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a half or two-thirds of the soil. A nobility was organized, in general neither close nor hereditary, made up of old tribal chieftains on the one hand, and rich landowners, officials, soldiers, and the companions of princes on the other. It approached with increasing closeness in the Balkan countries to the organization of the Byzantine nobility, and in the rest of Europe, even in Russia, to the institutions of Western feudalism. It had its *alleux* and its fiefs, its domains which resembled the English manor, the French *seigneurie*, or the German *grundherrschaft*, and which were divided up into holdings cultivated by the labour of peasants.

The small free property and the class of peasant small-holders, which had been so important in these regions before the thirteenth century, fell under the domination of these new powers, the Crown, the Church, and the feudal lords. The dependence of this class, either under the form of the Byzantine colonate or that of the Western villeinage, left the cultivator his personal liberty and the perpetual usufruct of the soil, but took from him his property in the land and submitted him to poll tax, rents and labour services. Such was the condition of the rural masses known as *meropsi* and *kmetons* among the Serbs, Slovenes, Poles, and Czechs, *drabans* in Roumania, *udvornici* in Hungary, and *moujiks* and *smerdes* in Russia. A part of the vanquished or impoverished population was even reduced to serfdom, under the influence of aristocratic ideas of German or Byzantine origin. In Bulgaria, Serbia, and Slovenia the *obrotsi*, *atroesi*, and *pariki* were assimilated to the Byzantine *paroikoi*. In Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, and Russia serfdom made continual strides from the thirteenth century onwards. Though, under the sway of Christian ideas and a better understanding of economic interests, rural slavery disappeared completely in Croatia and became rare in Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland, it survived and was even extended in the more backward lands, such as Lithuania and Russia.

In the south and centre, among the Serbs, Moldavians, Croats, Czechs, and Poles, the rural population, scattered in hamlets and villages, profited in part, though far less than in the West, from the advantages of colonization and the diffusion of Christian civilization. In the East, in Russia, they remained in a condition not far removed from Asiatic



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barbarism. Everywhere epidemics and more frequent famines, and the rude conditions of social life which still persisted, made their existence unstable and hard, although its uncertainty was lessened by the powerful solidarity maintained by the old communal institutions of family and village.

In the north of Europe the three Scandinavian states did not begin to make acquaintance with civilized life until the tenth and eleventh centuries, when they were converted to Christianity. Before this time their inhabitants, the Northmen, were divided into a number of tribes and confederations, and lived chiefly by piracy. Their economic and social organization differed little from that of the ancient Germans, their brothers by race. Like these, they practised agriculture hardly at all, and their principal resources came from fishing, hunting, the exploitation of their forests, and cattle-raising. One part of the soil belonged to the tribes, and another to village communities, which enjoyed the undivided land in common. Private property was limited to the family; each family group held in collective ownership an *odhal*, inalienable and transmissible only to males, which was made up of its own property and acquisitions, and comprised only a house (*topt*), with the enclosure round it, and the land (*ornum*) acquired by clearance. In Denmark each of these patriarchal domains usually comprised about thirty-six acres. The rest of the land, which devolved to each family, was composed of a number of parcels, long and narrow strips, which the village community divided annually by a sort of system of lot, and the size of which was measured by the throw of a hammer or axe, or else by means of a cord. In one such village in Sweden twenty families thus divided among themselves 5,600 lots of land. Round each village (*by*) stretched pastures and forests.

An energetic population of freemen, sailors, fishermen, herds, woodmen, cattle-raisers, and farmers lived upon this vast and half-empty stretch of territory, a great part of which was covered with wood, marsh, and heath, under a severe climate. There were little more than a million inhabitants in the whole area, which was twice as large as France. Denmark, the most populous part, contained 550,000 in the eighth century and 900,000 in the tenth. The



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greater number were freemen, of whom there were 200,000 in Denmark in the ninth century, holding 12,000 domains. They were by nature fierce and disinclined for labour, living by warfare or the chase, and they recognized no superior authority save that of kings, tribal chiefs (*jarls*), nobles (*adelings*), rich landowners, and the *comitatus* of warriors (*huskarls*, *landemen*), princes who possessed no privileges and who were distinguished from the ordinary freemen only by wealth, tradition, or function. The cultivation of the land and the raising of cattle was left to slaves, descendants of the aboriginal populations, prisoners of war, condemned criminals, or insolvent debtors. The Scandinavians had for long lived in a state of barbarism, aggravated by the blood-thirsty religion of Odin. The terror of Christian Europe, these piratical "sea kings" had carried destruction and death from the Dnieper to the coasts of Spain. They had formed new settlements in the tenth century in Western Europe and Russia. Finally, they created the first stable states of the north, the three kingdoms of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

