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W. Cunningham

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WESTERN CIVILIZATION

IN ITS ECONOMIC ASPECTS

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AN ESSAY
ON
WESTERN CIVILIZATION
IN ITS ECONOMIC ASPECTS
(ANCIENT TIMES)

BY

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PREFACE.

IT has been my endeavour in this essay to bring out the main economic features in the growth and diffusion of the Civilized Life in Western Europe, to which so many peoples and countries have contributed; I have not aimed at portraying the development of each of the separate polities to which reference is made.

Some of the difficulties that have to be faced, in engaging in such a task, have been obvious from the first, and others have been felt more clearly as the work progressed. The chief of these is due to the lack of information. The social and economic side of life was so familiar to their contemporaries, and was often so uneventful, that chroniclers have rarely thought it worth while to describe it particularly. We have to depend on incidental remark, rather than on detailed and deliberate description. This silence is especially perplexing in early times, and renders it very difficult for us to trace the precise connection between one primitive civilization and another. We have often to be content with establishing the fact of intercourse, and thus indicating a line along which

c. w. c.

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certain arts and habits could be easily transmitted. It is of course possible that some art or institution may have been invented independently in different societies; but so many ages and peoples have been and are unenterprising and uninventive, that, in the case of distant but related societies, transmission along lines of known intercourse always seems a more probable hypothesis than that of independent origination.

But there is another difficulty; even when distinct information on some economic topic has been recorded, we have not sufficient knowledge of the circumstances to be able to interpret the evidence with confidence. The last word has not been said on the precise aims of Solon's legislation, nor on the exact character of the leather money of the Carthaginians, nor on the agrarian system of the Germans in the time of Tacitus.

Perhaps the hardest task of all is to find suitable phraseology in which to describe and discuss the reported phenomena. Before the era of money-economy, the sides of life, which we distinguish as economic and as political, were merged together; in Egyptian history, foreign commerce cannot be readily distinguished from tribute paid by dependencies, and (to use modern terms) the "organization of labour" was intimately connected with the "incidence of taxation." In Greek and Roman life, analysis is much simpler, and modern economic categories—such as capital—can be usefully applied.

Many of the remarks in the following pages are necessarily of a tentative character; I cannot but hope, however, that the advance of Economic Knowledge will gradually give us the

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means of applying appropriate conceptions to all the various phases of industrial life, however unlike they may be to our own, and that the masses of new material, which research and excavation may supply, will fill up many of the *lacunae* in our information regarding past ages.

I am much indebted for suggestions and advice to Professor Prothero and Professor Ridgeway, also to Dr Jackson and Mr Wyse, Fellows of Trinity College, and Mr G. Townsend Warner, formerly Fellow of Jesus College. Mr H. J. Edwards of Selwyn has been so kind as to read the whole work both in manuscript and in proof; he has also constructed the chronological chart and supplied the maps for the volume.

W. C.

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ERRATA.

p. 23, n. 4, for Usurtesen read Usertes.

p. 84, l. 2, for Pharacians read Phaeacians.

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