RAFFAELE MATTIOLI LECTURES

In honour of the memory of Raffaele Mattioli, who was for many years its manager and chairman, Banca Commerciale Italiana has established the Mattioli Fund as a testimony to the continuing survival and influence of his deep interest in economics, the humanities and sciences.

As its first enterprise the Fund has established a series of annual lectures on the history of economic thought, to be called the Raffaele Mattioli Lectures.

In view of the long association between the Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi and Raffaele Mattioli, who was an active scholar, adviser and member of the governing body of the University, it was decided that the lectures in honour of his memory should be delivered at the University, which together with Banca Commerciale Italiana has undertaken the task of organising them.

Distinguished academics of all nationalities, researchers and others concerned with economic problems will be invited to take part in this enterprise, in the hope of linking pure historical research with a debate on economic theory and practical policy.

In creating a memorial to the cultural legacy left by Raffaele Mattioli, it is hoped above all that these lectures and the debates to which they give rise will prove a fruitful inspiration and starting point for the development of a tradition of research and academic studies like that already long established in other countries, and that this tradition will flourish thanks to the lasting partnership between the Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi and Banca Commerciale Italiana.
SOME BRITISH EMPIRICISTS
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
1650-1900
RAFFAELE MATTIOLI FOUNDATION

Richard Stone

SOME BRITISH EMPIRICISTS

IN THE

SOCIAL SCIENCES

1650–1900

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XVII
FOREWORD

My husband’s belief in the importance of the quantitative side of economics went back to his undergraduate days. Theories, he thought, must be as far as possible tested against numerical data to be considered acceptable. This is why he devoted most of his professional life to econometrics and economic statistics. He also believed that the workings of an economic system cannot be properly understood in isolation from their demographic and social context, and here too he put his belief into practice.

He was very interested in the history of his subject, and he welcomed the invitation to deliver the Mattioli Lectures and expand them into a book as an opportunity to express publicly, so to speak, his admiration and respect for those of his British predecessors whose contributions he considered the most significant. There were heroes from other countries in his Pantheon, such as Vauban and Quetelet to mention only two, and he would have liked to write a parallel book on them, but time did not allow it.

When he died in December 1991 he had almost finished writing the present volume, in fact the first nine chapters were already in proof. The last three were unfinished, but fortunately he had carried them far enough for me to think I could complete them. I had followed his work closely and knew his intentions. The more technical parts, including all the tables, were done and all I had to add were some of the missing links. I hope the joins will not be too apparent.

There are a number of friends I would like to thank for their invaluable help first to my husband and then to myself: Roger Schofield and Peter Laslett for their kindness in supplying important material connected with Gregory King and Patrick Colquhon; Manfredi Lamanna, John Shaw, Paul Lunde and Pier Luigi Porta for their patience in tracing some of the more recondite bibliographical references; Christine Hudson, Lesley Pepper and Asha Patel for producing a succession of impeccable typescripts, particularly Asha, who typed the last three chapters with infinite care as a labour of love; Phyllis Deane, who kindly read what I had done and gave it her reassuring imprimatur; and
FOREWORD

Luigi Pasinetti, who gave me great encouragement and support at the Italian end of things.

I also wish to thank all those who have helped me in my search for the portraits of the principal protagonists. In some cases this search has involved several people and much painstaking detective work on their part. The fact that I was unknown to them and that most of the research had to be carried out by correspondence makes their cooperation all the more deserving of gratitude. I shall list them in the order in which the portraits appear in the book. For the portrait of Petty I have to thank Mr. K. K. Young, Registrar of the National Portrait Gallery, London. For that of King, Mr. R. C. Yorke, Archivist of the College of Arms. For that of Fleetwood, Miss Melanie Barber, Archivist of Lambeth Palace Library, the Rev. M. J. Higgins, Dean of Ely, and Dr. Thomas Cocker. For that of Young, Mr. Peter Philby and Sir John Ruggles-Brise, the original owner of the portrait. For that of Colquhoun. Miss Anne Escott of The Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Mrs. Margaret Marshall of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, Professor Andrew S. Skinner, Vice-Principal of Glasgow University, and Mrs. Alison Webster of the Department of Political Economy in that University, all of whom tried hard to trace the lost painting from which the engraving reproduced here was taken. For that of Halley, Miss Joan Sanderson, Librarian of the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge. For that of Farr, Miss Patricia Broad of the Office of Population and Census Surveys, Miss Sandra Cumming, Information Officer of the Royal Society, and Miss Joanne Harris of the National Portrait Gallery. For that of Florence Nightingale, Sir Ralph Verney. And for that of Booth, again Mr. K. K. Young. All efforts have failed to produce portraits of Davenant, Graunt and Eden, who are therefore represented by the title pages of their books.

Giovanna Stone

Cambridge, 1997
PROLOGUE

It is for me a great pleasure as well as a great honour to be here today and I want first of all to express my thanks to the President of the Banca Commerciale and to the Rector of this University for inviting me. I would also like to thank Dr. Crippa for his thoughtfulness in easing a task which in my present state of health seemed at first rather daunting.

Not only is this invitation an honour, it has also given me the impulse I needed to come back to Italy, from which I had been absent for too long. My wife is Italian and for many years we spent our summer vacation with her father in his country house in Romagna. Then things changed and that pleasant habit came to an end. Our last trip to Italy was eight years ago and I thought, pessimistically, that my travelling days were over. You can imagine therefore what a pleasure it is for me to return to a country with which I have such close links.

It was delightful to be invited and delightful to feel that I could accept. But I am not an economic theorist, and when it came to choosing a theme for my lectures I was somewhat perplexed. Finally I thought I had better talk on a subject of which my head was rather full when Dr. Crippa came to see me, namely the foundations of empirical social science in England. For this purpose I have chosen the lives and work of twelve people whom for one reason or another I find particularly sympathetic. There are many other writers I could have mentioned, and it would also have been interesting to compare the English contribution with similar quantitative work in Italy, France and elsewhere. But my plate is overloaded as it is.

The eleven men and one woman who are the chief protagonists of my story came from all walks in life and had very different careers, but they had one thing in common: none of them had any formal training in the fields to which they contributed so much. Few of them went to university, and those who did studied subjects, such as medicine, astronomy and divinity, which had nothing to do either with economics or with demography. As far as their contributions to these two disciplines are concerned, they are all twelve outstanding examples of the English amateur tradition.
PROLOGUE

Today I shall concentrate on economics, beginning with the political arithmeticians of the seventeenth century, Petty, Davenant and King, who between them laid the foundations of the subject; and going on to Fleetwood's index numbers, Young's production accounts and Colquhoun's balances of income and output. Tomorrow I shall turn to demography and what I have loosely called social studies: John Graunt, another seventeenth century character, who can be called the founder of quantitative demography; Halley and the first life table; Farr and vital statistics; Eden and the study of poverty; Florence Nightingale and the reform of the hospital service; and finally Booth and his monumental survey of the London poor.

In the time at my disposal I cannot do full justice to my twelve characters, but I hope to do so when I expand these lectures for publication. Gregory King, indeed, will appear twice on the scene: once in his own right as the first great economic statistician, and the second time with Graunt, of whom he was the ablest follower. Here and there I may also introduce some minor actors who have played a smaller but still significant part on a stage which was not so crowded with stars that their more modest talents should pass unnoticed.

Richard Stone

XXII