

The Economic History of Modern Europe

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The Economic History of Modern Europe

WHEN World War II broke out, the economic history of Modern Europe was largely an underdeveloped and uncultivated field. One country only, Britain, had a well-established school of economic historians, which was already quite prolific. In Germany, there had been a promising start at the end of the 19th century, mostly with the historical school of economists, but it had largely petered out, even before the deadly influence of Nazism set in. In other countries, a number of scholars had done valuable and even brilliant work, but they were few and isolated, and political, diplomatic, religious history remained supreme. This was the case, for example, in France, which had one single chair of economic history in its eighteen universities, despite the passionate campaign which had been waged during the 1930's to promote work in economic and social history by the new journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, under the leadership of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. Moreover, pre-war economic history was mostly institutional, with a side-line in the study of techniques and innovations. As Professor Herlihy points out in another article for works on the earlier centuries, scholars were "thinking primarily in terms of institutions and of total economic systems based upon them."

However, during the last quarter of a century, economic history has grown very fast in Europe,¹ largely because the economic difficulties of the 1930's and of the war and post-war periods had compelled historians to become conscious of the importance of economic problems. New chairs, departments, and research institutes have been established in many universities; associations of economic historians have been created in a number of countries; existing journals, like *The Economic History Review* or *Annales* have expanded, new ones have been started, often in specialized fields, like history of agriculture, of transport, of business, of metallurgy. . . . ; meetings and conferences, both national and international, have multiplied. In some countries, like France, economic and social history

This paper deals with research relative to Western Europe, and neglects deliberately Russia and Eastern Europe, owing to its author's incompetence.

¹ And it "took off" in some countries, like Spain, where it was practically non-existent before the war.

became so self-confident, aggressive and imperialist, that it seemed at times on the way of supplanting and liquidating the more traditional forms of history, which the most vociferous apologists of the new discipline denounced as obsolete and uninteresting. In 1961, 41 percent of doctoral theses in progress in France, in modern history, were in the economic and social field.²

This fast expansion in the number of economic historians (the recent international conferences have mustered several hundreds of them) has brought about an enormous increase in the volume of publications, so that it is getting quite difficult to keep abreast with new work, even in relatively specialized fields. I do not intend therefore to survey or to list even the most important of them.³ Moreover, a large majority of publications belong to a traditional style of economic history, and their methods, though growing more sophisticated, are those which had been elaborated in the 1920's and 1930's;⁴ they are sectorial or regional monographs, based on a careful and scholarly analysis of primary sources and keeping close to those sources; this is their strong point, and they have brought to light a mass of new and useful data; but being fearful of generalizations, limited in their ambitions,⁵ they have added to our knowledge of the past, without renewing it, and, though I do not want to belittle their valuable contribution, I should like to concentrate on the new methods and the new interests, which have recently appeared among the more forward-looking economic historians. In this respect, the two most important developments—which moreover are closely inter-related—have been the shifts from short- to long-term studies, and from qualitative to quantitative analysis.

During the 1940's and most of the 1950's, the major interest of many economic historians was the study of short-term fluctuations, of business cycles, with an emphasis upon economic crises, though some attention was also paid to longer, Kondratieff-type movements. This resulted undoubtedly from the strong impact upon a whole generation by the depression in the 1930's, and also from the in-

² Comité français des sciences historiques, *La Recherche historique en France de 1940 à 1965* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1965), p. xxv.

³ References in footnotes are therefore limited to a few works which are considered as representative of recent trends in research.

⁴ The methodology of British economic history, for instance, derives mainly from the example set by T. S. Ashton, who was the true founder of the "British school."

⁵ J. F. Bergier, "Heurs et malheurs de l'histoire économique en Suisse," *Cahiers d'histoire*, XII, 1-2 (1967), pp. 41-43 (Rencontres franco-suissees d'histoire économique et sociale).

fluence of Marxism, for which crises are an essential feature of capitalism. Moreover, historians were able to use the techniques of analysis and the conceptual framework which had been elaborated by business cycles specialists, while the study of economic fluctuations was of immediate and obvious use for explaining social and political movements, especially revolutions.

This interest was especially strong in France, under the influence of Ernest Labrousse, and of his 1944 book on the crisis of the French economy before the 1789 Revolution,⁶ in which he had built up the model of the *ancien type*, or subsistence crisis, brought about by the failure of grain crops, and which appeared as characteristic of pre-industrial economies. This model was used in various studies of early modern and early 19th century crises,⁷ while there was a good deal of discussion to ascertain when *ancien type* crises had been superseded by modern overproduction crises.⁸ But, even for the more recent periods, crises were prominent in French writings, as in Fohlen's book on the textile industries under the Second Empire, which is organized around the cotton famine.⁹ However, business cycles were also in the forefront in a number of books on British economic history published during the post-war years, both by British and by American authors, such as Gayer's, Rostow's and Schwartz's *Growth and Fluctuations of the British Economy*, Rostow's *British Economy of the Nineteenth Century*, Ashton's *Economic Fluctuations*, and the monographs by R. C. O. Matthews and J. R. T. Hughes;¹⁰ the same interest and the same kind of intensive

⁶ C.-E. Labrousse, *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution. I. Aperçus généraux, sources, méthode, objectifs; la crise de la viticulture* (Paris: P.U.F., 1944).

