DURING the last twenty years there has been extensive discussion of the history of commerce and urban life in the early Middle Ages. Scholars have disagreed strongly, sometimes rather violently. These debates have centered essentially on quantitative questions: How much trade and urban life were there at various times? If one wanted to draw a chart showing commercial activity between the fifth and the eleventh centuries, there would be fairly general agreement as to the general curve but considerable disagreement as to the quantity of activity represented by any one point. We cannot here discuss the arguments used, much less enter into the debate. We must content ourselves with describing the general curve and making a few remarks about the state of urban life and commercial activity in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

In the western part of the Roman Empire the high point of urban and commercial development was probably reached in the first and second centuries after the birth of Christ. By the third century the civil wars resulting from the struggles of rival candidates for the imperial crown had reduced the
level of prosperity. By the fourth century both Gaul and Britain were suffering from Germanic raids. The heavy taxation that gradually ruined the middle class was a severe blow to urban life. Thus when the German invaders entered the empire in large numbers in the fifth century, they found commerce already sadly decayed and the urban centers weak and depopulated. The establishment of the Germanic states did not halt this process but rather accelerated it. The Germans were unused to town life and had no desire to become accustomed to it. The Germanic kings had no interest in keeping roads and bridges in repair and safeguarding merchants. There seems to be no doubt that trade declined steadily and town life gradually disappeared. The cities along the coast of the Mediterranean were to some extent at least an exception. Until the eighth century there was nothing to hinder commerce on that sea, and such cities as Narbonne appear to have remained important trading centers. Then in the eighth and ninth centuries the Moslems conquered Spain, the Balearic Islands, Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. Moslem fleets were in complete control of the western Mediterranean. Although it is most unlikely that commerce ceased entirely, as far as the Christian states were concerned it became so slight as to be of little significance.

The Decline of Commerce

In the tenth century commercial activity in western Europe was at its lowest ebb. There was very little contact with the great trading centers of the Near East. The Byzantine fleet kept open a tenuous line of communication with Venice and a few other towns on the Adriatic coast of Italy. Once the Swedish Vikings had established themselves in Russia, they conducted trade with both Constantinople and
Bagdad, but all that seeped through to the west were a few articles of gold and silver and some coins. Within western Europe itself there must, of course, always have been some trade. Certainly the knights of this region did not have all their equipment made and their war horses bred locally. But it is clear that what commerce there was, was so slight in amount that it played no part of any significance in the life of the time. Merchants were extremely few, and very little money was in circulation. In general, each community was economically self-sufficient.

It seems unlikely that any towns in the economic sense existed in western Europe during the tenth century. There were, of course, conglomerations of buildings, usually on the site of an ancient town. Every bishop had his city with its cathedral, episcopal palace, residences for the cathedral clergy, and houses for the various people who served the church and its clergy. At Paris the Ile de la Cité contained a royal residence in addition to the ecclesiastical buildings. At Rouen three centers of population lay in close juxtaposition: the ducal tower of Rouen, the cathedral, and the great monastery of St. Ouen. At Tours there was the seat of the counts of Touraine, the cathedral, and the monasteries of St. Martin and Marmoutier. Thus a good many ancient towns had a fair number of people living on their sites. But these people were not primarily merchants and artisans. They were tenants of manorial lords who grew their food in the fields near at hand. For example, at Rouen there were three villages surrounding the residences of three lords, the duke of Normandy, the archbishop of Rouen, and the abbot of St. Ouen. Once again it is important to emphasize that these places probably contained some men who were engaged in trade. There were almost certainly people living on the riverbank
on the Ile de la Cité at Paris whose chief occupation was transporting goods on the Seine, and the same was probably true of Rouen. But these people and their activities were of little or no significance in the economic life of the period.

