THE CAMBRIDGE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF EUROPE[1]

THIRTEEN years have elapsed since the appearance of the study of medieval agrarian life contained in the first volume of *The Cambridge Economic History*. The foundations of the second, which treats of medieval trade and industry, had already then been laid; but war, post-war dislocation and the removal by death of Professors Clapham and Power, as well as of scholars who had promised contributions and of a colleague so wise in counsel as the never enough to be lamented Marc Bloch, postponed its publication. It is a tribute both to the prescience of the architects who planned it and to the competence of their successors, Professors Postan and Rich, that it should have been possible for the work now before us to follow, with only minor modifications, the original design. Of the eight chapters composing its six hundred odd pages, three deal in turn with the pre-Roman world, the later Western Empire and the regions which had as their metropolis Byzantium; two—the central and most imposing block—with the contrasted, but complementary, economies of North and South, whose interlocking activities made the commerce of medieval Europe, not a chaos, but a system; three more with the fundamental crafts of the textile worker, the miner and metallurgist, and the builder in stone. Naturally, while a high level of scholarship is maintained throughout, not all the contributions are of equal interest or weight; nor will the judicious reader fail to note that some of the generalisations suggested are more valuable as incitements to further research than as epitomising conclusions already established beyond dispute. The former feature is inevitable; the latter, in the opinion of the reviewer, is a virtue, not a fault. The result is a volume which is more than a mere series of monographs, and which, in comprehensiveness, insight and, when the data permit, precision, stands, in its own vast field, alone.

Monetary, credit and investment conditions and techniques are so intimately connected with the subjects here discussed that the incidental character of the treatment accorded them may, at first sight, cause surprise. The editors' decision, however, to postpone for subsequent examination these and certain other topics, such as town life, urban finance and the economic policies of municipal corporations and gilds, has been more than justified by the use which they have made of the space thus secured. It has, in particular, enabled the present work to dwell at length on the too often neglected international background against which particular regional and national economies require in all periods, and not least in that here considered, to be seen. An insularity pardonable in a youthful discipline, con-

[1] *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe. Volume II. Trade and Industry in the Middle Ages.* Edited by M. M. POSTAN and E. E. RICH. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952. Pp. v + 604. 45*s*.)

cerned to consolidate its base before venturing abroad, has unduly restricted the range of English work on economic history, with the consequence that its contributions to the continental chapters of the story, without a grasp of which its domestic problems cannot easily be solved, have been meagre, and that its practitioners continue at times to rattle the dessicated bones of concepts and controversies which a more catholic outlook would have shown to have had their day. The antidote to provincialism offered by the wide horizons and long vistas of *The Cambridge Economic History* is not the least of the services for which gratitude is due. Based on half a century of labour by scholars of a dozen different nationalities, it betrays few of the limitations inevitable in the verdicts of a particular period, place or school; makes movements, not states or even peoples, the leading actors on its stage; and employs the rise, pre-eminence and decline of individual regions to illustrate the vicissitudes of a civilisation shared in different degrees by all.

To do justice to a conspectus so extensive is beyond the power of a single pen; but some features of the landscape revealed by it leap to the eye. The high degree of inter-dependence favoured, when other circumstances were propitious, by the long and deeply indented coast-line of Europe, with the rivers and two inland seas which made commerce accessible to most of its provinces and indispensable to some, needs no emphasis. The prolonged coexistence, in spite of those unifying influences, of different cultural levels, typified by the continuance in some regions of a stone age at a time when in others iron had already ousted bronze, is a converse, and not less significant, trait. The effect of changing population densities in accelerating or retarding the economic tempo; the impact on economic life of political factors, from the order and wide markets of centralised empires to the dynamic supplied by the existence of numerous independent centres of energy, fertilising each other by rivalry, imitation and migration; the contrasted psychologies of different periods, peoples and social strata, confounding interpretations based on the assumption that identical stimuli, such as price changes, will evoke the same response from each; the complexity of so-called simple economies and unceasing mutations of eras sometimes labelled static; the alternation—a recurrent theme—of growth and stagnation, which causes economic progress to resemble, not the broadening river of the conventional metaphor, but an unpredictable succession of irregularly advancing and receding tides—such are a few of the reflections with which a reviewer unversed in medieval economic history is likely to lay this latest study of it down.

Trade, in one form or another, if not as old as man, has too lengthy a pedigree to make the quest for origins a profitable pursuit. The palæolithic contemporaries of the concluding phase of the last ice age were not, it seems, immune to the impulses which prompted Smith's famous comment on the ineradicable human " propensity to truck and barter." Professor Childe's introductory chapter, though not meat for babes, offers illuminating examples of activities later to be known by more majestic names. In parts of neolithic Europe the mists begin to clear; and its characteristic develop-