In adopting Christianity, not without difficulty, they came under the influence of Western civilization, which was brought to them by the Anglo-Saxons, the Germans, and the French monastic Orders. The first benefit reaped from this evolution was the conquest of the soil by colonization. Under the impulse of princes and monks, bands of peasants set themselves to protect the low-lying coasts of Zeeland and Jutland by dykes, to drain marshes and convert them into meadows, and to establish fisheries and water-mills on the rivers. On all sides monastic colonies and village communities attacked the immense Scandinavian forest, and established grass farms with huge herds of cows, isolated domains in which pioneers settled—above all, in the north and east—and villages of colonists, Danish *thorpes*, Norwegian *sœters*, Swedish *bodas*. The Danish plain, Jutland, Zeeland, Fuhnen, Southern Sweden, Skaania, Ostrogothia, Nericia, Vermeland, and Upland were the first to be colonized, and were soon covered with meadows and ploughlands.

The Norwegian and Swedish pioneers penetrated resolutely into the central and southern regions—Svealand, Dalecarlia, Norrland, and Finmark—the home before the tenth



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century of wandering tribes of Finns and Lapps, whom they now drove before them. Through the great forest—first along the coast and then inland—were scattered their cattle-farms and their camps of woodcutters. Soon, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Danes even sent warlike agricultural colonies to swarm over the lands of the Obotrite Slavs in Mecklenburg and Western Pomerania, and among the Esthonians on the eastern shores of the Baltic. On their side, the Swedes colonized the Aaland Islands, Ingria, Carelia, and Finland, where they established villages of free peasants; and the Norwegians scattered fishing stations all along the Biarmic coast as far as the White Sea.

At the same time they exploited the resources of lakes, rivers, and seas, caught the eider-duck, the whale, the cod, and the seal in the north, and salmon and herring in the Baltic. From their forests, which were still abundant in spite of clearances, they obtained timber, pitch, tar, potash, ashes, and the furs of wild beasts, with which they supplied the West. Model farms were created, notably on the Cistercian estates, and cattle-breeding was improved. Denmark bred strong battle palfreys and draught horses, as well as horned cattle, and so also did Sweden and Norway. Like England, Scandinavia was one of the most active centres for the exportation of butter, cheese, fats, lard, grease, and strong hides. Even the ploughlands made some progress in spite of extensive methods—the triennial fallow, the compulsory rotation of crops and cultivation in common. The use of farm manure and peat became more general; the iron ploughshare and the practice of ploughing deep appeared. Southern Sweden, particularly Skaania and Denmark, produced rye, oats, barley, and corn. The Cistercians introduced horticulture and perfected arboriculture. Flax, hemp, and hops were cultivated over wider areas.

A regular trade now appeared, and in the twelfth century a money economy; from the eleventh century Denmark had struck silver coins (the *rixdales*), in imitation of Germany. But movable wealth was comparatively small, and credit rare and expensive; the legal rate of interest in the thirteenth century still varied between $10\frac{1}{2}$ and $20\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Nevertheless, roads were established and internal navigation was organized. An active national marine was created in Den-



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mark and Norway, and, before it was crushed by the Hanseatic monopoly, Scandinavian trade reigned supreme in the Baltic and in the seas and glacial ocean of the north. It even established direct relations with the West and the Levant.

In the newly founded towns—Trondhjem (997), Bergen, Copenhagen (1168), Roskild, Odense, Lund, Wisby (the great port of Gothland) Stockholm (thirteenth century), Calmar, Norrköping, Abo—workshops and associations of artisans arose, and likewise merchant guilds on the German model, over and above the old family and domestic industry. The first metallurgical industries, in the shape of small forges, were created in Sweden, beside the seams of copper and iron, which were uncovered and worked by Scandinavian and German miners in Dalecarlia. Finally, France gave to the Scandinavian states their first architects and the promoters of their industrial arts.

Nevertheless, Scandinavia, like Eastern Europe, remained primarily a region in which natural economy held sway. Private property, it is true, soon took the place of collective property, and the tribes lost their undivided lands, while those belonging to the village community diminished by dint of alienations, partitions under definite titles of possession, and the appropriations which followed upon clearances. Family property itself could be divided among co-heirs, even women. Nevertheless, by reason of the vast extent of forests and uncultivated lands, common lands remained numerous and comprised about half the soil of Sweden and Norway. Kings built up large domains for themselves and claimed the ownership of fisheries and mines. The secular and monastic Church got possession of the greater part of the appropriated soil. One archbishop of Lund alone possessed three-quarters of Bornholm and the district of Aarrhus. A nobility was constituted on the model of Germanic chivalry, provided itself with fiefs, sought to make itself hereditary, and seized a large part of the land.