**The Revival of Trade**

The eleventh century saw the reversal of the downward trend of commercial activity and the reawakening of urban life in western Europe. Because of the small amount of material available to the historian, this development will always remain obscure in detail. One can merely point out the conditions necessary for commerce and urban life and mention various indications that these existed and were taking effect in the eleventh century. The basic requirement for the existence of commerce is that each of two groups of people produce a surplus of a different commodity and that each wants what the other produces. It is also necessary that it be possible to transport the surplus of each group to the location inhabited by the other at a cost that is consistent with the desire for the commodity. Then if the trade is to rise above the level of mere barter, there must be a medium of exchange acceptable to both groups: normally, coined money. Finally, there must be people able and willing to carry on the trade.

In the eleventh century several districts of western Europe were producing a surplus of commodities for which there was a demand elsewhere. Probably the most important of these districts was the county of Flanders. There is some evidence that as early as the Carolingian period this district produced woolen cloth of unusually fine quality. By the middle of the eleventh century it was making more than could be used locally. Another district that produced com-
modities for which there was a general demand was the forest of the far north. Trade between the north and Flanders was easy. Norse merchants could load their ships with honey, furs, and hunting hawks, sail down to Flanders, and exchange their cargo for woolen cloth, for which there was an active demand in the north. Then the Flemish merchants could peddle the furs, hawks, honey, and their own cloth among the aristocracy of northern France and Germany. They may well have been paid largely in raw wool. Thus Flanders became the first industrial and commercial center of western Europe.

Another important commerce was started apparently by the creation of a demand. In France wine was the usual drink of the people of every class, and each district produced enough for its own local needs. But there were parts of the country peculiarly suited to the culture of the vine that could easily produce surpluses if a demand appeared. The Anglo-Saxons were ale drinkers, and wine was not made in England. When in the reign of Edward the Confessor England began to swarm with his Norman friends, these Normans wanted the wine to which they were accustomed. We know little in detail about the wine trade in the eleventh century, but it is clear that before the Norman Conquest merchants from Rouen appeared regularly in London. The Conquest, of course, enormously increased this demand for wine in England. Wine coming from northern Burgundy was shipped down the Seine to Rouen and thence to England. After the accession to the English throne of Henry II, already count of Anjou and duke of Aquitaine, the vineyards of the Loire valley and those of the Bordeaux region entered into competition with those of Burgundy for the English market.
Before the Norman Conquest of England Norman merchants had played a part in the slow development of commerce in northern France, and many of them followed Duke William to his new kingdom. England had a number of products that were in demand on the continent. The tin mines of Devon and Cornwall had been known to the Phoenicians and had been actively exploited by the Romans. The Norman kings encouraged tin mining by giving the miners special privileges to facilitate the pursuit of their trade, and they organized the commerce in the tin produced into a tight governmental monopoly. The lead miners of Derbyshire and Cumberland were encouraged in the same way. England was the only source of tin in western Europe and an important producer of lead and silver. Then by the late eleventh century the weavers of Flanders were having difficulty finding the raw wool they needed, and England even before the Conquest had a great number of sheep. Soon the Flemings were relying heavily on England for their wool supplies, and England was increasing her production to meet the demand. The first great expansion in English woolgrowing seems to have come with the appearance of the Cistercian monks in the twelfth century. The Cistercians were bound by their rule to refuse to accept land that was already inhabited. They were to support themselves by their own labor, not by that of their tenants. Before long great tracts of inarable land in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, the borders of Wales, and other regions were given to the Cistercians by the English barons. They soon discovered the desirability of using it as sheep pasture. By this means wild, waste land could with little expenditure of labor be made highly profitable. In a short time secular lords in the same districts were emulating the Cistercians, and England be-
came the center of woolgrowing for all western Europe. While a flourishing commerce with its chief center in Flanders was slowly spreading over northwestern Europe, an equally, perhaps more, important development was taking place in the south. Early in the eleventh century the western towns of north Italy headed by Genoa and Pisa began to build ships and to trade along the Mediterranean shores to the west. To protect this commerce they organized a series of expeditions against the Moslems who held Corsica and Sardinia. Meanwhile Venice had become independent politically but still maintained an active trade with Constantinople. Her fleet was mistress of the Adriatic Sea. In addition, certain inland towns, notably Milan in Lombardy and Florence in Tuscany, had become important centers for the weaving of woolen cloth. Northern Italy was ready for any commercial opportunities that might appear.