ments—the minute agricultural surplus emerging as mere collecting is replaced by plot cultivation and stock-breeding; an incipient regional specialisation; and the appearance of something in the nature of regular trade routes by mountain-passes, rivers and coasts—are epitomised by the author with admirable skill. In the ensuing era, where history and prehistory meet, but where archæology still remains our only guide, the high land-marks, which alone can here be mentioned, appear to have been three. The first, from 3000 or so B.C. the chief accelerating factor, consisted in the reaction on Ægean islands and coasts, and through them on the continental hinterland, of the demand for luxuries, materials for armaments and articles for ritual, pomp and display, set in motion by the surplus accruing to the monarchies and hierarchies of the great river civilisations of the Nile and Euphrates deltas. The second, the sequel to the destruction about 1700 B.C. of Knossos, was the shift of the centre of economic gravity from Crete, hitherto the monopolist intermediary between Europe and Egypt, to Mycenæ, and subsequently, when northern pressure threatened an Ægean dark age, the expansion of enterprise in the Western Mediterranean and north of the Alps. The third was a series of technological changes, of which the most significant were the substitution for plot-farming of an agriculture based on some form of plough, and metallurgical improvements, in particular the smelting and forging of iron, which, being widely distributed and relatively cheap, had no rival as a metal for daily use. The evidence of the sixth and fifth centuries points to an increase in the number of specialised crafts; a multiplication and enlargement of settlements made possible by more abundant food supplies and the greater ease with which forests could be cleared; heavier traffic on ancient routes, together with the opening of new; and a lengthening of the radius of trade which causes the products of Italian iron-workers to appear in Denmark, Cornish tin to be sent *via* Brittany and Marseilles to the Mediterranean and, on occasion, Southern wines to make glad the melancholy heart of Central European man. Of the scale, as distinct from the occurrence, of such activities little apparently is known, so that it is not always easy for the layman to decide whether he is faced by isolated episodes or by specimens of a trend. Even after Cæsar's conquest of Gaul, writes the author, " the free Germani, except in formerly Celtic areas just across the imperial frontiers, remained as barbarous as in the first iron age." The fact remains that the symptoms of a quickening economic pulse several centuries before that date seem beyond dispute.

The two succeeding chapters are concerned with the most famous of historical themes. Few contrasts can be more impressive than that emphasised in the opening paragraphs of Professor Walbank's brilliant study of trade and industry under the later Roman empire in the West. The problem posed by him is why the expanding enterprise and open economy of the first two centuries of the Principate had as their sequel disorders of the kind to evoke the all-embracing *étatisme* typified—to mention only one example—by Diocletian's abortive essay in universal price-control at the beginning of the fourth. The felicity of the imperial golden age has been, from Gibbon

onwards, a familiar tale. Peace unbroken by major wars for a period not much shorter than the interval which separates the accession of Victoria from the death of Anne; seas cleared of pirates and patrolled; easy land communications along magnificent roads; moles, quays, docks, light-houses, even inns constructed at the public expense; low revenue duties at the ports —such innovations combined, in the author's words, to make an area extending from the Scottish Lowlands to the Euphrates and from the Black Sea to the Atlas mountains, " a single economic system," of dimensions which the world had not yet known, and, till the American industrial revolution, was not again to know. Technological improvements were, it appears, few, and Roman influence on the rural populations may well have been superficial; but, in other respects, *novus nascitur ordo*. The economic response to order and unity, unaccompanied as yet by crushing fiscal burdens, was that to be expected. The heart of the empire, long a parasite on its dependencies, appears to have experienced a brief revival. The scene of the most sensational developments, however, was not Italy, but the provinces.

The fascinating pages in which the author uses archæological discoveries to reveal how in Gaul, in Spain, in the semi-Romanised German border-regions near the Rhine and Danube, and later in the *parvenu* province of Britain, military consolidation and economic development, so often enemies, advanced for a period hand in hand, could hardly be improved. The armies lay the foundations, in the shape of roads, forts, supply establishments and factories, to meet their own requirements. The Italian trader, with an eye for the demand of the natives as well as of the troops, follows in their wake. Markets spring up; resident merchants are added to itinerant pedlars; local industries expand; the camp becomes the nucleus of a conglomeration which grows in time into a town; new cities are founded. As manufactures develop, as agriculture feels the pull of a heavier demand and natural resources are more intensively exploited, the divergent economic characteristics of different regions and provinces, and with them the tendency for each to go its own way, become increasingly pronounced. The capital, with its million or so inhabitants dependent for food on Egypt, Africa and Sicily, and for luxuries on the East, remains the single greatest aggregate of mass consumption and conspicuous waste; but primacy in the productive arts moves outwards from the centre towards the circumference. Strategic highways increasingly become commercial arteries, linking the semi-industrialised frontier regions with the interior and with each other. Slowly, but inevitably, it ceases to be true that all roads lead to Rome.

The trader's paradise of security, easy intercourse and light taxation did not last. Among the forces undermining it, frontier wars and internal revolts; a consequent decline in population, particularly in the towns; the partial de-Romanisation resulting from the official policy of introducing barbarian settlers to fill the gaps; a reduction in the supply of the slaves, on whom large-scale industry had rested; and, as long-distance commerce contracts, a loosening of the economic links between provinces and metropolis, are given by Professor Walbank a prominent place. The immense

bureaucratic and military machines devoured money. Attempts to lighten the burden on the Treasury by currency manipulations had begun, on a modest scale, in the first century; but it was not, it seems, till the middle of the third that the effects of depreciation became catastrophic. By that time, not only the stable currency of the early Empire, but the predilection for a qualified *laissez-faire*, which had caused even the crucial business of importing corn to Rome to be left in private hands, was a thing of the past. Vitality is waning; but production must be maintained, goods distributed and food supplies assured. Less, it appears, by design than in response to practical necessities, authority intervenes to compel, or itself to undertake, the performance of functions which, in an era of deepening insecurity, political and economic, the invisible hand of self-interest can no longer be relied on to discharge.

