'S PRIVATE OFFICE, FINNEGAARDEN.



NO. 2. OUTER ROOM OPENING INTO MASTER'S ROOM, FINNEGAARDEN.



to ten merchants, with storekeepers, clerks, and workmen, lived in one courtyard, and as there was enforced celibacy, they managed their affairs in co-operative fashion, having a common kitchen called the fire-house (ildhuset) and a common hall or club-room in a separate building (schøtstue). These were placed together near the garden.

Besides the halls belonging to the various courtyards, there was a chief hall (kjobmandsstue). This large wooden building was first erected in 1480, near the middle of the German quarter, on the site of the town market-place, fronting the quay. At its back was a massive stone wine-cellar, which had originally belonged to the town, but before the year 1437 was let to the Germans. In later times, until 1898, at this cellar was a public bar. The kjobmandsstue was pulled down a few years ago, and in its place is a modern stone structure, called by the same name and adorned with the Hanseatic arms.

The buildings were constructed of wood throughout, even the kitchens, except that these had brick chimneys, fireplaces and ovens. Their roofs were tiled. The whole quarter was almost completely burnt down in the year 1676 and again in 1702, but on each occasion it was rebuilt quite in the old style. Owing to the inflammable nature of the material there were always great precautions against fire. The dwellings generally had no fireplaces. In the museum are specimens of lanterns and candlesticks for tallow candles, but they must have been sparingly used. From the sixteenth century onwards it was forbidden to go about the galleries with bare lights. Each club-room seems to have had a big lantern at the entrance and a candelabrum inside.

The ground-plan of the courtyards, with their buildings, has not varied much since 1476, and their names date from time immemorial. Originally they were the town houses of Norwegian noblemen, and mostly they were called after each owner, from his native district, or from the name of his country house; the word 'gaarden,' meaning the house or courtyard, being often added. Thus Finnegaarden is named after a nobleman, Finne, who had an estate so called. Enhjorningen was originally Einarsgaard, the christian name of the original owner having been Einar. Bratten was named after a noble



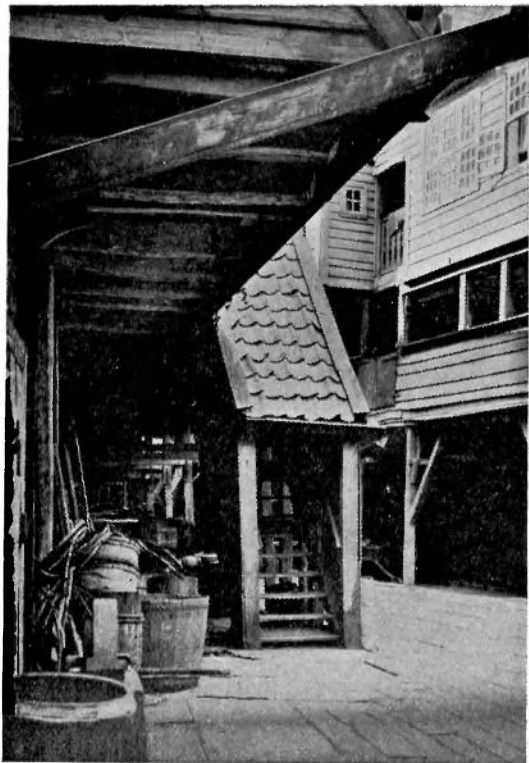
family Bratte, Leppe after one Lodin Lepp, and so on, The names generally are older than the time of the earliest Hanseatic dominance at Bergen. It should perhaps be mentioned that the termination *en*, often added to the names of the courtyards, is merely the definite article.

#### ADMINISTRATION AND TRADE.

The whole establishment consisted originally of about thirty double blocks of buildings with their passages, but the number was reduced after 1702. It has been said that during its most flourishing time there was a population of from two to three thousand men. They were ruled by two aldermen or masters appointed by the burgomaster and council at Lübeck, who took turns to preside, and together with a legally trained secretary, also from Lübeck, and eighteen merchants of the Kontor, formed the merchants' council. The Kontor had two other permanent officials, the merchants' clerk and the secretary's clerk. They received their salaries, with presents at Christmas and Easter, from the Hanseatic league. In the autumn the merchants' council held an important meeting in the chief hall (*kjobmandsstue*), where the secretary resided.

