

COLCHESTER BAYS, SAYS AND PERPETUANAS.

BY ELIOT HOWARD.

IN the Act of Parliament 13th Anne, c. 20, A.D. 1713, "for the speedy and effectual preserving the navigation of the River of Thames by stopping the breach in the Levels of Havering and Dagenham in the County of Essex, &c," after enumerating certain dues which might be collected from vessels entering the Thames towards the cost of the repairs, there occurs the following final clause :—

"Provided always that nothing in this Act contained shall charge the Two Colchester Packet Boats above four times in the year with the said duties of 3/- a voyage they going weekly from Wivenhoe to London with Bays, Says and Perpetuanas, and from London to Wivenhoe with Wooll to be manufactured at Colchester."

The fact that the Bays, Says and Perpetuanas of Colchester, were of sufficient importance to find their way thus into an Act of Parliament appears to justify an attempt to save from oblivion what little knowledge can now be gathered about them, but on looking through the information obtained from various quarters, I find that there is little to add to what I have received through the kindness of Dr. H. Laver of Colchester and our excellent Secretary Mr. G. F. Beaumont.

In Murray's *English Dictionary* we find, under "Baize" the following forms, "bayes, baies, bease, bayze, bayz, bays, baize (1570 in Godefroi "les baies et sarges"). Latin *badius*, chestnut coloured, *bay*: so named from its original colour, &c. A coarse woollen stuff having a long nap, &c."

In the memorandum book of one of the old woollen mills in Somersetshire, under date 1804, reference is made to "Orange list bay—Colchester bay—Long bay—South sea bay," and in 1813 "Lisbon or broad baizes—Meltons or R.M. Baizes." Again in 1821 "made some baizes or more properly raised serges." But the present owners of the mills are unable now to trace what the fabrics so described may have been.

At first sight it would appear that *bays* are the same fabric as we now call *baize*, and that *says* are what we call *serges*. But we shall see that such a conclusion may prove to be too hasty.

In the present day we generally connect *baize* with green colour and think of a specially coarse kind of cloth, but apparently this quite misleads us as to the nature of the "Colchester bays."

Dr. Laver points out the strange fact, that although the manufacture died out so recently that one or more of those who were engaged in the work may be still alive, all knowledge on the subject seems to have disappeared.

There is, however, in the Colchester Museum a small piece of the fabric, about six inches square, secured by Dr. Laver at great expense, and this is the only sample in good condition known to exist. The fabric appears to have been of fine texture woven like serge, that is, formed like a twill, the shuttle not passing over and under alternate threads as in calico, but passing over more than one thread.

In spite of the supposed origin of the name from *badius* or bay colour, the Colchester bays appear to have been generally pure white, but that they were sometimes coloured seems probable from the minutes of the Coachmakers' Company, 11th Nov., 1690, when the purchase was ordered of "— yards of Colchester bays to line the Company's standing on my Ld. Mayor's day."

In the records of the Somerset Mills is found frequent mention also of "Says" but here again there is little to guide as to the details of the manufacture, and especially on the question whether in the West of England they were the same as serges. Dr. Laver says that the Colchester *Says* were not serges, that is to say, they were woven with one thread up and one down like calico, and not by passing the shuttle over several threads so as to form a twill. The specimens he has seen were green and appear to have been used commonly for bed-hangings, being frequently mentioned in old wills. In Dawson Turner's *Domestic Architecture*, pt. I., p. 71, in a foot note, "a fringe of say" is mentioned.

In the Autobiography of Mrs. Gilbert (Ann Taylor) edited by her son, the late Josiah Gilbert of Ongar, we find the following note on the subject (page 68, Fifth Edition, 1888).

"The 'bay' and 'say' manufacture was brought into Colchester in 1570 by eleven Dutch families flying from the Alva persecution.

¹ From old records quoted in Beaumont's *History of Coggeshall* it would appear that the Essex "bays" were, as sold by the weavers generally white, and subsequently dyed to suit the taste of the purchasers.

'Say' was a kind of serge, all wool, much used by the 'religious' for shirts and by the English Quakers for aprons. The word is said to be derived from *sagum*, a soldiers coarse cloak or a kind of blanket."

As regards Perpetuanas we have been quite unable to trace any such long historical sequence or in fact to find much trace of any kind. The name is quite unknown in the West of England and does not appear in books of reference, but it seems clear that the fabric so known was a cloth of very durable character. The name was doubtless given as a sort of trade mark and connected with *perpetual* wearing qualities and not with the obscure black letter Saint Perpetua who appears in our Calendar on March 7th.