In the later years of the Empire, therefore, something like an *économie dirigée* staggers piece-meal into life. The multiplication of imperial factories, with a *Vir illustris* in Rome at their head, belongs, it seems, to a later age; but the bureaucratic framework of prescriptions, with which enterprise must comply, was already, in the fourth century, not a trifle. Partly, perhaps, to appease the armies, prices, at least on paper, are strictly controlled. Gilds of merchants and craftsmen, the *collegia*, had a long history behind them. Step by step they are converted from voluntary associations into organs of the State, working in Rome to the orders of the Government, and in the provinces under the municipal authorities to which its instructions are transmitted. Membership, which, in order to prevent evasion, is made both compulsory and hereditary, ceases to be a right and becomes a matter of legal obligation. Similar tendencies to petrifaction are equally pronounced in rural areas, where the military requisitioning of supplies; *corvées* for the transport of goods; a fiscal policy which makes the greater proprietors responsible for the collection of the tax in kind, known as the *annona*, from all holdings on their estates; and—a natural consequence of that measure—the *de facto* binding of tenants to the soil, enlarge the area of economic life in which compulsion, not inducements, moves the springs. The parallel movement on the domains of private land-owners, who spontaneously, for reasons of convenience or security, make a high degree of economic self-sufficiency the aim of their estate policies, is even better evidence of the forces at work. Its effect is to dissolve the more complicated social organisms of which individual productive units and local communities had once formed part, and to throw their former components, in autonomous isolation, back upon themselves. A money economy, it seems, continues in and after the fourth century to be the rule; but the ranges of economic activity withdrawn from the influence of the market show a noticeable increase. It is a question how long, in a contracting and increasingly turbulent world, the two types of organisation will function side by side.

The economic life of the Eastern Empire, the subject of an instructive chapter by Mr. Runciman which deserves a fuller discussion that space permits, went in most respects a different, but in some a similar, way.

Commanding the junction of the only land route from Europe to Asia with the exit from the Black Sea, Constantinople, of which more is said than of the provinces, seemed cast by nature for the role of a commercial, as well as of a diplomatic and administrative, capital. Its political stability depended, like that of Rome, on regular and adequate supplies of food. It obtained them at first from the old imperial granary of Egypt, and then, when the Arab invasion locked that door, found a substitute within easy reach in the corn-fields of Asia Minor. Raw materials came to it partly from territories, from Greece to the Balkans, under its own political control, partly by long-distance trade, which brought to it, in addition to timber, wax, furs and other northern products, the heterogeneous oriental products conventionally epitomised as spices, and its single largest import, the invaluable Chinese raw silk. As a manufacturing city, Constantinople appears to have combined imposing productive capacities with a specialisation in costly superfluities not easily paralleled on the same scale elsewhere. Apart from armaments, a state concern, its longest lines appear to have been high-class silk fabrics, also produced in government factories, and an impressive list of luxury wares made by a multitude of minor crafts, the two last supplying exports which went far afield. The State's monetary policy was enlightened, with the result that inflation was kept at bay long after it had become a problem in the West. On the other hand, the imperial control of the minutest details of economic life was carried to lengths which cause the comparable Western expedients to appear almost a régime of freedom. The emperor, writes Mr. Runciman, was both the largest manufacturer and the largest merchant in his domain.

It was at the second point, rather than at the first, in the sphere, not of industry, but of trade, that, towards the end of the eleventh century, the dangerous cracks in the Byzantine economic edifice appeared. Their immediate occasion was the coincidence of strains imposed on the Empire by wars in Asia Minor, by the advance in the same area of the Seljuk Turks, which cut the grain trade at its source, and by Norman piracy in the Levant, with the renascent economic ambitions of the regions of Southern Europe nearest its own. Confronted by a crisis, its ruler invokes the aid of Venetian naval and financial power, and liquidates the debt by a grant to the creditor of the privilege of trading duty-free in the majority of imperial ports. The precedent, originally a temporary expedient, proved not only irreversible, but infectious. It was followed by analogous concessions to Genoa, Pisa and a lengthening list of Italian commercial towns, and they in turn by the establishment throughout the Near East of colonies of Italian business-men endowed with privileges similar in kind to the favours enjoyed by the Hanseatic League in a score of cities from London to Novgorod, and to those later wrung, under the name of Treaty Ports, from the Celestial Empire, when, in the nineteenth century, the Western Barbarian broke in. Thus within the Byzantine political framework an Italian economic empire quickly develops, one of whose pioneers, the Venetian plutocracy, plays a leading part in the catastrophe of 1204, and whose continued expansion in

the ensuing period makes the Mediterranean an Italian lake. It was not till two centuries later that the occupation of both sides of the Bosphorus by the Ottoman Turks dealt the final blow to the empires of Byzantium and of its spoilers alike. Long before that date, however, the pre-eminence in Mediterranean commerce and shipping had passed from Constantinople and her dependencies into foreign hands.