⁷ For instance: P. Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1960); A. Chabert, *Essai sur les mouvements des revenus et de l'activité économique en France de 1798 à 1820*, 2 vols. (Paris: M. T. Génin, 1945-1949); C.-E. Labrousse, éditeur, *Aspects de la crise et de la dépression de l'économie française au milieu du XIXe siècle* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Imprimerie centrale de l'Ouest, 1956); see also various articles by Jean Meuvret.

⁸ But the concept and model of the *crise d'ancien type* have become a dogma, which nobody in France has dared to discuss openly; see also the articles by D. S. Landes ("The Statistical Studies of French Crises") and A. Danière ("Feudal Incomes and Demand Elasticity for Bread in Late Eighteenth Century France"), *THE JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY*, X, 2 (Nov. 1950), pp. 195-211 and XVIII, 3 (Sept. 1958), pp. 317-344, respectively.

⁹ C. Fohlen, *L'industrie textile au temps du Second Empire* (Paris: Plon, 1956); see also J. Bouvier, *Le Krach de l'Union Générale, 1878-1885* (Paris: P.U.F., 1960).

¹⁰ A. D. Gayer, W. W. Rostow, A. J. Schwartz, *The Growth and Fluctuations of the British Economy 1790-1850* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953); W. W. Rostow, *British Economy of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1948);

studies of short periods appeared among Belgian and Italian scholars, and in the numerous German writings on the *Vormärz*.

However, in the 1950's and more in the 1960's, there was a shift of emphasis towards the study of economic growth—a concept which had been hitherto ignored by economic historians, and therefore towards analysis of long-term change and development. This shift of interest resulted from outside influences: in the post-war years, the problems of underdeveloped countries and the difficulties they were undergoing to “take off,” had come to loom large for economists, who had devoted a great deal of work to the problem of growth, and were trying to discover in the history of the most advanced countries some lessons for the Third World. Rostow's *Stages*, and the discussions about it at Stockholm and Konstanz,¹¹ were instrumental in interesting European economic historians in growth problems, this evolution being also helped by the influence of W. A. Lewis in England, of François Perroux in France, of L. H. Dupriez in Belgium. Still, this new orientation did meet with some resistance, mostly from left-wingers and marxists, who were reluctant to take up an approach which might shake up their pessimistic view of economic change under capitalism; so they maintained that the crucial factor for the historian was not the overall rate of growth, but the social distribution of its benefits and of incomes, as well as the short-term fluctuations which are the only ones to be perceived by contemporaries.¹²

However, the study of growth, of its conditions, its stages, its rhythms has eventually compelled recognition as a major field for economic historians. A consequence has been that they have been handling much lengthier periods than formerly; typical in this respect are the recent French “multi-secular” regional studies which

T. S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); R. C. O. Matthews, *A Study in Trade-Cycle History. Economic Fluctuations in Great Britain. 1833-42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954); J. R. T. Hughes, *Fluctuations in Trade, Industry and Finance. A Study of British Economic Development 1850-1860* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960).

¹¹ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth. A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); *First International Conference of Economic History. Contributions, Communications, Stockholm, August, 1960* (Paris-The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1960); W. W. Rostow, editor, *The Economics of Take-off into Sustained Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1963).

¹² For instance, P. Vilar, “Croissance économique et analyse historique,” *First International Conference of Economic History . . .*, pp. 35-82; J. Bouvier is far more open-minded in “L'appareil conceptuel dans l'histoire économique contemporaine,” a 1965 article, reprinted in his *Histoire économique et histoire sociale* (Geneva: Droz, 1968), pp. 11-24.

span one or two centuries, or even more, like Le Roy Ladurie who deals with Languedoc from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.¹³ Of course, for the early modern period, in most countries, the conclusion is that there was precious little long-term growth, especially in income per capita, but outbursts of expansion which after a time were interrupted by sharp crisis and long depression, like in the fourteenth or the seventeenth centuries; the emphasis in such works is on the obstacles and barriers to growth in traditional economies, on the ceiling which a stagnating agricultural productivity imposed to their progress; these views have been elaborated by Le Roy Ladurie, whose Malthusian model appears presently quite attractive. There is of course the exceptional case of England, where growth, even per capita, seems to have been far less irregular from the late Middle Ages, than on the Continent, and recent studies have stressed and tried to explain the uniqueness of the English experience. The interest in growth appears also in the work which has been recently devoted to the hitherto neglected origins of the Industrial Revolution, in the attention paid to the factors which were favorable or unfavorable to its diffusion in Continental countries during the nineteenth century, and to the differential processes of industrialization, which often deviated from the English pattern.¹⁴ Another consequence of the rise of growth to the forefront is the attempt to measure it accurately, which is related to the emergence of quantification, another important, and possibly more important and pervasive development in recent economic history.