**The Influence of the Crusades**

This opportunity came with the First Crusade. The great crusading army of heavily armed knights marched overland to Constantinople and on through Asia Minor to the Holy Land. There they established the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. Most of Palestine and a large part of Syria became a state organized on feudal lines and ruled by barons from western Europe. The kingdom of Jerusalem needed supplies of all sorts from Europe. Moreover, great numbers of individual crusaders and pilgrims wanted transportation to the Holy Land. Hence there was a large immediate demand for shipping. Genoa and Pisa rose to this need and carried the supplies and men in their ships. To protect this shipping from the Moslem fleets they organized squadrons of warships that soon won effective control of the Mediterranean.
From the latter part of the eleventh century to the appearance of the Ottoman Turks as a naval power in the fifteenth century, the fleets of Genoa, Pisa, and Venice were masters of the great inland sea.

The kings of Jerusalem and their barons were fully aware that the very existence of their state depended on the ships of the Italian cities. They gave the Italian merchants extensive trading privileges throughout the kingdom. Soon the caravan routes to Damascus were swarming with goods bound for the Italian merchants operating in the Latin kingdom. The most important of these commodities were silken cloths, sugar, and a wide variety of spices. These goods were loaded on Italian ships and carried back to Italy. Thus once more the luxury goods produced in the east became available in the southern part of western Europe. In short the end of the eleventh century saw active trading centers in both Flanders and Italy.

The Secondary Needs of Trade

The eleventh century also saw some development in the secondary needs of active commerce. Although there is no evidence that there was any improvement in methods of transportation, the efforts of the church and the great feudal princes were gradually making the roads and rivers safer for commercial travel. The merchant still had to pay tolls at every castle he passed and he always ran the risk of having his goods seized by a greedy baron, but some semblance of order began to appear. Then mining operations were rapidly increasing the silver available for coining money. The Norman kings of England obtained some silver from their lead mines, but the chief development was the opening of the rich Saxon silver mines near Goslar and their active
exploitation by Emperors Henry III and Henry IV. It was largely German silver that supplied the currency for the growing trade. Finally, a merchant class was slowly growing. Here there is almost no evidence as to just what took place. It can only be assumed that men saw an opportunity and were adventurous enough to seize it. A large proportion of these men must have been unfree peasants who deserted their lords to become peddlers who wandered over the countryside. But this was only the beginning. As we shall see, the growing towns soon supplied an adequate merchant class.

If a man was to engage in trade effectively he required certain things. Perhaps the most important of these was personal freedom and some lord who would vouch for him as a freeman. Obviously one who could not leave his lord’s land could not operate as a merchant, and a runaway serf without credentials was at the mercy of any knight who desired his goods. A merchant also needed a house to live in and a shop or small warehouse to hold his goods, and it was important that the rent for them be payable in the product of his business, money. He could not perform labor services for his lord to pay for his tenement. Then if he was to engage in trade with any enthusiasm, he had to have some assurance that his money and goods would not be taken from him by his lord. All the dues he owed had to be fixed amounts that the lord could not increase at will. He needed a guarantee that his lord would not take advantage of some minor offense he committed to levy a ruinous fine on him. Finally, a merchant wanted the right to form a co-operative organization with his neighbors. Only thus could he achieve reasonable security. If he lost his goods, the association would help him start again. It would care for his family and see to
his burial when he died. If a merchant in some other town did not pay him the money due him, the association would help him recover it.