Medieval Europe contained within itself its own small equivalent of North America and, if not its own tropics, a partial substitute for them. The two chapters by Professors Postan and Lopez on the trade of a period extending roughly from A.D. 1000 to 1500, discuss with an agreeably sophisticated realism, not only the commerce of the northern and southern components of the system, but the contrasted economies in which each stream had its source. A text-book legend, which has found its way even into Toynbee's great *Study of History*, depicts the trade of the Middle Ages, and, indeed, of all centuries before the eighteenth, as of minor moment, because predominantly confined to luxuries of high value in small bulk. As far as that of Northern Europe is concerned, nothing, the first of our authors suggests, could be farther from the truth. In reality, except for the virtual absence of capital goods other than timber and stone and the small, though not negligible, part played by metals, the back-bone of its commerce consisted of indispensable staples of much the same character as to-day. The deficiency areas of Scandinavia, the water-logged estuary of the Rhine and the increasingly industrialised Low Countries would have starved without imported grain. In the days before Eastern colonisation made Poland and Prussia the granary of Europe, the largest surplus which supplied them came from Northern France. The propensity of agrarian historians to write as though our benighted ancestors lived by bread alone has diverted attention from the majority of agricultural products other than cereals; but there are good grounds, it seems, for thinking that dairy produce from northern England *via* Boston and Lynn, vegetables and fruit from France, and, later, Dutch and south German beer and hops, were regularly shipped abroad. On the international rôle of fish—at a time when fresh meat was almost the seasonal delicacy which game is to-day, not a supplement to flesh-food, but a substitute for it—and of wine from the specialised vine-growing regions of Gascony, Burgundy, the Moselle and Cyprus, it is needless to dwell. The tonnage employed in moving raw materials must, to judge by Professor Postan's pages, have been hardly less than that carrying food. Scandinavian, south German and, later, Baltic timber; fibres and subsidiaries, in particular, potash, alum and dye-stuffs, needed by the textile industries; salt from the Bay of Bourgneuf, the ideal return cargo for vessels trading south, which without it must have returned in ballast; and, among metals, Swedish iron and English tin and lead are cases in point. Manufactured exports included a host of minor specialties, but bulk consignments of textile fabrics, a genus embracing a wide diversity of species, travelled both by land and water far afield. Next to foodstuffs and raw materials, they supplied the strongest link between different regional economies.

Favoured by the existence of vast areas in Eastern Europe to colonise and exploit, this northern commerce continued, it seems, till the mid-fourteenth century both to thicken and to expand. At its zenith, however, it was not comparable in the range of its activities or in the harvest yielded by them with the cosmopolitan business empire developing farther south. "The startling surge of economic life in Europe in the 'high' middle ages," writes Professor Lopez, "is probably the greatest turning point in the history of our civilisation." The unchallenged pioneer of that mediæval commercial revolution, whose rôle as the economic schoolmaster of Europe he compares with that played by England in the industrial changes of the eighteenth century, was Italy. Her manufactures, in particular woollen textiles, of which, if Villani may be trusted, about 30,000 workers at Florence alone produced, in the early thirteenth century, some 100,000 pieces a year, together with a wide variety of high-class silks and satins, glass, ship-building, hardware and a multitude of minor crafts, were important; but it was primarily as a trader, and on special occasions a financier, not as an industrialist, that the Italian business-man made his influence felt from London to Pekin. Geography made Italy a natural intermediary, whose products and re-exports reached the commercial centres and fairs of southern Germany and France by land, and from the later thirteenth century, when the Genoese despatched their first fleet through the Straits to France, Flanders and England, the countries of the Atlantic coast by sea. Monopolising the Mediterranean traffic, buttressed by trading stations and depots at every vantage point from Alexandria to the Black Sea, commanding the western termini of the oriental routes and tapping the resources of southern Russia, the Levant, Africa and the Far East, Italian cities, in spite of their internecine feuds, exploited these unrivalled opportunities with incomparable skill.

The articles handled by so widely ramifying a commerce as that depicted by Professor Lopez were naturally more heterogeneous than the pedestrian staples of Northern trade. Raw wool and raw silk, timber and possibly grain stood high among Italian imports, and cloth among exports; but it was more costly and exotic, if not more important, wares—expensive silks, velvets and damasks; Russian furs; spices, of which a contemporary expert catalogues three hundred and eighty odd varieties; and other amenities for a small, but wealthy, clientele—for which the Italian merchant was in cruder societies most renowned. It was equally natural that Italian business methods should be marked by a sophistication unusual at the same date elsewhere. "The anti-capitalist religious theories of the middle ages," writes Professor Lopez, "had probably more widespread acceptance than anti-capitalist Marxist theories have today." He has no difficulty in showing, however, that, in spite of the impediments to corporate enterprise offered both by the *commenda* and by the *compagnia* types of partnership, features often regarded as peculiar to a later phase of capitalism were not absent from the business life of Italian city-states.

Granted the range and complexity of medieval commerce, what of its magnitude? The English customs returns, which enable Professor Postan

to produce for just under a century invaluable triennial averages of exports of wool and cloth, imports of wine, and exports and imports of miscellaneous merchandise, have, unfortunately, few parallels elsewhere; nor is the interpretation of statistical data, whether derived from official sources or from more fragmentary observations, free from snares. In order to be significant, quantitative statements, whether of time, space or number, must be seen in scale with the other dimensions of the world to which such measurements are applied. Sidereal and human time are not the same. Distances, which in one age are long, are short in the next. Nor would it be according to light to discount, as mere battles of frogs and mice, the Napoleonic campaigns on the ground of the paucity to modern eyes of the divisions engaged. The instinctive scepticism which, on the score of the minute values involved, dismisses as much cry and little wool the trade of a Europe whose total population, Professor Lopez tells us, was nearer fifty than a hundred millions is equally beside the mark. The question of moment, after all, is not whether medieval commerce was comparable with that of a later age, which it obviously was not, nor, given its setting, could conceivably have been. It is the degree of significance possessed by it for the societies of its own day; and, on that point, though figures are obviously to be welcomed, evidence of a non-statistical kind can help us as much or more. In considering the problem, the existence of large back-waters unaffected by the business currents racing in the great commercial centres must not, of course, be overlooked. But the growth of areas specialising in particular productive activities, which only wide markets could have enabled to survive; the multiplication and enlargement of towns; the rise in numbers, wealth and influence of a commercial plutocracy; the fiscal importance of foreign trade, and the struggle of the classes engaged in it to keep at bay princely propensities to poach their profitable preserves to death—these commonplace features of mediæval economic and political life tell their own story. An equally convincing proof of the interdependence of different economies is given by the partial paralysis ensuing when, as a result of tariff policies, blockades and wars, the links forged by grain, fish, wool, salt or cloth—not to mention finance—are temporarily snapped.