Quantitative studies of the European past are not something entirely new. One could quote Tooke and Thorold Rogers, and some important work in the inter-war period, by Silberling, Schlote, Hoff-

¹³ P. Léon, *La naissance de la grande industrie en Dauphiné, fin du XVIIe siècle-1869*, 2 vols. (Paris: P.U.F., 1954), a pioneer work in this field; P. Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis . . .*; P. Vilar, *La Catalogne dans l'Espagne moderne*, 3 vols. (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1962); P. Deyon, *Amiens, Capitale provinciale. Etude sur la société urbaine au 17e siècle* (Paris-The Hague: Mouton, 1967); E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1966). Still these writers pay a good deal of attention to short-term fluctuations.

¹⁴ On this point, one can mention: A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective. A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1962); M. Lévy-Leboyer, *Les banques européennes et l'industrialisation internationale dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: P.U.F., 1964) and "Le processus d'industrialisation: le cas de l'Angleterre et de la France," *Revue historique*, CCXXXIX, n. 486 (April-June 1968), pp. 281-298.

An international conference was held at Lyon in October 1970 on the typology of industrialization; its proceedings will be published.

mann or Simiand; also the studies undertaken in the 1930's under the auspices of the "International Scientific Committee on Price History," by Beveridge, Elsass, Hamilton, Hauser and Posthumus. Indeed, price history was for a time the most progressive branch of economic history; it supplied the first long time series which allowed some measurement of economic phenomena before the nineteenth century, and it made historians familiar with statistical techniques. And it is still going strong in several countries—Britain being a notable exception; some important works have been recently published,¹⁵ and a masterful synthesis on "Prices in Europe from 1450 to 1750" by F. Braudel and Frank Spooner has appeared in Volume IV of the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*.¹⁶

However, in the early post-war period, economic history, with the exception of price history, was basically qualitative; if it used figures or statistics, it was to illustrate statements which were essentially descriptive or narrative. But in recent years a growing number of economic historians have made quantification their chief tool of research and statistics the basic framework of their studies, qualitative data being used in order to illustrate them.

In this respect, the most radical innovation has been the attempt to quantify and measure the growth of national economies considered globally, by applying to historical development the techniques which had been perfected by national income statisticians, in order to reconstruct regressively the national product and its components.¹⁷ The initiative of this enterprise has come from outside the economic history profession, from Simon Kuznets and the "International Association for Research in Income and Wealth," which from 1950 onward encouraged, sponsored and helped financially

¹⁵ For instance A. Friis and K. Glamann, *A History of Prices and Wages in Denmark, 1600-1800*, I (Copenhagen and London: Longmans, 1958); C. Verlinden, éditeur, *Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant (XVe-XVIIIe eeuw)* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1965); M. Baulant and J. Meuvret, *Prix des céréales extraits de la Mercuriale de Paris, 1520-1698*, 2 vols. (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1962).

¹⁶ E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson, editors, *The Economy of Expanding Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 374-486.

In the 1940's and 1950's, there was an idea abroad, especially among French or French influenced historians, that economic development was determined by price movements, which in their turn were regulated by the output of precious metals. Fortunately, one does not hear much of it presently.

¹⁷ A precursor in this field was E. Lindahl, E. Dahlgren, K. Kock, *National Income of Sweden, 1861-1930* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1937).

research on the growth of national product of several European countries.¹⁸ Progress reports were presented at several meetings of the "International Association" in the 1950's, and eventually three major works have been published: *British Economic Growth 1688-1959*, by Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole (1961); *Histoire quantitative de l'économie française*, from 1700 to 1958, by a team headed by Jean Marczewski, a more extensive undertaking with eleven volumes published since 1961, but which is still far from completion; and for Germany, Walther Hoffmann's *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1965).¹⁹

According to Marczewski, this type of work is the only one to deserve the name of "quantitative history," which he has defined as "a method of economic history, which integrates all the facts which are studied in a system of interdependent accounts and which draws conclusions in the form of quantitative aggregates which are entirely and solely determined by the data of the system." And he has maintained that quantitative history is superior to traditional forms of economic history, even those which used freely quantitative data, especially because it is more objective and exhaustive in its choice of data.²⁰

Naturally enough, this new approach has been received by most economic historians with mixed feelings, to say the least. Deane, Marczewski and Hoffmann have all been taken to task for their lack of criticism of source materials, for their relying on doubtful estimates of outputs or incomes by seventeenth or eighteenth century writers, for their statistical juggling and their reckless interpolations

¹⁸ For a brief "history" of this undertaking, see J. Marczewski, "Histoire quantitative, buts et méthodes," *Histoire quantitative de l'économie française*, I (Paris: I.S.E.A., 1961), pp. xli-xlvii.

¹⁹ P. Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688-1959. Trends and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962; 2nd edition, 1967); J. Marczewski, éditeur, *Histoire quantitative de l'économie française* (Paris: I.S.E.A., 1961-1969), 11 volumes, most of them written by T. J. Markovitch and J. Toutain; W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Springer, 1965).

Shorter studies devoted to some other countries had been presented to I.A.R.I.W.'s meetings and published in *Income and Wealth*, Series II, III and V (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1952, 1953, 1955).