Each 'gaard' had also its own administration, presided over by one of its leading occupants called 'buherren,' and other merchants who belonged to it, forming a council which met in its own hall. These minor councils, elected annually like the eighteen, adjudicated on all irregularities happening in their own particular gaard, and looked after the commissariat. Their judgments, however, could be appealed against, first before the merchants' council, and finally to the council at Lübeck. They kept a book in which were entered the rules, accounts for common housekeeping, etc. In the Bergen museum are some of these books, throwing light on the administration of justice in the Kontor. They also record the barbarous games or tests to which the new comers had to submit before they were allowed to join the community.

A few words on these ordeals will, perhaps, not be out of place. One of the commonest, and the longest used, was the water-game, in which the victim was taken out to sea, undressed, dipped three times in the water, and



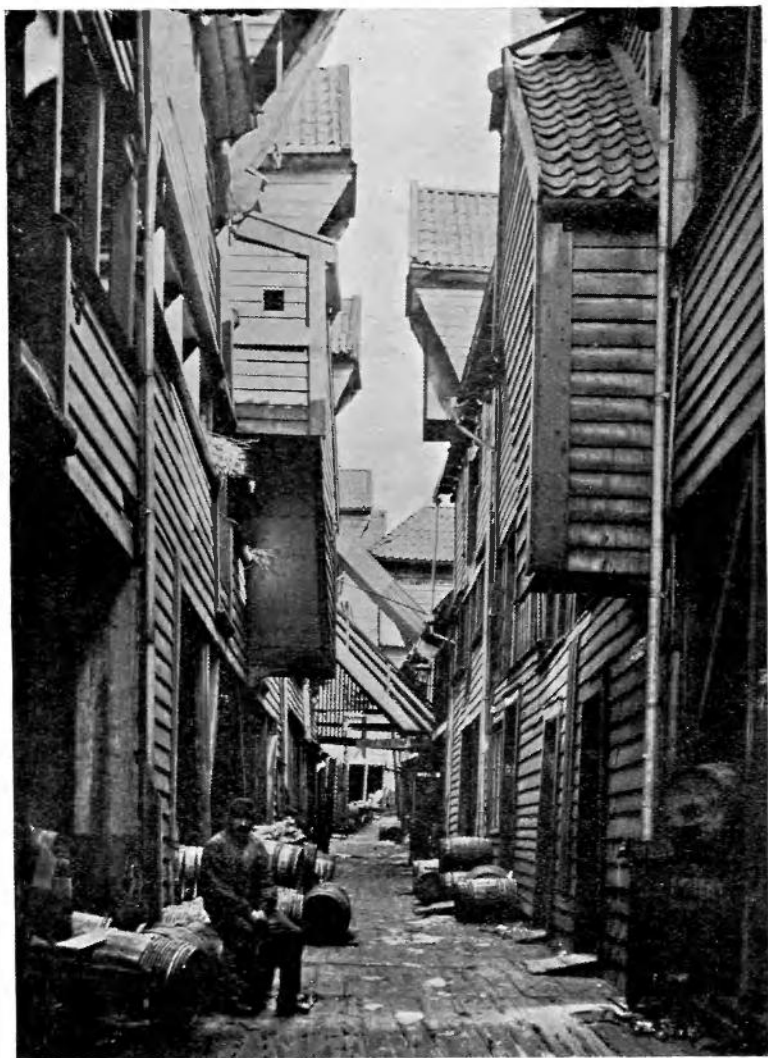
NO. I. COMMON PASSAGE OF BELGAARDEN AND  
JAKOBSFJORDEN, TOWARDS THE HARBOUR.

*To face page 280.*



PLATE IV.