Space does not allow a reference to more than a handful of the problems explored by Professors Postan and Lopez. It must suffice to remark that the reader seeking light on medieval communications and costs of transport; on the rise and retrogression of particular centres of enterprise and the markets served by them; on the commercial rôle of the precious metals; on the forms of organisation under which trade was carried on and the characteristics of the different types of entrepreneurs who made the pace, will find in these chapters a store of novel information and abundant food for thought. On one central issue, however, raised by both the authors, something more should, perhaps, be said. The economic civilisation of the Middle Ages did not, in their view, follow a continuously, if irregularly, ascending curve, but encountered a crisis in mid-career. The age of expansion climbed to a watershed, on the other side of which lay, not further progress, but a long contrac-

tion, in which engines were retarded or reversed and vitality ran down. Thus both the Hanseatic League's commercial empire and the greatest achievements of the Italian Renaissance were the fruits of a period when the peak of matèrial prosperity was a thing of the past. The outburst of economic energy in parts of sixteenth-century Europe was not, it is suggested, the continuance of a previous upward movement, but a belated recovery from a prolonged decline.

This theory of a long-term change of trends is obviously of great interest and importance. The evidence adduced to support it is of several different kinds. Professor Postan points to customs figures showing from the 1340s to the 1470s, save for a few exceptional years, a continuous fall in English exports; to the reduction of grain surpluses coming on the market as a result of the contraction of large-scale demesne farming which, with cereal prices sinking, no longer paid its way; to the temporary exhaustion, till methods of dealing with water were discovered, of continental silver- and copper-mines as well as to the diminished output of English tin; and to the probability that, in more than one region, textile manufactures themselves fell on evil days. The explanation offered by him consists, not in the conventional reference to price movements, which, though in particular instances important, he regards as too disparate in tendency to account for the " secular slump," but in a shrinkage of demand resulting from a diminished population. Vacant holdings and untilled fields; dwindling towns; falling rents and rising wages—phenomena common to England and the Continent—are cited as circumstantial evidence in favour of the view advanced. Given the validity of the initial assumption of a failure of man-power, these corroborative examples of its effect are much to the point. The premise of the argument, however, is a numerical decline on a scale sufficient to have as its consequence a century of stagnation. It seems to the reviewer that that crucial postulate required to be strengthened by a more exhaustive analysis of the causes, as distinct from the results, of the fall in population than is here attempted. It ought in fairness to be added that Professor Postan's thesis does not lack impressive support. Writing of Southern Europe, and using different *data*, Professor Lopez agrees with his Northern colleague, both as to the reality of the " all-European depression " of the later Middle Ages and as to the importance of progressive depopulation among the factors producing it. A series of devastating epidemics, of which the catastrophe of 1348 was the highest, but not the only, peak; wars more protracted and destructive than any since the last barbarian onslaught of the ninth and early tenth centuries; and the collapse of internal order in civil strife, were combined, first with the arrest, and then with the contraction, of the moving frontiers of commercial enterprise, on which, during the period of expansion, the prosperity, not only of Italy, but of Southern Europe as a whole, had been based. Debarred from access by land to the Far East by the welter of intractable successor states erected on the ruins of the Mongols' Asiatic empire; squeezed by the ruler of the Egyptian bottle-neck on which, as a result, it was compelled to fall back; deprived by the Turkish

advance of its trading stations in the Levant and by the impoverishment of other regions, such as France, of its markets in the West, the former commercial capital of Europe, at the height of its cultural brilliance, was on the way to become an economic back-water, with consequences hardly less disastrous to its neighbours than itself. " In the larger part of Europe," writes Professor Lopez, " the prosperous level of 1300 was not reached again before the sixteenth or the seventeenth century." It is against that background that the social life and policy of the later Middle Ages—the increase in town and country of small-scale enterprises as compared with large, the multiplication of *rentiers*, the defensive restrictionism of companies and gilds —ought, it is suggested, to be seen.

Of the wares handled by commerce something has already been said. The concluding chapters of the volume are devoted to three of the major industries by which these and other articles were produced. The learned and penetrating contribution by Professor Carus-Wilson on the growth and vicissitudes, during more than a thousand years, of the most venerable, widest-spread and, in its dependence on imported raw materials and distant markets, most international, of medieval industries, is a model of all that such a study should be. Like the other activities of peace, the manufacture of woollen textiles for sale had found under the Principate a congenial climate. A high degree of local specialisation in Italy; the deliberate development of Spain as a source of wool; the remarkable industrial progress of northern Gaul, which enabled its fabrics in the fourth century to compete with Italian products in Rome itself; the high prices paid for some British makes and the establishment of an imperial factory at Winchester, suggest that the economic benefits of unity and order were more than a phrase. During the ensuing disintegration, a few stray glimpses of the industry—woollen cloaks sent as a present to English missionaries abroad, cloths as a valuable item in Viking plunder, later textile workshops on Carolingian estates, in one of which the Emperor's famous gift of Frankish cloths to Haroun el Raschid may perhaps have been produced—are all that come our way; but by the eleventh century the lines of a new industrial landscape can be discerned. A North Sea manufacturing region, as the authoress calls it, has come into existence, including as a subordinate partner England, but primarily composed of the densely populated territories of the Count of Flanders, from Arras to the Scheldt. It is here, in a corner of Europe unable to support itself except by the exchange of manufactures for food that the first medieval version of a Black Country is born.