Simon Kuznets has synthesized the first results of this international research project in his articles "Quantitative Aspects of the Economic Growth of Nations," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (1956-1965); see also his *Modern Economic Growth. Rate, Structure and Spread* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966).

²⁰ J. Marczewski, "Histoire quantitative, buts et méthodes," pp. iii-viii; see also *Introduction à l'histoire quantitative* (Geneva: Droz, 1965).

or extrapolations.²¹ It seems unfortunate that such criticisms are often valid, at least for the period before the early nineteenth century, when the statistical material is nonexistent or inadequate, so that some of the conclusions which at first sight appeared new and interesting, are in fact very fragile.²² Another serious criticism is that the resort in those books to ten-year averages laminates everything and conceals the turning points.

Anyway, some writers, especially Pierre Chaunu, have rejected the use of aggregates and put forward, for the early modern period, an alternative method, which they call *serial history*; this would be better adapted to the pre-statistical age, for which masses of quantifiable data are dormant in archives, but the historian has to collect and elaborate them, to build up the time series himself, which for more recent periods governments gracefully supply ready-made. The idea is to construct carefully from original sources, long, yearly and homogeneous time series of economic variables, like the one Chaunu himself built up for the trade between Seville and the Indies in the sixteenth century. Such series, which are generally locally-based, give, of course, a partial view only, but the best of them can be representative of a much larger sector, and their multiplication ought to be able to illuminate the growth and fluctuations of regional or even national economies.²³

This seems a rather sensible view, inasmuch as, despite their shortcomings, the work of Deane or Marczewski is not to be done

²¹ See for instance, on Deane and Cole: T. C. Barker, "Book Review of Deane and Cole's *British Economic Growth, 1688-1959*," *Economica*, XXXI, n.124 (Nov. 1964), pp. 449-452; A. H. John, "British Economic Growth, 1688-1959," *Kyklos*, XVII, 2 (1964), pp. 276-280; J. F. Wright, "British Economic Growth, 1688-1959," *The Economic History Review*, XVIII, 2 (August 1965), pp. 397-412; on Marczewski: P. Vilar, "Pour une meilleure compréhension entre économistes et historiens. 'Histoire quantitative' ou économie rétrospective?" *Revue Historique*, CCXXXIII, 2, n. 474 (April-June 1965), pp. 293-312; P. Chaunu, "Histoire quantitative ou histoire sérielle," *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto*, n.3 (1964), pp. 165-176, with a rejoinder by Marczewski, pp. 177-180; on Hoffmann: R. Tilly, "Soll und Haben: Recent German Economic History and the Problem of Economic Development," *THE JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY*, XXIX, 2 (June 1969), pp. 312-314.

²² Such as Deane's suggestion of an acceleration of economic growth in England in the 1740's, or Toutain's hypothesis about a marked increase in French farm output during the eighteenth century. However, most commentators—except some "hypercritical" historians—have not attacked the principle of using national accounting methods in economic history, but only the ways in which they were concretely applied in the above-mentioned works.

²³ P. Chaunu, "Histoire quantitative ou histoire sérielle;" "L'histoire sérielle. Bilan et perspectives," *Revue Historique*, n. 494 (April-June 1970), pp. 297-320; H. and P. Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique (1504-1650)*, 12 vols. (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1956-1960).

again for a long time, and as a matter of fact, a lot of work has been and is being done in "serial history," generally by teams of researchers, owing to the enormous mass of documents which must be exploited. For instance Le Roy Ladurie has master-minded a project which extracts from the leases of tithes some indexes of French agricultural output from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century;²⁴ Deane and Sydney Pollard are working on capital formation in Britain.²⁵ Another field for which rich data are available is ships' movements in and out of ports and a fair number of statistical studies of sea-borne trade have already appeared; one of the most important has been done by J. Delumeau on Saint-Malo in the seventeenth and eighteenth century with the help of computers,²⁶ and Herman van der Wee is starting a large-scale project on Antwerp in the nineteenth century.

At any rate, the effort at quantification is likely the most promising trend in European economic history,²⁷ though we must not hope for any short cuts, and though serial or quantitative history is mainly descriptive, and its results have to be analyzed and interpreted. Immense possibilities are open to this kind of work by the progress of computers, but hitherto they have been used much more in neighboring fields, such as historical demography or social history.

This leads us to another basic character of economic history in

²⁴ E. Le Roy Ladurie et al., "La production agricole en France (XVe-XVIIIe siècle) notamment d'après les dîmes," Papers prepared for the First Conference of French Economic Historians, Paris, January 1969, (mimeographed); some of these papers have been published, for instance: J. Goy and A.-L. Head-König, "Une expérience. Les revenus décimaux en France méditerranéenne. XVIe-XVIIIe siècles," *Etudes rurales*, n. 36 (1969), pp. 66-83.

We must mention also the important and excellent work on agricultural history, especially from a quantitative point of view, which is being done at Wageningen (Netherlands), by B. H. Slicher van Bath and his collaborators; see for instance his "Yield Ratios, 810-1820," *A. A. G. Bijdragen*, 10 (1963).