NO. 2. PASSAGE OF ENGELGAARDEN, TOWARDS THE  
HARBOUR.



BREDSGAARDEN, TOWARDS THE HARBOUR.

whipped with a birch-rod. In the smoke test the new comer was hoisted up to the ceiling of the kitchen and half choked with smoke. In order that the smoke might have more effect he was obliged to answer several questions, and if he was thought not to have endured enough, he was let down and barrels of water were poured over him. Another pleasing amusement was to daub the poor man with soap which contained disgusting ingredients, and then to shave or clip him with a pair of wooden scissors. Or again he was wrapped in a bullskin and tossed through a hole in the kitchen roof. Of other tests it is not necessary to attempt a description; those of the new comers who got off best did not escape a whipping. It is a question what was the object of these proceedings. To some extent they were doubtless merely brutal, but they seem also to have been part of a clearly defined policy, which will be indicated in what follows on Hanseatic trade methods. In 1599 Christian IV, king of Denmark and Norway, with his brother, visited Bergen, and some unfortunate apprentices had to submit to ordeals of this kind for their entertainment. When one of the victims broke down under the smoke test the king substituted one of his own servants.

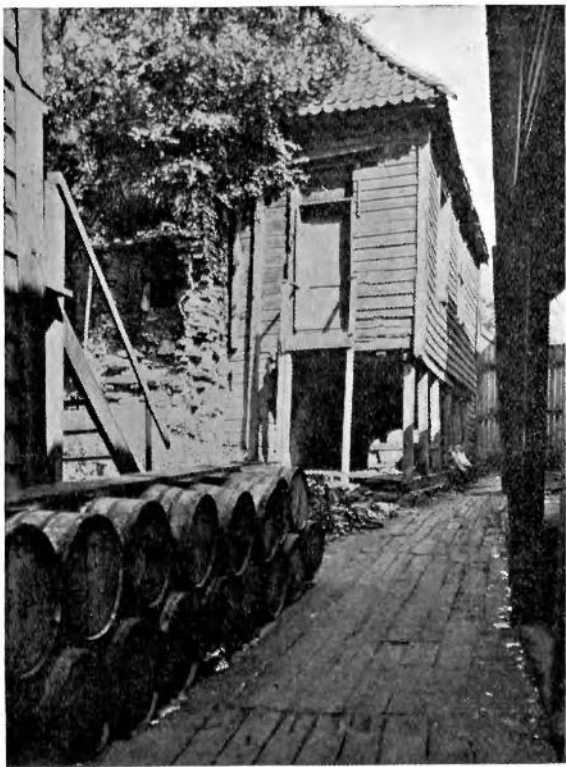
The peculiar conditions under which the Hanseatic people followed their trade in Bergen necessarily caused distinct forms of administration and of investment of capital. At first, that is before the ascendancy of the league, the German merchants certainly travelled to Bergen themselves, in order to sell or exchange their goods within the legally-fixed trading season, from May till the middle of September. When, however, the Kontor was founded as an ordered settlement, and trade could be carried on throughout the year, new methods for the management of business were inevitable. The capitalists of the Hanse-towns, men generally of good social standing, had no inclination to settle for a long time in Bergen, and therefore substitutes were found, who, under rules not unlike those enforced in other Hanseatic factories, became domiciled members of the Bergen Kontor.

The relationship of these traders to the German capitalists varied somewhat. For instance, it may be seen from Lübeck records that the capitalist sometimes handed a certain sum of money to the merchant at Bergen,

whose business it was to invest this profitably. The profits were afterwards divided according to previous agreement. Another arrangement was for the merchant to contribute part of the capital. In that case he usually received a special commission besides his regular profit.