Flanders, Brabant and north-eastern France, then a single economic area, are the first of the three great textile specialists on which the writer's searchlight is turned. The international connections of the region and the internal structure of its business justify her treatment of it as a classical example of medieval industrialisation at its height. The basis of its manufactures was English—mainly Lincolnshire—wool, together with alum from Asia Minor and the Black Sea, and, in addition to woad from Picardy and Provence, more exotic dye-stuffs from Spain and Portugal, the Levant and as far afield

as Ceylon. Its products were in demand, not only all over Northern Europe, but, *via* the Champagne fairs, in Italy, the Levant and the Far East. The organisation of production assumed the form to be expected in an urbanised industry involving the co-ordination of a multiplicity of different processes and dependent on distant markets and sources of supply. The dominant figure was the business entrepreneur, supervising in his own establishment the staff required for the preparatory tasks of sorting and cleaning, and for the rest distributing orders among small masters, who employed in the aggregate a large body of wage-earners. The potentates at the head of the firms concerned composed the merchant gilds through which the civic plutocracy controlled, not only the economic affairs, but the public life, of each town; and these gilds in turn were organised in an inter-city kartell, the so-called "Seventeen Towns," which enforced a common export policy on the merchants resorting to the crucial window on the world in Champagne. The domestic politics of the industry had little to learn from subsequent refinements in that field. Piece-lists, time-wages and hours prescribed, on the advice of Big Business, by the municipal authorities, kept, or attempted to keep, the lower orders in their place. If Capitalism implies the control of production for the pecuniary gain of the owners of capital, Professor Carus-Wilson does not err in using the term.

The decline of an economic Leviathan is not less instructive than its growth. Social instability, combined with the precariousness of raw material supplies at the mercy of political caprices abroad, were the most obvious of the Flemish industry's Achilles heels. In the later thirteenth century both these sensitive points became increasingly inflamed. Proletarian exasperation produced from 1280 onwards the series of upheavals which, heightened by nationalist passions, culminated in 1302 in the sensational victory at Courtrai of the artisan infantry of Bruges, backed by the Count of Flanders, over the civic plutocracies and the cavalry of the Count's grasping suzerain, the King of France; while, at the same time, English export duties raised the price of wool. The effects of the intermittent operation of both these factors, the latter aggravated in the next century by recurrent embargoes and blockades, were heightened by the long-term menace of intensified foreign competition. The Italians who exchanged oriental dyes for Flemish fabrics at the Champagne fairs had not been slow to grasp that it might pay to import cloth in the grey and finish it at home; and from dressing and dyeing to manufacturing was not a long step. The result was the conversion of the small native manufacture of Italy into a giant using African, Spanish, French and English wools to produce high-quality textiles of European repute. In Florence, its largest centre, where by the middle of the fourteenth century the once pre-eminent finishing gild—the *arte di calamala*—was over-shadowed by the younger *arte di lana*, it was an affair of large firms, employing on the average 150 workers a-piece, and marked by a strong tendency to concentration.

The virtues of a work are shown, not only by the new information which it conveys, but by its success in making its readers aware of the limitations

of their knowledge of supposedly familiar themes. Judged by that test, Professor Carus-Wilson's pages on England are among the best in her chapter. The demand for textiles was so insatiable that, in spite of Flemish and Italian competition, the English product had long been exported on a considerable scale to a world which might have been supposed to be already wallowing in superfluous cloth; but, in comparison with those two great rivals, the English industry had remained of the second class. It possessed one great advantage in native supplies of cheap and high-grade wool. The turning-point, however, in its history was, it seems, the mechanisation of one of the most laborious, and presumably most expensive, processes of the craft.

The substitution for fulling by hand—or rather by feet—of power-driven hammers made the country's abundant water resources an economic asset of the first importance, and gave the industry introducing it a technological lead similar in kind to that which mule and power-loom were later to confer. The multiplication of fulling-mills in the last half of the fourteenth century not only strengthened its hold on the international market but at the same time set in motion drastic changes in business localisation and structure. It both accelerated, if it did not initiate, the dispersal of textile manufactures in rural areas and concentrated them in those of the west and north, where climate and the lie of the land provided a sufficient head of water close at hand. As a result, the typical clothier ceases to be the prosperous burgess of a corporate town, and becomes an economic individualist who, untrammelled by gild or municipal regulations, can adopt such productive methods as he deems expedient and grow to whatever stature success may allow. The effect of this minor technical revolution is convincingly illustrated by the authoress from different angles. Her evidence includes the diminution in wool exports, increase in cloth exports and virtual cessation of cloth imports shown in the customs accounts of the mid-fifteenth century; the decay of the older urban centres of the industry; and the increase in the trade and political influence of the celebrated or notorious cloth-exporting kartell known as the Merchant Adventurers Company. By the time that the Tudors took command, the English manufacture, judged by its exports and probably also by its output, was the greatest in Europe.