²⁵ Papers presented at a Conference on this project, which was held in Sheffield in 1969, are about to be published. At Liverpool, a team under J. R. Harris is working on the provision of capital in Lancashire.

One can mention also a tentative index of French industrial production: F. Crouzet, "Essai de construction d'un indice annuel de la production industrielle française au XIXe siècle," *Annales E. S. C.*, XXV, 1 (January-February 1970), pp. 56-99; English translation in Rondo Cameron, editor, *Essays in French Economic History* (Homewood, Ill.: R. D. Irwin, Inc., 1970), pp. 245-278. An index of Belgian industrial production is being prepared at the University of Liège by a team under P. Lebrun.

²⁶ J. Delumeau et al., *Le mouvement du port de Saint-Malo, 1681-1720. Bilan Statistique* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1966); two more volumes are expected on the traffic of this port, for which rich and complete records have been preserved.

²⁷ It has been tried at a world history level by F. Braudel in his *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme (XVe-XVIIIe siècle)*, I (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967); see P. Chaunu, "La pesée globale en histoire," *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto*, 15 (March 1968), pp. 135-164.

most European countries, with, again, Britain being an important exception: it is not a fully independent subject, in the sense that scholars who work only on purely economic problems are rather scarce and that most of them have a foot, if I may say, in some neighboring field. This results partly from the nature of academic institutions, partly from the widespread and strong influence exerted by the ideal of "total history," which was launched by *Annales* in the 1930's, and which wants history to be a study of past societies in their entirety, taking into account all the factors which have come to bear upon man's behavior.²⁸ This approach has certainly been stimulating in many ways, but it involves a serious risk of dispersion of efforts, of amateurism, and it has led in many cases to economic history being sacrificed, being treated as preliminary spade-work to higher pursuits, such as the study of social structures and *mentalités*—which are a French obsession—or of the relationship between economic and political developments, on which German writers remain very keen. It is typical that the leading West German journal in our field is the *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*; and Richard Tilly has recently calculated that over 50 percent of its articles during the last ten years were devoted to social history;²⁹ as for the French *Annales*, their subtitle—*Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*—reveals a still broader and more diversified approach, and, as a matter of fact, it prints relatively few articles on economic questions. However, the constant calls for cooperation with other social sciences and for inter-disciplinary research have not, hitherto, proved to be effective and productive.³⁰

Moreover, there are two fields which have recently attracted so many European scholars that they have been somewhat of a brain-drain at the expense of economic history,³¹ though, on the other

²⁸ Marxist writers reject the idea of an autonomous economic history, and object to the separation with "social" (i.e., class struggle) history.

²⁹ Richard Tilly, "Soll und Haben: Recent German Economic History and the Problem of Economic Development," *THE JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY*, XXIX, 2 (June 1969), p. 301.

³⁰ The *Annales* school had advocated early a close cooperation between history and geography, which F. Braudel achieved in his master work on the sixteenth century Mediterranean, but in recent years the two disciplines have tended to move apart.

³¹ On the other hand, the history of sciences and techniques is not much cultivated and remains a separate field, while the relationship between economic and scientific development badly needs to be seriously investigated; see however, A. E. Musson and E. Robinson, *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969). This is true *a fortiori*, for the

hand, they have brought to it many new and useful data.³² The first is historical demography, the success of which has already been stressed by Professor Herlihy. It is a relatively new field, which did not really emerge before the late 1950's, but grew very fast during the 1960's.³³ It was pioneered by French demographers and historians,³⁴ especially Louis Henry, who achieved the decisive breakthrough with the method of families reconstitution from parish registers; but it was taken up subsequently in several countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain and especially England, where the Cambridge group, under P. Laslett and E. A. Wrigley, is taking advantage of its late start to bring it to a new pitch of sophistication.³⁵ The new techniques having been forged for the study of the early modern period, it has attracted the majority of historical demographers, and the nineteenth century has been less popular; the first monographs were devoted to small villages, such as the now famous Crulay and Colyton, but wider scope studies of towns or regions are now beginning to come out; and some important conclusions have already emerged, such as the early coming of birth control to England, France and Geneva.

Another popular field has been social history, and especially the statistical analysis of social structures, of the distribution of population, income and wealth among the various classes and professions within the social pyramid. It uses "massive" sources, which generally have to be exploited by sampling methods and computers because of their sheer bulk, such as tax assessments, notarial archives (for instance marriage settlements), census documents, lists of electors, etc. Though this type of research is fairly new, it has already

history of education, though some interest in it has recently emerged among economic historians.

³² But the correlations between demographic and economic developments are still far from clear.

³³ P. Guillaume and J.-P. Poussou, *Démographie historique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970), pp. 21 ff., gives a useful survey of the birth and growth of historical demography. Two decisive turning points were 1952-1953 (articles by P. Goubert and L. Henry on parish registers) and 1958 (publication of Henry's and Gautier's work on Crulay).

³⁴ As a result, of course, of the acute demographic problems of France. The "Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques" had been established in 1945.