Nevertheless, it did not succeed in eliminating the class of small peasant owners, who remained numerous and influential until the fourteenth century, except in Denmark and Skaania, where they fell into a condition analogous to that of villeins, and sometimes amalgamated with the ex-slaves,



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whom Christianity had freed. In the same way tenant-farmers and free day labourers made their appearance. Under this régime the Scandinavian countries were able to attain a certain degree of prosperity. Their material condition improved; there were few paupers among them, and population grew; it almost doubled in Denmark, where in the country districts alone in the middle of the thirteenth century it numbered as many as 1,500,000 souls, and in the six bishoprics of Sweden in 1320 it reached the figure of 384,000. A crowd of new villages (*thorpes*) were created side by side with the old *bys*, apart from the isolated farms (*gaardes*) and *châlets* (*sütters*). Up to the fourteenth century the rural masses of Scandinavia, whose life was rough and simple, seem to have enjoyed a certain ease of existence and fairly extensive local liberties. Family life remained powerful, and associations of all kinds—religious, charitable, and economic—multiplied. Without attaining as great a height of development as the West, Scandinavia, like Eastern Europe, reached, under the beneficent influence of Latin, Germanic, and Christian civilization, a degree of prosperity unknown to it in the barbarian period, and not even equalled in modern times.

Thus in the history of labour the first three centuries and a half of the Middle Ages is one of those capital periods during which some of the most important works of progress which have transformed human societies were accomplished. The work of Ancient Rome herself and of all antiquity had been surpassed. In the East, North, Centre, and West of Europe the barbarian world had been conquered and civilized by means of the combined action of Christianity and of the new civilization of the West. After the first feudal age, a necessary marking time, in order that the military structure of medieval society might be organized and that it might be preserved from a renewed offensive by the invaders, after two centuries, in which the aristocratic and clerical castes had monopolized landownership, made villeinage and serfdom general, and submitted the rural population to the yoke of a dearly purchased protection, the dawn of a renaissance had shone upon Christendom, at length emerged from its isolation.

The great stream of trade had begun to flow again, more



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ample than before. An immense commercial development had brought with it the appearance of a money economy, the transformation of industry, and the formation of a bourgeoisie and an urban civilization. The commercial and industrial classes had, for the first time, united to conquer liberty and even privileges for themselves. For the first time the labouring masses had won for themselves a place in society worthy of their social value and economic rôle. They had become real powers, strong in their associations and had attained a degree of independence and comfort hitherto unknown. On the other hand, it had been necessary to exploit the soil to its utmost, and parallel with the grand work of the industrial and commercial renaissance, accompanied as it was by the emancipation of the urban populations, had gone that magnificent labour of agricultural colonization and the liberation of the rural classes which changed the face of Europe.

The greater production of wealth had allowed the number of human settlements to be vastly increased. Christian Europe had been so effectively renewed at the beginning of the fourteenth century that its people grew and multiplied and everywhere founded towns and villages, while population, double what it had been in the European provinces of the Roman Empire, had reached the figure of sixty to seventy millions. Never in the whole history of labour had such far-reaching results been obtained by the work of man. Then was seen the spectacle, unimagined by all the generations which had gone before, of multitudes of free human beings, enjoying the rights of man, and breathing a new air of liberty, whetting their energies by the conquest of independence and by the play of their multifarious activity, developing all the resources of their strength and initiative, and, above all, tasting the joy and sweetness of life, in the framework of an existence which was still simple enough to escape the economic uncertainties of modern society.



BOOK III

CHAPTER I

POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND DEMOGRAPHICAL DISTURBANCES AT THE CLOSE OF THE MIDDLE AGES, AND THE BIRTH OF A NATIONAL ECONOMY (1340-1453).

DURING the last century of the Middle Ages, between the beginning and end of the Hundred Years' War, a new Europe was created in the throes of long and painful birth-pangs. The different nationalities hurled themselves against each other from West to East, and grew strong by dint of their violent struggles. In the East and South-East, Asiatic barbarism once more began its assaults upon Christendom, and submerged a large part of Eastern Europe. Civil and religious wars increased the confusion and added their evils to those brought about by the conflicts of peoples and races. At the same time the political and social forces of the past broke up. The Church, corrupted by wealth and weakened by heresy, shut itself up in its selfishness and resigned itself to the rôle of a parasite, abandoning the leadership of the Christian commonwealth and ceasing to promote economic progress. Everywhere feudalism showed itself more and more devoid of the qualities indispensable to the art of government, and able only to renew and perpetuate anarchy. It lost its military prestige at Crécy, Poitiers, Nicopolis and Agincourt, and in the Hussite wars. It became a mere court nobility, vowed to the service of princes, and lived henceforth only by exploiting its tenants, or, worse still, by rapine and brigandage.

The urban bourgeoisie, the power of which grew in the Low Countries and Central and Northern Italy in the fourteenth century and in Germany until the end of the fifteenth, showed a superior political sense. But the municipal government was no longer able to give adequate protection to the various groups under its shelter. Moreover, communal patriotism waned in the midst of the social struggles which were now let loose, and urban prosperity was often menaced. The horizon of town life narrowed, and the



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commune, which had been in the preceding period the standard-bearer of emancipation and progress, finally became an agent of particularism and tyranny in the realm of economic activity, opposing by its spirit of exclusiveness, monopoly, and excessive regulation the development of new and larger societies.