Professor Nef's chapter on medieval mining and metallurgy deals with a subject long as obscure as textiles were famous. The diversity in productive techniques and markets of the industries grouped under these heads; the multitude of minute undertakings composing them; and, since the factor determining their localisation was the existence of accessible ores, their frequent remoteness from conspicuous centres of population and trade, make a synoptic survey difficult to present. The stages in the development of mining are, however, clearly set out, and the complexities of law and custom defining the respective rights of the different parties—miners, land-owners, feudal superiors and political sovereigns—interested in its progress are successfully disentangled. Of the industry under the Empire little, it seems, is known, and of its fate during the succeeding five centuries even less. The

expanding trade and growing population of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were accompanied by an increase of the energy applied to tapping the more easily accessible sources of mineral wealth. It is at that point that Professor Nef takes the story up.

In central and south-eastern Germany, where silver, lead and copper are the prizes sought, a prospector's age of semi-colonial enterprise, with the " free miner " as its characteristic figure, gets under way. In Sweden, a little later, the great Kopperberg resources are systematically exploited. In the first third of the fourteenth century the output of Cornish tin shows a sensational rise; while lead, mainly from Derbyshire, assumes its place among the four most important English exports. The most widely distributed of metals, iron, was probably still too dear to compete in common use with wood; but the author can point to symptoms in more than one country of its increased production. In the Low Countries, France and England the mining of coal for the market has begun its great career.

This upward movement did not, it seems, last. Reference has already been made to the verdicts of Professors Postan and Lopez on the economic decline afflicting the later Middle Ages. It is instructive to note that the researches of Professor Nef in a narrower, though highly important, field point to a similar conclusion. Apart from the environmental factors affecting them in common with other departments of economic life, mining and metallurgy were confronted by problems peculiar to themselves. The exhaustion of superficial deposits necessitated shafts, and increased the perils of water, gas and falls of roof; while the subsequent crude processes of treating the ore offered obvious opportunities for economies to be realised by more efficient techniques. Whether as a direct result of economic pressure or because a shift of intellectual interests had prepared the way, the technological innovations recounted by Professor Nef, from drainage and ventilating systems to power-driven machinery for crushing ore and blast-furnaces for smelting it, may fairly be said to make the century following 1460 the first great age of the mining engineer and metallurgist. The social and political consequences of the heavier outlay which modernisation involved are rightly regarded by him as meriting more than a passing word. Gradually, but inevitably, the capitalist undertaking directed by an entrepreneur, financed by the issue of shares to investors and employing hired wage-earners, supersedes the informal co-operation of the partnership of working miners. In England, except for the precious metals, the State stands aside. In France and some of the German principalities a Mines Administration is created to supervise the exploitation of minerals in the interests of the dominant political régime.

The subject of the volume's concluding chapter is an industry some of whose greatest products, unlike medieval fabrics and metal-work, are constantly before our eyes, but whose economic, as distinct from its æsthetic, aspects remain to most of us a closed book. Of the methods by which, with the minimum of skilled assistance and such materials as the locality supplied, the common run of medieval dwellings, often in rural areas sheltering men

and beasts under one roof, were produced and maintained, little, if anything, is known. Their construction was probably an amateur job, completed with a helping hand from a neighbouring joiner or thatcher; and though in towns the professional played, no doubt, a larger part, it is difficult to believe that, even so, a body of skilled craftsmen could have arisen to meet these humble needs alone. The industry with which Professor Jones is concerned was of a different type. It is sufficient to consider the chief categories of buildings erected between 1100 and 1400 in order to appreciate the magnitude both of the demand—governmental, military or semi-military, ecclesiastical, municipal and private—for durable and imposing structures, and of the strains on man-power and materials which the effort to meet it imposed. The capital expenditure represented by royal castles, such as those built by Edward I to hold down the Welsh; castles and fortified houses of magnates and gentry; cathedrals, abbeys and thousands of parish churches, many, no doubt, first built of wood, but with an eye to its subsequent replacement by stone; the walls and market halls of towns, not to mention such lesser structures as bridges, hospitals, chantries and a few colleges and schools, suggests an aggregate outlay which, even when spread over centuries, it seems surprising that a society by modern standards poor could support. Some of the major operations have left records behind them. It is these undertakings, therefore, which supply Professor Jones' theme.

The finance of the subject—a crucial issue—belongs to a later volume. The aspects of the industry which receive most attention here are the organisation and management of building, including the provision of materials, the recruitment and training of workers, and the circumstances in respect of wages, hours, the right of association and other conditions in which they were employed. Building, as interpreted by Professor Jones, was in effect engineering in stone. As a result partly of the progressive substitution, from the latter part of the tenth century onwards, of that material for wood, partly of the recurrent supersession of old tastes and styles by new, the technological innovations experienced by it were probably both more frequent and more drastic than those undergone by any other medieval industry. It might have been expected, therefore, that the scientific qualifications required to cope with the problems of an intricate and swiftly changing craft would have permanently been in short supply. In fact, to judge by Professor Jones' pages, there is little sign that, as a limiting factor, that particular obstacle was acute. Technical manuals, if such were produced, have not apparently survived. It is evident, however, that a body of professional knowledge existed, and that on such major issues of policy as the choice of sites, the nature of the foundations to be laid, the preparation of plans and the safety of structures, expert advice was sought and obtained. The direction and control of operations could follow several different patterns. The initiating party could, as was the usual practice of the English Crown and of many ecclesiastical bodies, get the work done by—in modern language—direct labour, under the direction of its own officers, sometimes employing for the purpose a dual staff, partly financial and administrative,

partly technical. Or it could give the contract to a professional architect or builder who undertook to complete it in a specific period, sometimes supplying him with materials, sometimes requiring him to procure them himself. Or it could combine both methods, and, while planning the building as a whole, let the execution of parts of it to a contractor. In either case, it may be remarked in passing, the rôle of the architect appears to have been of the first importance. The view sometimes heard that medieval cathedrals were built by anonymous masons, between whom and the artists designing them little difference of remuneration and authority existed, is dismissed by the author as a sentimental myth.