³⁵ See for instance E. A. Wrigley, editor, *An Introduction to English Historical Demography from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), and the bibliography in his *Société et population* (Paris: Hachette, 1969).

produced a number of important works, especially in France,³⁶ Germany, and in Italy, and many more are in progress.³⁷

Some of the preceding remarks have pointed out an interesting factor in European economic history, which is the existence of several national "schools," with different fields of interest, methodology and approach. This results from variations in academic traditions and institutions, as well as in the intellectual, and I would say, political climate in which economic history has developed. With, I admit, a good deal of simplification, one can distinguish three main schools—British, French and German, each one with its satellites, so to speak.

The British "school" is certainly the most numerous—the Economic History Society has an enormous membership—and in many respects the best, as testify the very high standards of the *Economic History Review*, which has no equivalent on the Continent. In a typically British way, it has developed progressively, without the neo-mania which is so prevalent in France, but has always been fairly open-minded towards innovations, as is shown by its early and sustained interest in the problem of economic growth. Its main characteristic is the combination which it has achieved between traditional methods of careful scholarship and a quite sophisticated level of economic analysis, its exploitation of primary sources through modern economic tools. Though they have been sometimes criticized in the United States for their analytical imprecision, most British economic historians know far more modern economics and use it more skillfully than their Continental counterparts; and there is also a strong tradition among British economists of statistical studies of the past.³⁸ England has therefore an extensive and excellent monographic literature,³⁹ which covers nearly all aspects of its modern economic development and has brought to light the basic

³⁶ A pioneer and important work was Adeline Daumard, *La Bourgeoisie parisienne de 1815 à 1848* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963).

³⁷ German writers have also shown interest in the formation of the industrial labor force, while Britain has a flourishing school of urban history.

³⁸ For instance, E. H. Phelps Brown and S. V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables compared with Builders' Wage-rates," *Economica*, N. S., XXIII, 92 (November 1956), pp. 296-314; C. H. Feinstein, *Domestic Capital Formation in the United Kingdom, 1920-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); A. K. Cairncross, *Home and Foreign Investment, 1870-1913. Studies in Capital Accumulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

³⁹ Any selection would be arbitrary and unfair, but books like Peter Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), or S. B. Saul, *Studies in British Overseas Trade, 1870-1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1960), show British scholarship at its best.

relevant facts, so that there are several multi-volume series dealing with its general economic history.⁴⁰ Unrivalled for the breadth and depth of their work,⁴¹ the British delight in sophisticated controversies, which sometimes take a byzantine character, but which are fascinating to watch.

One may link up with the British school, the Scandinavian economic historians, especially the Swedes, who have done much excellent work, despite some excessive taste for details; fortunately part of it is available in English, thanks to the *Scandinavian Economic History Review*.⁴²

As for French economic history,⁴³ a basic character is that, owing to the watertight separation in universities between economics and history departments, and to the lack of interest by economists—except the team around Marczewski, it is being written by historians, who lack adequate knowledge of or training in economy theory and the techniques of economic analysis, and whose only conceptual framework is for too many of them a sprinkling of milk and water Marxism. Moreover, owing to the centralization of the French University system, French historians have been especially receptive to the influence of a few talented scholars and teachers, principally in the last twenty-five years, Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse. The tremendous impact they have made upon the younger generations has been largely beneficial, but also sometimes stifling, so that one might say that French economic history has suffered from the cult of personality. Under those circumstances, French research is both old-fashioned and innovating. It keeps too much interest in traditional problems like short-term fluctuations or price history, or in obsolete concepts, like Simiand's A and B phases. But its strong point is its quest for and critical use of new and unpublished sources,

⁴⁰ T. S. Ashton, editor, *An Economic History of England* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955); Asa Briggs, editor, *Social and Economic History of England* (London: Longmans, 1962); *The Pelican Economic History of Britain* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1967, in progress).

⁴¹ As testified the articles reprinted in E. M. Carus-Wilson, editor, *Essays in Economic History*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1954-1962). Compare with "continental" articles in F. Crouzet, W. H. Chaloner and W. M. Stern, editors, *Essays in European Economic History, 1789-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969).

⁴² And also *Economy and History*, published by the Institute of Economic History of the University of Lund.

⁴³ The volume edited by R. Cameron, in the American Economic Association Translation Series, which is quoted in note 25, reprints in English translation a number of French articles on economic history; it includes (pp. 1-8) an excellent introduction on the "French school."

especially those liable to statistical treatment, and it has shown a growing concern for quantification and "serial history." The French have been pioneers in the fields of historical demography and of the study of social structures, but the competition of these new branches and the preoccupation with "total history" have somewhat harmed economic history—which, moreover, Labrousse and his followers consider too often as the servant of social and political history. The main French contributions have taken the shape of massive monographs, very often on a regional basis,⁴⁴ which are based upon the careful scrutiny of a wide range of manuscript sources, but where interpretation remains too often impressionistic, and lacks internal coherence, for want of a theoretical framework derived from modern economics. This handicap is not too serious however in studies of the early modern period, which have been a French favorite, and on the other hand, some recent works on the nineteenth century display a more sophisticated knowledge of economics and an effort to integrate the economist's problematics into economic history.⁴⁵ As for synthesis, it is just starting, with the publication early in 1970 of the first installment of a large *Economic and Social History of France*,⁴⁶ in four volumes. Despite their shortcomings, the French historians have certainly done a great deal of interesting work, and so they are quite self-confident, and unfortunately rather chauvinistic, as you may have felt in international conferences.

