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978-1-107-68058-6 - The Growth of English Industry and Commerce: During the Early and Middle Ages.

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OPEN FIELDS AND BALKS AT CLOTHALL, HERTS.

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DURING THE EARLY AND MIDDLE AGES.

BY

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FELLOW OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY; HON. FELLOW OF GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE,
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FIFTH EDITION



CAMBRIDGE:
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1910

Cambridge University Press

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107680586

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First published 1910

First paperback edition 2011

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-68058-6 Paperback

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PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION.

IN recent years the study of English Economic History has been prosecuted with great vigour in France, Germany, Russia and America, as well as in this country, and there has been no little difficulty in making an attempt to bring the present edition completely up to date. It has, however, been a satisfaction to me to recognise how much the knowledge of this branch of history has increased in clearness and in precision since this book was planned some thirty years ago. Many minor alterations have been introduced in the present edition; and owing to suggestions made by Dr L. C. A. Knowles of the London School of Economics, the sections on the effects of the Black Death (§ 119), and on the changes in rural England under the Tudor kings (§§ 150, 151, 152), have been entirely rewritten.

W. C.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

13 *August*, 1910.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

I. PAST AND PRESENT.

- 1. A basis of comparison.** An accurate survey of England is given in *Domesday Book*. 1
- 2. Industrial contrasts.** The comparison of *Domesday* with modern England brings out contrasts in the relative importance of different industries and different districts. 1
- 3. Contrasts in conditions of life.** It also shows contrasts in the character of town and country life. 2
- 4. Contrasts in social structure.** *Domesday* puts before us great differences in the social structure in regard to Capital, to Labour, and to Land. Additional difficulties in study are presented by the changes in the connotation of terms. 4

II. THE SCOPE OF ECONOMIC HISTORY.

- 5. The grouping of facts.** The Body Economic, though its phenomena may be studied separately, is yet identical with the State in actual life. As the interconnection of economic and political events is so close, and the sphere of study so large, the careful grouping of facts is necessary. Economic History is the study of facts of every kind from a special point of view. 5
- 6. Political structure.** Political History describes the framework of our industry and commerce at each period. 8
- 7. Current morality.** The manner in which industry and trade are carried on is controlled by custom and public opinion. 9
- 8. Human resources.** Skilful energy must be applied in work, and goods must be husbanded with forethought. 10
- 9. Physical conditions.** Human resources are limited or directed by physical conditions. 12
- 10. Economic progress.** Both in town and country, Industrial organisms of new types have superseded others, again and again. The effectiveness of the later forms must not blind us to the fact that each type was relatively satisfactory. 13
- 11. Nature of the change.** There has been continuity of change and increasing complexity in Society, accompanied by increasing power in

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comprehending the conditions of progress. It is necessary to take account of changes both in practice and in terminology. 15

12. Events and ideas. The course of affairs becomes intelligible when we apprehend the underlying ideas. 17

III. METHOD AND DIVISIONS.

13. The methods of Economic History and of Political Economy. In Economic History the methods of study differ from those of Economic Science, since we can neither cross-examine the facts in trying to interpret particular phenomena, nor reconstruct a satisfactory picture of society as a whole. We must begin with the general influences and actual forces in each epoch, in order to avoid serious anachronism. The main chronological divisions of Economic History are marked out by political changes, but each period has its own dominant economic forces. Economic History is dependent, in its scope and divisions, while Political Economy is hypothetical and independent of political changes. The main problem in the Economic History of England is to trace the gradual introduction of money economy and competition in different departments of life, and so far as possible the changes in aims and ideas. 18

14. Relative importance of different kinds of evidence. We have literary evidence in the shape of (*a*) documents and (*b*) histories; additional information may be drawn from monuments and relics, and from survivals. 23

15. Contemporary analogies. The argument from analogy may give us useful illustrations, though we cannot formulate accurate sociological laws. 25

16. Importance of English Economic History. English economic development may be usefully taken as typical, owing to the completeness of the records and to the comparative isolation of the country. 26

I. EARLY HISTORY.

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18. Factors in moral progress. The customary habits of the primitive tribes were modified by Christian influence, and by the remains of Roman civilisation. 29

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20. Extensive tillage. Nomadic tribes who have access to indefinite areas of soil can practise extensive culture habitually. 33