In place of the old dying feudal economy, and above the decaying urban economy, a national economy was organized and developed. Its framework was the monarchical or princely state, in which were merged the old local sovereignties. With much uncertain groping, under the influence of the maxims of Roman Law, and impelled by the pressure of necessity, the state became conscious of its rights and of its duties towards the community, especially in the West. In the Low Countries, France, Italy, Spain, England, and at times even in other parts of Europe, sovereigns showed themselves possessed of an economic policy, sometimes incoherent, but every day more active. Their power and prestige often depended upon the manner in which they carried it out. The Italian princes, the dukes of Burgundy, certain of the Valois kings, such as Charles V, owed some part of their popularity and their ascendancy to it. This policy had for its object the increase of national wealth, the expansion of all kinds of business enterprises, and the satisfaction of popular needs. It sought to maintain a due proportion between production and consumption, to stimulate the one and to supply the needs of the other. In order to accomplish this the royal power essayed to establish centralized institutions, to rely upon the support of the middle classes, and to submit Church, feudal nobles, and communes to its authority, despoiling them of their economic prerogatives or bringing them under its own control. Not only did it attempt to maintain or restore order and public peace by creating administrative machinery, law-courts, finances, and regular armies, but it also intervened more or less continuously, and with more or less happy results, in the organization of production and in the relations of the labouring classes.

It lent its support to agricultural colonization, to works of embankment and drainage, and to the destruction of wild beasts, as may be seen in the history of Spain, Italy,



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the Low Countries, France, and Portugal. It was at pains to preserve by protective legislation natural wealth such as waters and forests, preventing their wasteful exploitation and encouraging the clearance of wasteland and the immigration of cultivators. In one place it tried to develop cattle-raising, as in Spain, and in another rich crops, such as rice in Italy; everywhere it encouraged the production of cereals. In the Low Countries the princes of the house of Burgundy favoured the spread of rural industries, and protected them against the intolerance of the towns. Anxious to maintain an abundant supply of labour and low prices in the country districts, the sovereigns helped landed proprietors against the flight and the exactions of agricultural wage-earners by measures of taxation and coercion. At the same time they favoured the emancipation of serfs (for example, in Spain) and almost everywhere they made meritorious efforts to prevent the restoration of serfdom.

Everywhere royal legislation forbade the seizure of ploughshares and beasts of labour, sometimes even of the seed and provisions necessary for the subsistence of the peasant. Often it granted temporary exemption from taxation to cultivators in order to encourage their efforts. The monarchical state sought to establish a protection over the rural masses, which should preserve them from the excesses of its own agents and, above all, of the old feudal powers. Charles V (the Wise) in France went as far as to permit the peasants to beat those royal officials who tried to exercise the right of purveyance of carts and fodder without payment. In Bohemia Charles IV invited all peasants who had suffered wrong by seigniorial exactions to bring their complaints to him, under the guarantee of his protection. The royal power began to exercise a control over excessive tolls and labour services. It allowed the country folk to claim their stolen commons from the lords and to have recourse to royal justice against feudal abuses. Nevertheless, it was careful to maintain the essential prerogatives of the privileged social classes; its economic policy was not at all revolutionary; it was even, as a rule, timid and hesitating, so intent was it upon maintaining a sort of unstable equilibrium between its different classes of subjects, between the spirit of tradition and the spirit of progress.



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The same principles also informed the rising national economy in the domain of industry and commerce. To increase the resources of the state, by augmenting the production of the workshops and the circulation of manufactures, to maintain the authority of the central power over the trading and working classes, while at the same time seconding their efforts and endowing them with privileges, these were the motives with which sovereigns were inspired. In the majority of states, the princes took the initiative in the reorganization or creation of industries, they supported the exploitation of mineral wealth and the establishment of metallurgical works. They called in from abroad entrepreneurs or workers who could introduce new industrial specialities, such as silks in France, fine cloths in England, and the manufacture of mixed fabrics of silk and wool in Italy. Under their protection glass and porcelain works were organized, and, above all, the artistic and luxury industries, to which they lent an intelligent patronage, notably in the Italian states, France, the Low Countries, and Bohemia. Without entirely removing the control of industry from the old powers and, in particular, from the towns, the monarchical state brought the concession of statutes to crafts and the promulgation of economic regulations into increasing subordination to its authority. Sometimes, in order to overcome the abuses of the corporative monopolies, it decreed freedom of profession and authorized any capable artisan to establish himself and "do loyal work or merchandise," as John the Good of France expressed it in his ordinance of 1351, and Richard II of England in that of 1394; at other times, on the contrary, after periods of crisis, it provoked and encouraged the formation of privileged corporations, in order to favour the re-establishment of production. It even began to arrogate to itself the right of authorizing artisans to work independently outside the bounds of the corporation, by virtue of royal letters of mastership. It brought under its control the whole world of workers, free crafts and sworn corporations, regulated their organization and discipline, superintended their administration and police, imposed governors upon them at need, and submitted them to fiscal and military obligations. Representing the general interest, it forced industry



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and commerce to observe rules of manufacture and sale, intervened, if necessary, to forbid coalitions of masters, rings and monopolies, as well as unions and fraternities of workers, and fixed wages and prices. Thus there grew daily stronger a sort of unconscious state socialism, the manifestations of which were to increase enormously in the course of the modern period.