Town Charters

The early merchants looked for places to live where the location was suitable for trade and where the local lord was willing to give them the privileges they needed. Usually they settled near a castle, an abbey, or an episcopal city. In Paris the merchant colony grew up on the right bank of the Seine opposite the Ile de la Cité. At Lincoln the merchants lived on a steep slope that ran from the cathedral, bishop’s palace, and royal castle down to the river Witham. Soon most well-located castles, abbeys, and cathedrals had their faubourg, or merchant settlement. The merchants would approach the lord of the place and ask him for a charter of privileges. Sometimes they would offer him a large sum of money, sometimes an attractive annual income, and often both. The lord would then grant them a charter. Rarely were two town charters exactly alike, though various lords had model charters that they followed fairly closely. But while variety in detail was endless, the basic privileges mentioned in the last paragraph were always included. The land of the merchant settlement became free land; anyone who lived there for a year and a day became a freeman. The lord usually excepted from this provision his own serfs, but he was glad to receive the escaped serfs of other lords. The merchants would owe fixed money rents for their tenements. This was usually called burgage tenure to distinguish it from other methods of holding land. Then the special dues the lord was to demand were usually fixed. The lord could ask for so much a year in tallage and for a further
sum to persuade him not to debase his coinage. Often the charter listed the money penalties that the lord could collect for various offenses. In addition the charter usually gave the merchants the right to form a guild or co-operative association. When the guild was not mentioned in the charter, it was usually because it already existed. In many cases the merchants formed a guild and the guild carried out the negotiations for the charter.

The privileges mentioned above were the fundamental ones, those that were absolutely necessary for a community of merchants. Many, perhaps most, towns obtained other rights in the original or subsequent charters. Trade was bound to involve numerous disputes about debts, agreements, quality of goods, and such questions. The lord's officers knew nothing about such matters. Hence usually the merchants were allowed to hold a court to decide commercial cases. Then if the lord was feeling generous or was offered a very attractive sum of money, he might allow the merchants' court to dispense police-court or low justice while his officers kept the higher jurisdiction. Such was the situation in Paris. The elected head of the guild, the provost of the merchants, had a court for commercial questions and low justice, but all important cases went to the king's provost of Paris. Some towns had still higher privileges. Many English towns induced the king to allow the guild and its officers to take over local government and collection of the king's dues. They were subject to the general supervision of the sheriff of the county, but there was no royal officer in the town itself. London was a county in itself and had its own elected sheriffs. In France many towns achieved almost complete independence. They were governed by an elected mayor assisted by elected aldermen. The mayor had full
rights of jurisdiction: both high and low justice. The lord had the right to a fixed sum of money from the town every year, but otherwise he had no rights over it.

Towns and Feudalism

A flourishing town was a valuable asset to a feudal lord. For one thing it brought him a large income in the form of money. Then most towns had a well-equipped and reasonably well-drilled militia. Although these troops were infantry and hence not of much use in the field against knights, they were able to defend their own walls and thus gave the lord an extra garrisoned fortress. Moreover, towns were useful for the purpose of increasing the population of one’s lands at the expense of a neighbor. In the twelfth century the king of France and the count of Champagne carried on a town-founding race along their mutual frontier in order to steal each other’s serfs. The desirability of towns made lords anxious to have as many as possible. Often a feudal prince would give a charter to a location that seemed promising in the hope that a town would spring up. But from the point of view of the lords, the basic privileges of personal freedom for the inhabitants, burgage tenure, fixed dues and fines, the right to have a guild, and perhaps a court for commercial cases and low justice was all a town should have. Very rarely did a lord voluntarily give a town greater powers of self-government. The towns that had more advanced privileges usually won them by rebellion against weak lords. In France and Italy such towns were often called “communes.” A commune was fundamentally simply a sworn alliance of a group of people associated for a stated purpose, in this case revolt against the lord. Some rural villages formed such alliances and won special rights. But usually the commune
was an association of townsmen working together for greater self-government. The king of France would not allow communes in his own lands, but he was glad to encourage them in the lands of his vassals. A large proportion of the French communes were in towns ruled by a bishop such as Beauvais. The bishop usually had trouble mustering enough troops to put down a revolt, and when the king supported the rebels, he was utterly helpless. The communes of Italy were basically similar to those of France except that they represented an alliance of merchants and lesser nobles against the bishop who ruled the town. The minor nobles of the countryside moved into the town and joined the merchants in forcing the bishops to give them self-government. In Germany the great towns were given extensive political privileges by the emperor, who hoped to use them to curb the power of the nobles.