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- 21. The evidence of Tacitus.** The subterranean stores mentioned by Tacitus show that there were opportunities for accumulation; these are important economically, and have considerable bearing on further progress. **34**
- 22. Modes of settlement.** The Romans were impressed by the casual character of English settlements, and the primitive methods adopted for assigning land. **36**
- 23. The rights of the cultivator.** The 'higid' of the Germans consisted of a house and yard (*toft*), a share in the 'extensive' tillage of the fields in the waste, rights to meadow, and rights to common pasturage on the waste, which in winter included the meadow and stubble. The arable fields were laid out each year, so that each holding consisted of many scattered strips, intermingled with the strips of other men. **38**
- 24. Intensive tillage.** No date can be assigned for the introduction of intensive culture, which led to the disuse of annual reallocation, so that the definite rights of the cultivator to property became 'real' instead of 'ideal.' **42**
- 25. Tribal and village organisation.** The tribes were organised for economic, judicial, and military purposes, and were united by the common bond of blood, or by companionship in war. The tribesmen were also grouped in village communities. This is a widely diffused institution, and is chiefly concerned with the regulation of tillage. **44**
- 26. Industrial arts.** Relics, such as swords, testify to the skill of the English craftsmen; they had a system of coinage, and were acquainted with the Runic characters. Warriors were accustomed to make the weapons they used. **45**
- 27. The art of war.** Warfare and agriculture were not incompatible, and piracy formed an employment for the surplus population. The English pirates ravaged Britain; they organised predatory bands, which carried on commerce, and formed temporary settlements. These raids cannot always be distinguished from regular migrations. **50**

III. THE CONQUEST OF BRITAIN.

- 28. Disintegration of Roman civilisation in Britain.** The Romans, in planting Britain and other colonies, took account of the original population, as well as of settlers, in forming estates. They provided for the acclimatisation of animals and plants, and the development of natural resources. The disintegration of Roman society in Britain was hastened by the Picts and Scots; and on the desertion of Britain by the Romans, it was devastated by famine and faction. **54**
- 29. The displacement of the Britons.** Resistance to the English was unsuccessful; but the conquered would not submit, and the long-continued struggle resulted in the gradual withdrawal of the old population. The towns were ruined, or at least destroyed as centres of commerce and civilisation. **57**
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70. The Jews. The Jews were royal chattels, and formed isolated groups in different towns. Their affairs were regulated by the Exchequer of the Jews, and they were subject to unscrupulous and ruthless persecution for practising usury and base callings. Missionary efforts were made among them and their business was regulated. The Crusading enthusiasm was very detrimental to them. **199**

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- 83. Municipal economy.** The thirteenth century was a period of planting new towns and extending urban areas. The aim of much municipal regulation was to promote commercial prosperity, and attempts were made to secure fair dealing. Documents which remain furnish schemes of assessment, and give evidence as to the competition of 'foreigners' and facilities for alien merchants. Attempts were made to secure reasonable rates for corn and wages. **245**
- 84. Christian duty in matters of trade.** There is a contrast between the objects of modern and mediaeval economic doctrine: S. Thomas Aquinas assumes a just price based on common estimation, and regulation was desirable to enforce this just price, while allowance was made for necessary variations. The legitimacy of certain forms of bargain, and motives of conduct were the chief matters of consideration. **251**
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- 87. Beginning of national commercial policy.** The foreign policy of Edward III. was connected with the development of English national resources. His claim to the French crown offered the best prospect of bringing Gascony and Flanders into organic connection with England. He claimed the sovereignty of the sea in the interest of shipping; and the course of the Crecy campaign was affected by the consideration of trade with Flanders. The Gascony trade was also important. **265**
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- 90. Ecclesiastical immunities.** The papal pretensions as to the Church and its revenue called for new measures. The most important of these was

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92. The conditions of trade. Improved conditions for trade were secured by, (a) police ordinances, and regulations with regard to wrecks; (b) measures for the recovery of debts and prohibition of unfair distraint; and (c) measures to remedy the debasement of the currency, as well as the establishment of exchanges. The craft of the goldsmiths had parliamentary recognition. These measures were an improvement; as local regulation was superseded by general, and trade became more free. . . . 279

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99. Regulation of trade. The Staple was organised by Edward III., and this institution afforded many economic advantages. The export of wool was superintended by keepers of the Tronage, and efforts were directed towards maintaining a high price for wool exported. The people of Bruges tried to obtain a monopoly and prohibited export by Italian merchants. The Staple was organised within the realm by Edward III., but after some experience it was generally fixed at Calais.

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101. Fair dealing. Forestalling was prohibited, but the rules at Yarmouth, with regard to herrings, show the difficulty of interfering with middlemen in the interests of the producer or consumer. The attempts to enforce a uniform assize of cloth were not successful, and the necessity for the authoritative weighing of goods gave rise to some of the privileges of the Grocers' Company. The inconvenience of changing regulations was very great; the interference of the Crown, and the taking of grants in kind, tended to disorganise commerce.

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merchants and craftsmen. The condition of journeymen was unsatisfactory; some of them attempted to form brotherhoods of their own, as was done by the cordwainers; and the saddlers and tailors also formed Yeoman guilds. At Coventry, and at Bristol, special arrangements and organisation were allowed to the journeymen tailors. In other trades the introduction of machinery also gave rise to difficulties. Guilds tended to become monopolies, and took a stand against the competition of aliens; they appear to have combined for this among other objects. 441

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OPEN FIELDS AT CLOTHALL, from a photograph by Miss E. M. Leonard

Frontispiece

MAP of a Normal Virgate in the open fields of Hitchin, reproduced by
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