No less anxious for the progress of trade than for that of production, the royal power showed a more or less effective zeal to secure the position of both. It encouraged by grants of privilege the formation of commercial associations, such as the wholesale mercers and the merchants who frequented the River Loire in France, the Staplers and Merchant Adventurers in England, and the Hansards in Germany. Torn between aristocratic prejudices and the national interest, the princes sometimes forbade the nobles to take up commerce, and sometimes (as under the Valois kings) authorized them to do so. In general, they were so well aware of the power of the merchant class that they often associated it with the government. They dimly descried an economic policy, the principles and direction of which they could not yet distinguish very clearly. They understood the need for a strong organization of credit, and yet they bowed to popular prejudices and to the antiquated suggestions of the canon law, and sometimes prohibited loans at interest, which were confounded with usury, and took measures of intermittent severity against Jews and Lombards.

They guessed sometimes, as did Charles V of France, the English Plantagenets, and the Dukes of Burgundy, how great was the advantage of a stable coinage, yet they occasionally gave way to the deceptive temptations of the old fiscal ideas, and tried to make money by debasing the coinage, as John the Good did eighteen times in a single year. In general, they tried to realize the ideal of a single coinage and to prevent the export of precious metals and of the currency, to regulate exchanges, and to introduce a little order into the chaos of feudal economy. Similarly, they attempted to ordain uniform weights and measures, notably in France and England. They saw the necessity of maintaining and improving roads, and made roadmaking



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and road preservation one of the essential prerogatives of the central power. They favoured inland navigation and companies for river transport, laid an axe to the sprouting vegetation of seigniorial tolls, conceived the first idea of a public service of bridges and highways, and in Italy, Germany, and France at the end of the Middle Ages even inaugurated public posts and passenger services.

Inexperienced and hesitating, the royal commercial policy picked its way between prohibition, protection, privileges, and monopolies on the one hand, and free competition on the other. Yet if the intervention of the state in the mechanism of trade remained narrow and irritating, incoherent and contradictory, it did have the merit that it favoured the creation and prosperity of markets and fairs, of merchant marines and navies, and opened foreign markets by means of commercial treaties, attracting merchant strangers, and giving a fruitful impulse to commercial relations.

The national economy was nevertheless unable to bear all its fruits in the midst of the political and social crisis in which the whole of Europe was struggling, and to which there was added a severe crisis in population. The latter was brought about by the massacres provoked by the great wars which were then bleeding Christendom white, by the ravages of bands of brigands, and by the excesses of religious fanaticism. Famines reappeared more frequently than ever in the devastated regions. Those of 1343, in Austria, and of 1351, 1359, and 1418, in France, left particularly terrible memories behind. The last carried off over 100,000 persons in Paris, where groups of twenty or thirty poor wretches at a time died of starvation on the dung-heaps, and where wolves came to devour the corpses. Earthquakes shook the ground, and one of them, in 1347-48, destroyed Villach and thirty little townships of Carinthia, while in the Netherlands the sea redoubled its murderous assaults. But worst of all were the ravages of epidemic maladies, leprosy, and typhus, which raged among the masses, who were already weak from want and wretchedness.

The most famous of these epidemics, the Black Death, or bubonic plague, which came from Asia, ravaged all the countries of Europe in turn from 1348 to 1350, and carried



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off two-thirds of the population of Central Italy; a third, a half, and sometimes two-thirds of the inhabitants of Lombardy, Northern Spain, France, England, the Low Countries, and Germany; a half or two-thirds in the Scandinavian and East European countries. The towns were attacked with special severity. Venice lost two-thirds of its population; Bologna, four-fifths; Florence, 80,000 to 100,000 souls; Majorca, 30,000; Narbonne, 30,000; Paris over 50,000; Strassburg and Bâle, 14,000 each; Vienna, 40,000. There were 300 deaths a day at Saragossa; at Avignon, 400; at Paris, 800; at London, 200. The scourge made new attacks from time to time in different places; it reappeared nine times in Italy, where it carried off 4,000 peasants in 1399, four times in Spain between 1381 and 1444, six times in France between 1361 and 1436, on which last occasion it cost 5,000 Parisians their lives. It paid five visits to England between 1361 and 1391, and in 1382 it is said to have destroyed a fifth of the population and caused a loss of life of 11,000 in York. From 1363 to 1391 it again ran through Germany and Poland, and 30,000 people died of it in one year in Breslau, 20,000 in Cracow, and from a half to two-thirds of the inhabitants of Silesia. It was a disaster for Europe comparable with, and perhaps greater than, that of the late world war. As far as can be calculated it cost from twenty-four to twenty-five million human lives. It brought about an unexampled scarcity of labour, which resulted in a series of economic and social crises of extreme gravity, lasting for half a century. Work was disorganized, and to the confusion engendered by the great changes which had taken place in the states and in society, there was added the confusion resulting from a diminution of human capital and of the productive power of the European peoples.