Overland Routes

For the further development of commerce and urban life in western Europe, following the eleventh and early twelfth century revival discussed above, one principal need was a connecting link between Italy and Flanders. This was no simple task. The Moslem fleets controlling the waters around the Strait of Gibraltar and the storms of the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel made the sea route far too hazardous for twelfth-century merchants. The land routes passed through the lands of innumerable feudal lords who expected to be paid tolls if they restrained themselves from plundering the traveling merchants. But it was, in fact, the enterprise of a powerful feudal prince that finally supplied the needed link. Geographically the easiest and most natural land route from the Mediterranean to northern France was
up the valleys of the Rhône and Saône to eastern France. This region was equally well connected with the north. The Moselle led to the Rhine, the tributaries of the Seine to Paris, Rouen, and England, and the Loire to western France. Thus geographically the region we call Champagne was ideally situated as a meeting place between the traders of the north and the south. In the twelfth century this region was under the control of the most powerful of French feudal houses: the counts of Champagne, Blois, and Chartres. These counts, particularly Henry the Liberal, who ruled from 1152 to 1181, were fully aware of the advantages of their position and the profits they could draw from it.

The Fairs of Champagne

At a number of the chief towns of their domains, notably Troyes, Provins, and Lagny-sur-Marne, the counts of Champagne founded fairs. These fairs were so spaced that there was usually one of them going on. The counts saw that everything necessary was supplied. There were booths to be rented to merchants, money-changers to handle the many diverse types of coin that the traders brought in, police to keep order, and judges to give quick decisions in disputes. All this was highly profitable to the count. In addition to the rents for the booths, the percentage taken by the money-changers, and the fines for offenses committed at the fair, he charged a sales tax on all goods brought to the fair. The fairs were carefully organized. Each day was devoted to commerce in a different type of commodity. Thus on one day only furs and hides would be dealt in, on another textiles. During the days of trade no money actually changed hands, but careful accounts were kept in the official money of the fair, the silver pound of Troyes and Provins. Then on
the last day all the accounts were settled with the aid of the money-changers.

Fully as important as the local arrangements was the protection supplied by the counts to merchants bound for their fairs. No merchant could be arrested at the fair or anywhere in the count's lands while he was going to or coming from a fair for any debt except those contracted at one of the fairs. In addition the count through his vassals was able to supply protection along the routes leading to the fair. Many of the lesser lords of northern France, such as the counts of Dreux and Soissons, held fiefs from the count of Champagne. Then to safeguard the long route along the valleys of the Rhône and Saône the count gave money fiefs, in other words regular pay, to a number of powerful barons of the region. They did homage, swore fealty, and promised to protect the merchants. In return they were paid from the proceeds of the fairs. The counts used the same system to extend their influence into the German duchy of Lorraine. Thus by the end of the twelfth century merchants bound for the fairs of Champagne found most of their routes watched over by the count or his vassals.

The fairs of Champagne were extremely successful. Italian merchants bearing the rare goods of the east went there to buy raw wool, furs, hides, and other products of northern Europe. The merchants of the north went there to buy the goods of the east to distribute in their own countries. But these fairs were more than what we would call wholesale markets. The great lords of France would send their stewards to the fairs to buy their year's supply of sugar, spices, fine textiles, rich furs, and military equipment. When the English knight, William Marshal, found himself in need of a new war horse, he went to the fair of Lagny to buy it.
While the fairs of Champagne were the most important centers of trade in western Europe in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, other fairs sprang up rapidly. Most of these were chiefly local in scope. Merchants would buy the goods of the east and Flemish cloth at the fairs of Champagne and then sell them by wandering from one local fair to another. A few were noted for particular products. Thus Boston in eastern England was the natural outlet for a flourishing wool-growing region and became a great center for trade in raw wool. To it journeyed merchants from Flanders and even from the weaving towns of Italy. The English kings bought a large part of their household supplies at Boston fair. In short, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a large part of what we call foreign trade was carried on at the fairs. They ranged in size and importance from the great fair of Troyes to the annual fair at the chief seat of some petty feudal lord, the latter being basically an annual cattle market where some peddlers with rare goods might be found.