Whatever the particular form of organisation and control, the practical difficulties of the builder were liable to be grave. It was of the nature of many of the operations concerned that, as in the case of some monasteries, the situation selected should be remote; or that, as when defensive structures were in question, speed of execution should be the first necessity; or that, both for that reason and because of their mere dimensions, particular pieces of work should involve the mobilisation and maintenance of a body of craftsmen running into several hundreds. In such conditions the assembling of materials and workers on the site required was an intricate business, demanding, in the case of large undertakings, an office and staff on the spot. The former could be bought in the open market; but the more usual procedure, since the demand for extensive structures normally came from bodies and individuals well endowed with land, was to rely on stone and timber from quarries and woodlands on their estates. The latter, in the case of work done for the Crown, were often conscripted, but, with that exception, were usually engaged by the architect or master-mason, as he was commonly called, in charge of the job. The provision of accommodation for an industrial army in an out-of-the-way place presented a problem of accommodation similar in kind to that which arose, six centuries later, during the construction of railways. It appears to have been solved by much the same methods.

In the days when mechanical cranes and other equipment were crude, the proportion of labourers to skilled workers was presumably high. The latter included carpenters and plasterers, as well as masons; but the group of whom we hear most is the last, and Professor Jones devotes some illuminating pages to the distinctive features of the mason's life and work. The craft included two main branches, hewers or free masons who dressed and carved the stone, and layers or rough masons who fixed it in position. Demanding as it did experience in the ways of different qualities of stone, a knowledge of the methods required to meet the primary need for stability, and probably an ability to work from drawings, it offered opportunities for the exercise of a high degree of skill and sometimes of artistic power. In addition to apprenticeship and here and there an occasional craft school, the allied trade of quarrying, which also taught the properties of stone, was an obvious source of recruits. The figures given by the author show that the rise in time-wages, which began shortly after 1348, continued in the case of masons during the next two centuries; but they do not make it possible to specify

the stages by which the upward movement advanced, or to determine the relative changes in the economic position of masons as compared with other craftsmen. To judge by the diversity of the payments made to the former, even when working on the same job, nothing in the nature of a standard time-rate existed.

On the other hand, the craft, as Professor Jones observes, was marked by some peculiar characteristics, which distinguished its practitioners from most other artisans, and which may have fostered a sense of solidarity among them. For one thing the mason was necessarily a migratory worker, who moved from one locality to another, as an old building was completed and a new begun. For another, unlike the blacksmith or weaver, he had only his labour-power to sell. In the third place, the construction of a great ecclesiastical or military edifice was the nearest approach to mass production which the age had to show, with the result that, to a degree unknown by the majority of artisans, the mason addicted to that class of work passed a substantial proportion of his working life as a member of a team. It is possible that these features of the craft account, not indeed for organisation among masons, for association for mutual protection was in the air, but for the particular form which, in their case, organisation assumed. In some large cities, for example fourteenth-century Paris and London, we hear of masons' gilds; but the membership of the craft was in most towns too minute to permit effective corporate action on a merely local basis. The type of organisation characteristic of the masons, therefore, was not, as in other industries, the municipal gild. It was the lodge established wherever any considerable building was under way, and composed of all members of the craft working on it. Whether the German attempt to federate such lodges in a wider association was absent from France and England, or existed in those countries as an underground movement, we cannot say. One further development, however, which links the concluding paragraphs of Professor Jones' instructive chapter to the experience of a later age is reasonably clear. It is the emergence, here and there, from the fourteenth century onwards, of the separate journeymen's organisations—the *compagnonnages* of France and the so-called yeomanry gilds of England—which were trade unions in all but name.

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It is customary for a reviewer to conclude with an epitome of the impressions left on him by the book concerned. In the case of a work on a subject so vast as the commerce and industry of Europe during more than a thousand years the evasion of that ritual obligation is more, perhaps, to be commended than a formal compliance with it. The discussion of the treatment accorded to particular topics is a task for specialists. Nor, it is probable, will readers be lacking to deplore supposed *lacunae*, and to regret that space could not be found for industries other than the three classical

crafts which figure in these pages; for a fuller survey of the contemporary evidence and modern theories relating to population at different dates; and for an account of some salient features of medieval economic thought. If so, they may be reminded of the nightmare of selection by which historians are haunted, and invited to console themselves with anticipations of the further volume on the Middle Ages still to come.

Whatever such criticisms and comments, the magnitude of the achievement represented by the second volume of the *Cambridge Economic History* is unlikely to be challenged. Among its virtues are two, for which the gratitude of even a medievally illiterate reviewer may without presumption be expressed. The first is the intimate knowledge of different periods and regions which enables the authors to interpret their economic life in terms not, as too often in the past, of a classification into hypothetical stages of growth, but of the specific environmental forces—resources, opportunities, obstacles and strains—which prepared the varying moulds into which energies in different circumstances should run. The second quality consists in the illumination to be derived from the comparisons and contrasts between developments simultaneously taking place in different parts of Europe, on which the breadth of the writers' canvas invites the reader to fix his eyes. The heightened realism born of both is not a trifling gain. A book which, without labouring these lessons, by its example drives them home, is a landmark in the study of its subject. It reveals the point which half a century of effort has enabled to be reached, and indicates some of the paths which future travellers may profitably pursue.

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