CHAPTER II

TRANSFORMATION AND PROGRESS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY IN EUROPE
AT THE CLOSE OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

In spite of these crises and "growing-pains," European commerce developed in the course of the last century of the Middle Ages, chiefly to the benefit of those states which were most free from attack, or which were the soonest to repair the ruin which had been spread by the scourges of war and of epidemics. It was then that the future commercial organization of modern times took shape. In spite of the deep-rooted prejudices which prevailed on the subject of business enterprise, the needs of consumption and of luxury, as well as the growing profits to be drawn from commercial operations, gave a vigorous impetus to the trading powers—Italy, the South of France, Eastern Spain and Portugal, the Low Countries, and Germany.

Large-scale international commerce grew in vitality and initiative, its organization became more complicated, and it withdrew more and more from the bonds of urban economy and engaged by preference in wholesale and commission trade. New and more or less extensive associations were formed, often on the joint share principle, sometimes carrying on only a limited commerce, sometimes engaging in numerous varieties of traffic, sometimes even in banking and exchange, and supplanting the old gilds, which were too set in their limited circle of local or regional transactions. Such were the English livery companies, the six merchant corporations of Paris, the "*arti maggiori*" of Florence, and, above all, the Florentine *arte* of the *Calimala*, the French federation of mercers, the British companies of the Staple and Merchant Adventurers, the Hanses of the carrying or export traders of France, Germany, and Prussia. The most famous, the German Hanseatic League, included fifty-two towns in 1360, and eighty to ninety between 1450 and 1500.

It was under the influence of the great merchants who carried on the export or carrying trade that the mechanism of commercial operations was perfected. Means of information



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multiplied, in the shape of manuals and treatises on business, exchange, and jurisprudence, as well as accounts of journeys. The systems of account by double entry and of trade-marks which could be granted and transmitted made their appearance. The great commerce collected a whole army of clerks, porters, couriers, commissioners, interpreters, and messengers for its service. It organized meeting-places—bourses or exchanges—splendid buildings such as those of Genoa, Venice, Palma, Valencia, and Bruges. It had its representatives at the courts of princes, and its special justice, which was swifter than that of the ordinary tribunals; it elaborated a special merchant law, which took the place of canon law and approached more nearly to the civil law.

It laboured to improve means of communication. Under its care old roads were repaired; in the fifteenth century there were 25,000 kilometres of them in France alone. The West was henceforth well provided with roads, and communication with the Mediterranean over the Alpine passes was easy. In the fourteenth century the convoys of merchandise allowed no more than thirty-five days for the journey from Paris to Naples via the Mount Cenis pass. Services of carriers and posts were established in Italy, the Low Countries, France, and Southern Germany. River navigation was managed by great transport companies, which dug out and buoyed river beds and established river ports. The first sluice locks were invented in Lombardy, and the first navigable canal was opened between the Baltic and the Elbe. On the Loire alone merchandise worth nine million francs was carried annually.

War had, indeed, destroyed the vitality of the French fairs, notably those of Champagne; but others prospered in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Spain, and in particular at Florence, where business to the amount of fifteen or sixteen million francs was transacted every year, and at Geneva, Cologne, Frankfort, and Bruges. In spite of a chaotic Customs system and a régime which was often marked by all the old exclusiveness, colonies of merchant strangers were the recipients of consideration and favour. States were united by treaties of commerce. A money economy spread throughout all civilized countries, and it has been calculated that at this period 15 to 40 per cent. of all



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business was done in coin, and that the stock of circulating money in the West reached in the fifteenth century the value of a milliard of francs. The anarchy of the monetary system decreased with the increasing employment of the great metallic species and with the diffusion of international coins, florins, and Italian ducats, the standard of which was fixed and invariable.