The Hanseatic League

Late in the thirteenth century the fairs of Champagne began to lose their position. Their decline was the result of a number of developments. Champagne had come by marriage into the possession of the Capetian house, and the kings were too greedy. By raising the rents and taxes at the fairs they drove merchants elsewhere. But more serious was the appearance of competing routes. By the late thirteenth century the kings of Germany were almost powerless and were completely unable to control the princes. Hence the imperial cities, often called the free cities, formed leagues for mutual protection. A group of North German towns headed
by Lübeck made an alliance called the Hanseatic League. They combined to put pressure on the princes to protect their merchants, to maintain warships to check piracy, and to operate trading stations. One of the most famous of these stations was the Steelyard in London. The League made arrangements with other free cities throughout Germany and thus developed an overland route to Italy. From the cities of North Germany the routes ran to Ulm and Augsburg and from there over the Alpine passes into Italy. During the fourteenth century these routes captured most of the trade between Italy and the north. What commerce did use the Rhône-Saône route found its entrepôt at Lyons. That city became the chief commercial town of France and had a very important fair.

The Craft Guilds

As time went on various changes took place in the institutional structure of most towns. Perhaps the most important of these was the development of the craft guilds. When a town was founded, there was only one guild, and all the inhabitants were members of it. Its officials were the governing body of the town and exercised all the powers granted by the charter. But this situation did not usually last very long. The members of the guild who enjoyed its privileges were inclined to be hesitant about admitting new members. Serfs could flee to the town, live there a year and a day, and so become freemen, but they were fortunate if they obtained membership in the guild. Soon most towns had an unprivileged population. Then great differences in wealth and economic interests began to develop among the members of the guild itself. The merchants who lived by trade were likely to make far more money than the artisans. As they made
their money by importing goods into the town and selling them to their fellow citizens, they were interested in using their monopoly to keep prices high. This annoyed the artisans, who had no part in the profits. Hence bit by bit the artisans broke away from the town guild and formed their own separate corporations. The process differed somewhat from town to town. In Oxford the town guild remained the dominant one and the others were simply subordinate guilds. No one could belong to an occupational guild who was not a member of the town guild. But in most towns there was a complete separation. The original guild became the merchant guild and the craftsmen left it to form their own organizations.

The formation of the craft guilds was a long, slow process that extended over many years. By the end of the twelfth century the only craft guilds found in England outside London were those of the textile workers: weavers, dyers, and fullers. In parts of France the guild structure seems to have developed a little earlier, but it is not until the thirteenth century that it appeared in full flower. Almost every conceivable occupation was represented by a guild. There were butchers’, bakers’, swordmakers’, goldsmiths’, tanners’, leatherworkers’, booksellers’ and parchment-makers’ guilds. In some French cities, notably Paris and Toulouse, the prostitutes had a guild. As a rule the members of a guild tended to live together on the same street.

**Guild Regulations**

The primary purpose of the craft guild was to safeguard the economic interests of its members. No artisan could work in a town unless he was a member of the local guild, and goods could not be imported into a town if they com-
petitioned with local products. Thus each guild had a monopoly of the market in its own town. The guild also did everything possible to prevent competition among its members. It laid down detailed regulations governing the quality of its product, the methods of manufacture, and the price that could be charged for it. The ideal was to have every member of the guild make exactly the same thing by the same methods and sell it at the same price. Hours of labor were rigidly controlled. Thus in difficult trades requiring careful work no one could labor before sunrise or after sunset.

Obviously this closely controlled monopoly would only work effectively if the supply of products was fairly well adjusted to the demand. Each guild tried to do this by limiting the number of its members. Before a young man was admitted to the guild, he had to learn the trade by serving as an apprentice to a guild member or master. The guild set the number of apprentices each member could have and the number of years they had to serve in that capacity. Thus the guild could control the number of craftsmen in its occupation. It also made sure that its members were adequately trained. When an apprentice had served his time, he had to produce a "masterpiece" for the inspection of the guild's officers to prove his ability to practice his trade.