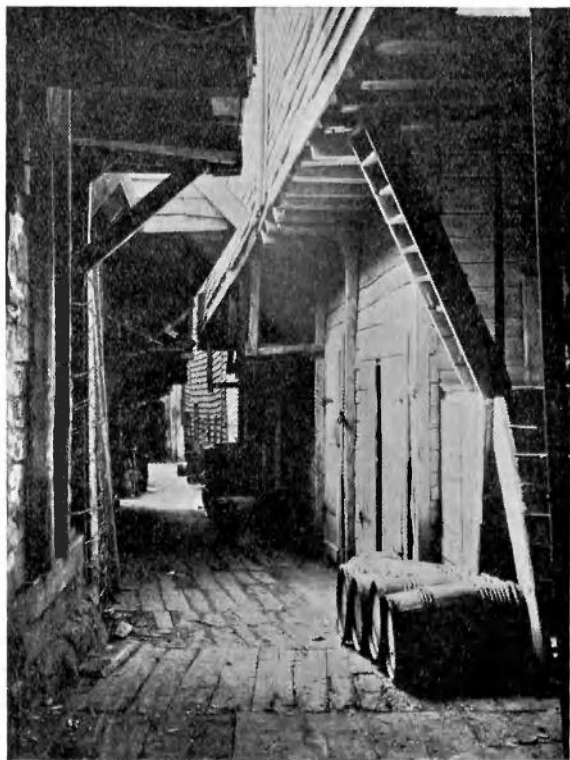
We will follow very briefly the career of a merchant who joined the Kontor. He came as a rule from the ordinary citizen class, and having been educated in his native place, on arriving as a new comer, he was not only tried by cruel corporal tests, such as those already mentioned on a previous page, but was obliged also to prove his mental capacity, and he soon found that he had to follow in the footsteps of the older men if he wished to make his way. According to the laws of the factory it was necessary for him to start from the lowest grade. Speaking generally, he was first a working youth or apprentice, then a workman, afterwards a foreman, perhaps a clerk or storekeeper; and if all went well he rose to be a merchant, that is master of a dwelling and office in his 'gaard.' In passing through this course he acquired an intimate knowledge of trade at Bergen down to the minutest detail. At length, when this 'Bergen-fahrer' retired from the Kontor, the fact of his having held a responsible post there was of great advantage to him, on establishing himself in his native land.

The stern discipline, however, of which we read, seems to have been chiefly enforced in matters that affected business. The Hanseatic traders were not always driving bargains, or handling goods, or casting up accounts. There was another phase of life among them of which we get glimpses. Among the thousands of bachelors inhabiting the factory there were many with no taste for a quasi-monastic life. The Upper Street, bordering the factory, had the worst of reputations, and from time to time complaints reached Lübeck of various acts of extravagance. Thus in 1572, and again in 1634, it was said that members of the factory were addicted to feasting and carousing; they kept horses, acted plays, and dressed in silks and satins. With the capitalists perhaps the private conduct of their Bergen agents was a matter of secondary consideration. What they really cared for was the trade, and besides they were at a distance which made full control



NO. I. BREDSGAARDEN, TOWARDS UPPER STREET :  
RUINS OF KITCHEN AND HALL BEYOND,





NO. 2. BUGAARDEN, TOWARDS HARBOUR.

difficult. To safeguard themselves, they obliged the leading merchants to pay occasional visits to Germany, preferably once a year, bringing with them full reports. By such means, and with the help of the council, if they failed to enforce a high standard of morality, their business methods appear to have been efficient even to the last.

The most strenuous time in the Kontor was during the seasons known as the 'stevne,' the first beginning about the middle of May, when vessels arrived from the north with whale-oil and rye to trade with the Germans. The second 'stevne' was in July and August, when fish, especially cod-fish, were brought there in great numbers, these having always been a chief article of commerce at Bergen. It will be remembered that the arms of the factory were half a double eagle displayed, impaling a crowned cod-fish. The craft dropped anchor at the jetties of the Kontor, the fish were weighed on board and taken to the store-rooms. The northlanders received in exchange corn, salt, fishing utensils, brandy, pepper, cloth, syrup, hemp, and other articles. On account of the dealings in pepper, members of the league at Bergen were sometimes called 'pebersvende' (pepper lads), a name still used for bachelors in Norway.