Loans on pledges, or for short periods at very high rates, were no longer used by any but individual debtors; the rule of Jew and Lombard declined, as a breach was made in their monopoly by the *monts de piété* and the popular banks which were set up in Italy and Germany. Less burdensome forms of credit became general, such as loans on a limited partnership basis or on joint account, and advances on merchandise and on negotiable securities. Bills of exchange became supply instruments of commercial circulation, permitting the operations of merchants and bankers to be carried on without the transfer of bullion, and the value of goods exchanged to be mobilized. In Italy and Germany commerce obtained credit at the rate of 4 per cent. to 10 per cent., instead of the 20 per cent. to 86 per cent. demanded by the Jews and Lombards. Powerful Italian banking companies—Florentine, Sienese, Luchhese, Venetian, Lombard, Piedmontese, and Genoese—covered Europe with a network of counting-houses and spread far and wide an already advanced banking system, by no means limited to exchange operations, but extending increasingly to the recovery of taxes, the negotiation of loans to collective or individual borrowers, the deposit of money, current accounts, clearance, and the discounting of bills. Associations of Spanish, German, French, and Flemish bankers were organized in imitation of these Italians. The first state banks even made their appearance in Venice, Genoa, Barcelona, Strasburg, Nuremburg, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Augsburg. The trade in money became definitely one of the vital branches of European economic organization.

Maritime commerce extended in scope in spite of the obstacles which it met with in customs systems, and in survivals of the old feudal economy. The right of reprisal was regulated; maritime courts or courts of Admiralty were



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set up; letters of marque were limited; an attempt was made to eradicate the endemic evil of piracy; armed escorts were organized to convoy the merchant fleets. In imitation of the Italian cities, such as Venice, which then possessed 3,300 ships manned by 36,000 sailors, the Western powers equipped navies. Barcelona and the Balearic Isles owned 660 vessels and 30,000 mariners, and France had at one time 200 great warships with 20,000 sailors on the sea.

Western commerce now set out to discover the world; nautical science was perfected, the compass came into general use, marine cartography advanced owing to the work of the Venetians, Genoese, and Catalans. The resources of Muscovy and of Central and Eastern Asia began to be known. The Italians sent their commercial agents as far as the Soudan. The Spaniards and Normans explored the coasts of Africa and discovered the Canaries in the fourteenth century, the Portuguese discovered Senegal, the Azores, Cape Verde, the Congo, and the Guinea Coast in the fifteenth century, the sailors of Dieppe reached the Ivory Coast, and the Bretons Terra Nuova. Already the world saw the beginning of that great movement which was later to reveal to it the marvels of the Indies and the New World.

The Mediterranean remained the chief centre of world commerce, and Italy kept the chief place in it. Venice had replaced Byzantium and had become the greatest entrepôt for merchandise in the world, and the Venetians passed for "lords of the gold of all Christendom." They imported annually from the East at the beginning of the fifteenth century ten million ducats worth of goods, more than a third of which came from India, and they bought in Egypt alone goods to the value of a million pounds. After them other Italian powers—Genoa and Florence—shared in the trade of the Black Sea and the Archipelago, Western Asia and Northern Africa, which was a source of immense profit. To this they added trade with the West, where in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries they established a crowd of counting-houses at Lyons, Paris, Rouen, London, Bruges, Antwerp, and many other places; and they traded also with the distant lands of Central and Eastern Europe. Side by side with them the Spaniards and Portuguese prepared them-



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selves for the great part which they were to play in the age of discoveries. Barcelona, Parma, and Valencia disputed the empire of the Mediterranean and the African trade. Catalans, Castilians, Basques, and Portuguese set up "factories" on all the coasts of the Atlantic, from La Rochelle to Bruges and London, and also in the interior of the Continent.

France, whose commerce was ruined by the Hundred Years' War, recovered her marvellous vitality from the time of Charles VIII, renewed her commercial relations with all Europe, and, thanks to Jacques Cœur, once more took up her trade with the Levant. England herself, awaking at last to a presentiment of her commercial vocation, persevered until she had built up a mercantile marine, equipped her ports—London, Bristol, Hull, and Newcastle—and developed her trade with her Continental possessions and with the Low Countries, Germany, and the Northern States.

The Low Countries and Germany disputed with Italy the hegemony of the commercial world. The former, profiting by their privileged position at the juncture of the great international trade routes, almost monopolized the carrying trade between the north and south and the east and centre of Europe. Bruges was the hub, and rivalled Venice in its thronging trade as well as in its beautiful buildings; in 1435, 100 ships sailed into its port daily, and its wealth and splendour dazzled the world. Antwerp, thanks to its franchises and to the widening of the Scheldt, began its career of prosperity, drawing to itself all the trade of Brabant, and from 1442 began to threaten the supremacy of Bruges, while in the north the Netherlands ports of Middleburg, Flushing, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam supplanted the old "staples" of Hardwyck and Dordrecht, thus preparing the way for the future "carriers of the sea."