I hope I am neither chauvinistic myself, nor too rash, in stating that in neighboring countries—Italy, Spain,⁴⁷ Portugal, French-speaking Switzerland, but also in Belgium (which has a well-established and excellent school of economic history, but which has many intellectual links with France),⁴⁸ economic history is practiced more or less on the French pattern, and has been strongly influenced by the French, especially by the *Annales* school. We find there the

⁴⁴ Some of them are quoted in note 13.

⁴⁵ For instance, the forthcoming book by François Caron on the history of the French Northern Railway (*Compagnie du Nord*).

⁴⁶ Ernest Labrousse, Pierre Léon, Pierre Goubert, Jean Bouvier, Charles Carrière, Paul Harsin, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, tome II, *Des derniers temps de l'âge seigneurial aux préludes de l'âge industriel (1660-1789)* (Paris: P.U.F., 1970).

⁴⁷ J. Vicens Vives, editor, *Historia social y económica de España y América*, 5 vols. (Barcelona: 1957-1959), is a major general survey which, unfortunately, could not be built upon a solid monographic basis.

⁴⁸ See J. A. Van Houtte, éditeur, *Un quart de siècle de recherche historique en Belgique, 1944-1968* (Louvain and Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1970).

same emphasis on the early modern period (although Italians and Spaniards are also interested in nineteenth century industrialization, or rather in the lack of it in their countries), and on regional studies, the same combination in many works of economic, demographic and social history, as well as the influence of Marxism, which is especially strong in Italy.⁴⁹

I shall be briefer on German economic history, as it has been surveyed at length by Professor Richard Tilly in the June 1969 issue of *THE JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY*.⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, this article was a severe indictment. Tilly stressed the traditional, conservative, institutional character of nearly all German writings, their descriptive and narrative style, their lack of analytical framework; he wrote that German economic historians, "producing economic history without economics have been playing Hamlet without the Prince," and that the comparison with English scholarship was most unfavorable to the Germans. He found them both reluctant to analyze *economic* phenomena and too much inclined to stress politics—especially the intervention of the Prussian state—as factors in economic development, too faithful to the old "Revolution from above" thesis; also too much interested in border-line aspects, such as the institutional framework of agrarian change or of industrialization, or their political consequences, and generally speaking subordinating economic to social and political history. He regretted also the concentration on the early modern period and the *Frühindustrialisierung*, while the decisive phase of German industrialization is neglected and largely unknown. Most of these criticisms are valid, but they apply also to many other Continental scholars, and nonetheless German historians have produced a great deal of useful works, for instance in agrarian, business and social history, and a new generation, often under American influence, seems to be turning to more

⁴⁹ A noteworthy Italian undertaking is the multi-volume *Archivio Economico dell'unificazione italiana*, edited by Carlo Cipolla (Turino: ILTE, 1956-). There is also a rich Italian literature on agrarian problems.

⁵⁰ R. Tilly, "Soll und Haben . . .," pp. 208-319. See also F. Redlich, "Recent Developments in German Economic History," *THE JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY*, XVIII, 4 (December 1958), pp. 516-530; H. Kellenbenz, *Probleme einer deutschen Sozialgeschichte in der neueren Zeit* (Nürnberg: Hochschulverlag Glock und Lutz, 1960); W. Köllmann, "Literaturbericht zur Wirtschafts und Sozialgeschichte," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 11 (Nov., 1968), pp. 700-709; A. Hoffmann, "Neue Aufgaben der Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in Österreich," *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 5 (24 April 1964), pp. 65-81.

economic subjects and especially towards quantitative studies of growth.⁵¹

This distinction between “national schools” of economic history must not be pressed too hard, and there are some interactions and exchanges; for instance, some French scholars are admirers and followers of British methods, while the British have borrowed from France the techniques of historical demography. But on the whole, despite international conferences and meetings, there is not yet any “common market” in European economic history, which remains far too parochial; in overwhelming majority, European scholars are working on their own country. In France only, I think, is there a fair number of historians who have specialized in foreign countries, mostly, under Braudel’s leadership, the Mediterranean, but also England, Germany or Austria.⁵² And the cooperative economic histories of Europe—the *Cambridge* series,⁵³ and the more recent and less ambitious *Fontana*⁵⁴—have not completely succeeded in bringing out an integrated picture of the economic development of Europe as a whole.⁵⁵ In this respect, it is only fair to stress how valuable has been the contribution of American scholars whose best works have brought a wider, comparative, transnational, truly European outlook, not to mention a much deeper intimacy with modern economics. Though Europeans have been critical of some of their works, writers like Cameron, Clough, Gerschenkron, Kindleberger, Kuznets, Landes or Rostow, have undoubtedly had a stimulating and rejuvenating influence on European economic history. May I express therefore the wish that some American scholars turn towards the early modern period, which they have hitherto rather neglected, and bring to it their economic expertise which it badly needs,⁵⁶ and also that the

⁵¹ See some works quoted by R. Tilly, “Soll und Haben . . .,” p. 314.