During autumn when the cured fish had been put on board ship for export, the work decreased, and the occupants of the various buildings in the factory passed a good deal of the darkest part of the year in the halls or club-rooms. Here they had their places at the tables according to their rank, and doubtless the beer jugs passed around.

In conclusion, when studying Bergen's northland trade, the fact is brought home to one that the natives of Bergen have inherited what was largely the creation of the Hanseatic league, for although Bergen already had a fishing industry of some importance before the foundation of the Tyskekontor, which is evident from reports of the visit of Danes to Bergen in 1191, still it was the people of the Hanse towns who originally organised fixed and effective methods of trade there, the stability of which has extended to our own days through more than five centuries.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

I will now say a few words about the illustrations to this paper. The general views speak for themselves.

One of them shows the 'Kontor' from the harbour; another, the same old houses seen obliquely from the quay-side (plate II). There still appear to be ten court-yards standing together on the western part of the old Hanseatic quarter, counting from east to west; their names are as follows: Holmedalen, Bellgaarden, Jacobsfjorden, Svensgaarden, Enhjorningen, Bredsgaarden, Bugaarden, Engelgaarden, Söstergaarden, Guldskoen. The rest were pulled down after the abolition of the Norwegian Kontor, except Finnegaarden, or part of it, which stands more or less isolated at the east end of the quarter. In one of the dwellings Mr. Koren-Wiberg has established his museum, the rooms being fitted up in the old style, with furniture, weapons, fire-extinguishing apparatus, and other objects. The whole gives an admirable idea of what a merchant's establishment was like in the late Hanseatic period. We have an illustration of the master's chief room on the first floor, with a sanctum partitioned off, where he did his private business (plate III, no. 1). On a window there in stained glass is the name 'Peter Eden, Anno 1706,' an occupant who helped to rebuild the place after the last great fire. There is also a view of an outer room opening into the master's room (plate III, no. 2). Both contain their old furniture.

Another view represents the building which contained the hall (schödstue) in the courtyard called Dramshusen, looking towards the Upper Street (plate VII, no. 2). These buildings commonly had an open storeplace below, and access was obtained to the upper floor by a projecting staircase communicating with an anteroom, whence a door led into the hall, to which a beer closet was attached. Along the wall were benches for the occupants of each merchant's house in that particular courtyard. They also had their own table and their own food cupboard. Unfortunately we have no illustration of an interior of a hall, but there are several in Mr. Koren-Wiberg's books.

A noteworthy view is that of the passage used by two courtyards in common, namely Bellgaarden and Jacobsfjorden (plate IV, no. 1). The spectator is facing the harbour. Bellgaarden is on his left hand. In another view (plate VII, no. 1) the middle building is what remains of the hall or schödstue.



NO. 1. NORTH-EAST PART OF BELGAARDEN AND JAKOBSFJORDEN,  
AWAY FROM THE HARBOUR.



NO. 2. THE DRAMSHUSEN CLUB-ROOM, TOWARDS UPPER STREET.

Plate VI, no. 1, shows the ruins of part of the kitchen of Bredsgaarden and the hall beyond. We are again looking towards the Upper Street. The remaining illustrations of the Kontor are sufficiently described by their respective titles. It ought perhaps to be said that the entrance-passage of each gaard from the quay generally passed under a house or building. This is shown in the views of the factory from the quay and harbour. I add a final note on the church at Bergen once belonging to the League.

The large and ancient church of St. Mary (Maria-kirken), which stands at the west end of the Upper Street, and a short distance north of the factory, was built by the Norwegians in or about the year 1183, but the quire with its lancet windows replaced the original one after a fire of 1248. It was possessed by the Hanseatic people from 1408 to 1754. They also had St. Martin's church, further east, burnt down in 1702 and not rebuilt. By way of frontispiece we give a view of the west doorway of Maria-kirken (plate 1). Though much 'restored' it is a fine example of Romanesque architecture. To this church there are two western flanking towers.