In the early days of a craft guild each member had a small workshop where he labored with a few apprentices, and when an apprentice finished his term, he became a master and had his own shop. But there was a natural inclination on the part of the masters who were the members of the guild to keep their numbers down, have more workmen under them, and thus increase their profits. Before long an apprentice could not become a master as soon as he finished his term of training; he had to work for a certain number.
of years as a journeyman or hired day laborer. In this way masters could have fairly large shops where apprentices and journeymen worked for them. As time went on the members of the guild became more and more disinclined to increase their number and reduce each one's share of the market. They preferred as the market grew to take more apprentices. Eventually it became almost impossible to become a master unless you were the son of a master or married a master's daughter. The majority of men working in the craft could not hope to rise beyond journeyman.

The journeymen were pretty completely at the mercy of the masters who ran the guild. The guild guaranteed every journeyman work. In Paris the journeymen of a guild gathered each morning at a certain place. The masters came and chose the men they wanted, but if there were some left when the choosing was over, the guild officers assigned them to masters. Through the guild, however, the masters set the journeyman's wages and regulated the hours and conditions of his work. In some towns the journeymen attempted to form organizations of their own to fight the masters, but as the latter always had the support of the town government, the journeymen were rarely successful.

The craft guilds could obviously abuse their monopolies to the detriment of their fellow citizens, by lowering the quality of their goods and by raising the price. In England where the royal government was strong the more important guilds were carefully supervised. From at least the reign of King John the English government set the weight, quality, and price of loaves of bread and the quality and measure of ale. Later when cloth began to be an important manufacture, strict regulations for its making were laid down and
were enforced by governmental inspectors. In France the guilds were likely to be strictly controlled in cities where the lord was powerful. Thus in Paris the regulations of most guilds had to be approved by the royal provost of Paris and he was responsible for seeing that the guild officers enforced them. Other guilds were controlled by various dignitaries. The booksellers and inkmakers, for example, were ruled by the rector of the university, the makers of candles and sacred vestments by the bishop, and the wine dealers by the royal butler. But in self-governing towns control was difficult, and the guilds tended to abuse their monopolies rather freely.

Social Services of the Guilds

Although the chief purpose of the guilds was economic, they had social and religious functions as well. They cared for the widows and children of members who died and paid the costs of the funeral. Often they ran schools for the children of their members. Each guild had a patron saint, and the guild conducted religious ceremonies in his or her honor. Usually the religious functions of the guild were performed by a separate organization called a confrérie, but its members were the members of the guild. The religious interests of the guilds are illustrated particularly well by the great nave windows at Chartres cathedral, each of which was donated by one of the town's guilds.

The rise of the craft guilds brought serious political disturbances in many cities. The members of the merchant guild who controlled the town government were naturally disinclined to give it up, and the craft guilds were equally unwilling to leave the merchants in power. The result in
many places was riots and revolts. In Flanders in the fourteenth century the craftsmen rebelled, overthrew the government of the rich merchants, and routed in pitched battle the merchants' ally, the king of France. Later they formed an alliance with Edward III of England. Few revolts of craftsmen made as much commotion as that of the Flemish weavers, but there were serious risings in many towns. As a rule they were terminated by some arrangement that gave the craft guilds a share in the town government.

The guild system had many obvious advantages. It provided a large measure of social and economic security for guild members. It also supplied the means for guild members to co-operate for all sorts of activity—social, economic, and political. The great weakness of the system was its inability to adjust itself to technological progress. No guild member could use a new method of manufacture until it had been accepted by the guild as a whole and provided for in the regulations. Such acceptance was in practice almost impossible. Hence from very early times innovators were forced to work outside the jurisdiction of the guilds. Thus in the twelfth century the regular method of fulling cloth was to put it in water and stamp on it or beat it with paddles. Late in the century it occurred to someone that water power could do this more effectively, and fulling mills began to appear. But the guilds refused to have anything to do with them. The fulling mills were built outside the towns away from the jurisdiction of the guilds, usually on the land of a noble so powerful that the guilds dared not refuse to accept the product of his mills. In general this was the story of later technological improvements. Much of the wool industry of late mediæval England grew up in the countryside to avoid the guilds.