⁵² F. Braudel, P. Chaunu, L. Dermigny and F. Mauro have also produced large frescoes of “oceanic” history.

⁵³ Though this was achieved in some contributions to *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, especially the outstanding chapter by David Landes in volume VI, which has been reprinted as *The Unbound Prometheus. Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

⁵⁴ C. M. Cipolla, editor, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe* (1969, in progress).

⁵⁵ An exception would be a couple of works on twentieth century economic history: I. Svennilson, *Growth and Stagnation in the European Economy* (Geneva: United Nations Commission for Europe, 1954); M. M. Postan, *An Economic History of Western Europe, 1945-1964* (London: Methuen, 1967).

⁵⁶ A first approach is D. C. North and R. P. Thomas, “An Economic Theory of the Growth of the Western World,” *The Economic History Review*, XXIII, 1 (April 1970), pp. 1-17.

methods of the new economic history, which Europeans have not yet assimilated, be applied to some European problems?⁵⁷

Anyway, the last twenty-five years have undoubtedly witnessed a lot of progress in modern European economic history, though in many cases new approaches and methods have been forced upon traditional economic historians by "interlopers," if I may say, like economists or demographers. This advance has been on a broad but irregular front; the most important progress has been achieved in the study of the early modern period, while the late nineteenth and the twentieth century have been badly neglected, except in Britain, where a lively controversy is going on about the so-called "climacterics," the problem of the stagnation and relative decline of the British economy after 1870.⁵⁸ I can also mention that, despite a number of important publications,⁵⁹ business history has not established itself as a very prominent branch of economic history.

It would be impossible to sum up in a few lines the results of this scattered and varied research, and I shall say only that to my mind, the dominating trend has been a dedramatization of economic history. Both the use of quantitative techniques and the study of long periods have contributed to this, and have minimized the importance of violent short-term fluctuations or the impact of governments' policies. Historians of the early modern period are stressing the enduring archaism of traditional Europe, the slowness of change in basic economic and social structures, the quasi immobilism of the countryside, and, as Professor Herlihy pointed out earlier, the absence of radical departures in agriculture before the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century. Or, as Chaunu puts it, "the long, slow, immobile, hard, dense, geological rhythm of traditional civilization."⁶⁰ It even seems that the long waves of expansion and contraction to which so much attention has been paid, were not, after

⁵⁷ However, some European scholars have used quite recently an econometrical or theoretical approach; for example, H. van der Wee and T. Peeters, "Un modèle économique de croissance interséculaire du commerce mondial (XIIe-XVIIIe siècles)," *Annales E.S.C.*, XXV, 1 (January-February 1970), pp. 100-126; John Hicks, *A Theory of Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁵⁸ This controversy is surveyed in D. H. Aldcroft and H. W. Richardson, *The British Economy, 1870-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

⁵⁹ By D. C. Coleman (Courtaulds), T. C. Barker (Pilkington), C. Wilson (Unilever), in Britain; J. Bouvier (Crédit Lyonnais), B. Gille (Rothschild), P. Léon (Allevard), in France; W. Treue, and many others in Germany; G. Jacquemyns (Langrand-Dumonceau), in Belgium; O. Gasslander (Stockholm Enskilda Bank), K. G. Hildebrand (Stora Kopparberg), in Sweden, etc . . .

⁶⁰ P. Chaunu, "L'histoire géographique," *Revue de l'enseignement supérieur*, 44-45 (1969), p. 67.

all, as dramatic as scholars thought a few years ago; for instance, they do not speak as much today of the “tragic” seventeenth century, as evidence of revival and change even during the last years of Louis XIV have emerged. As for the English Industrial Revolution, it appears now, I think, as the climax of a long but slow process of change and growth,⁶¹ and its impact upon the British economy as a whole as having been, for quite a while, rather restricted. If the nineteenth century did see much more rapid change than the preceding ones, some scholars have pointed out that growth rates, not only for national products, but for industrial production, were then far lower than those to which we are used in the second half of the twentieth century,⁶² so that the break with the traditional economy was progressive. It appears also that, for instance, the so-called Financial Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century, and the struggle between the “old” and the “new” bank, was not so sharp as was thought formerly, that the “stagnation” of the French economy in the nineteenth century, or the decline of Britain after 1870 had been too much overplayed. This tendency to “dedramatize,” to tone down the contrasts, may, however, have gone too far, and some signs of revisionism are faintly appearing.

On the whole, the state of European economic history is rather flourishing, but it is now being threatened, at least in France, Germany and Italy, by the chaotic situation of their universities, the collapse of standards in studies, and the exclusive interest of many students in purely political and contemporary problems.

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⁶¹ Most British historians stress now the importance of the home market for English economic growth, rather than the more spectacular rise of the export trade.

⁶² P. Bairoch, “Le mythe de la croissance économique rapide au XIXe siècle,” *Revue de l’Institut de Sociologie*, 2 (Brussels, 1962), pp. 307-331.