Germany, which had developed a commercial life rather late, had with her native tenacity succeeded in winning herself an eminent place among the commercial powers. She had attracted a good proportion of the trade of Europe to her land routes and her great rivers. On the Rhine a league of 60 river cities created a fleet of 600 ships; the Rhenish merchants, like the Flemings, grew rich on the carrying



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trade in the "golden city" of Strasburg, in Frankfort-on-Main, and, above all, in Cologne. The Danube towns reached an unprecedented degree of prosperity through their relations with the East, Italy, and the Levant; Ulm drew a revenue of half a million florins annually from this trade, and Augsburg and Nuremburg, more active still, "held the world in their hand," as the emphatic German proverb ran.

In the north, east, and west the Teutonic Hanse made a veritable empire for itself and turned Germany towards sea trade. Formed in 1241 by the free association of a small number of trading cities of Low Germany, chief among which was Lübeck, the League a century and a half later included over a hundred, spread over four districts or "quarters," from the Sudetes to the Baltic, and from the Scheldt to the great lakes of Russia. This powerful federation, which had four capitals—Cologne, Brunswick, Lübeck, and Dantzic—and which contained all the chief trading cities of the Low Countries, Germany, and Eastern Europe, notably Amsterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Magdeburg, Stettin, Breslau, Königsburg, and Riga, was a real mercantile state. It had its diets and general assemblies which promulgated regulations and decrees (*recessen*), its taxes, its treasury, its tribunals, and even its armorial bearings. It carried on an active and sometimes arrogant diplomacy, concluded commercial treaties, and made its flag known and respected everywhere. It set up its factories in Russia, Scandinavia, Poland, and Flanders—veritable fortresses with garrisons as well as warehouses, inhabited by the members or by clerks (there were two or three thousand of them, for example, at Bergen), who were submitted to an iron discipline and animated by an intransigent sort of mercantile patriotism. Its merchant fleet, with admirably trained crews, was protected by a navy of warships, which secured the safety of the convoys and waged a merciless struggle against piracy.

The Hanse was the rough school in which Germany formed her sailors and her explorers. It pacified the northern seas, founded the first great ports there, and brought about the prevalence of a uniform commercial legislation. It tried to unify measures and to regulate the exchanges. But its



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ideal was a sort of economic imperialism, selfish, brutal, and coarse, which trampled underfoot the interests and lawful rights of the weaker nations and exercised a kind of tyranny over them, at Bergen, Novgorod, and London, seeking to monopolize all trade and to destroy the national commerce of Scandinavia, Russia, and England, and thus rousing an inexpiable hatred against itself.

Thus Western Europe, continuing its former work, had developed trade everywhere, on sea and on land, had added to Mediterranean commerce that of the Atlantic and the northern seas, and had foreshadowed the new orientation of the great trade routes, which was to appear so clearly in the modern period.

Towards the close of the Middle Ages there also began a new industrial revolution, brought about by the progress of credit, trade, and consumption. Everywhere, side by side with the small industry carried on at home or on the great domains, which maintained its widespread activity, particularly in districts where a natural economy still predominated, the small urban industry spread, with its workshops, its free crafts, and its sworn corporations. It maintained an undeniable superiority all over Europe, especially in the West.

But already the great industry, which had begun its conquests during the preceding period, was continuing them with yet more success in the new age. Better adapted to the exigences of national and international economy, more easily able to furnish wide markets, more remunerative for capitalists in search of profits, it extended step by step, first to the manufacture of cloth, then to mines, then to metallurgical enterprises, glassworks, potteries, printing-presses. Sometimes it made use of pre-existing organizations, and enrolled in its service isolated workmen, or artisans grouped into crafts and corporations, to whom it distributed orders and whose work it regulated. Sometimes it organized veritable factories containing 120 weavers, as at Amiens in 1371, or 120 printers, as at Nuremberg after 1450. Under its influence the new rural industry was organized, out of reach of the rules and hindrances of the urban government and the gild system. The big entrepreneurs favoured it, because they could more easily impose their conditions, increase or reduce



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production at their will, and diminish their expenses, profiting by the smaller demands of peasant labour, while the peasants, on their side, found in the exercise of a craft, even though intermittent, an occupation for the dead season and an appreciable supplement to their means of existence. Rural industry soon prospered in most European countries, more especially in the Low Countries, France, Germany, England, and the Lowlands of Scotland, and even in Poland and Bohemia, under the direction of great merchants and entrepreneurs. It shared with the towns, and even sometimes lured away from them, the woollen and lace manufactures, many metallurgical trades, glass and paper-works, mines and ironworks, leaving to the urban centres more especially the principal food, clothing, and building trades and the luxury industries.

Industrial technique made considerable advances in specialization and perfection. In a fair number of industries, notably in the textile and cloth-dressing trades, great progress was made in specialization. The field of invention widened, and the employment of mechanical methods increased the productivity of human handiwork. Water-power, which had already transformed certain industries, such as the crushing of grain or of oleaginous matters, was used more and more for the fulling of cloth and the preparation of tan and woodwork, as well as for the manufacture of paper. It was the power used to pump water out of saltpits and mines, to bring coal and minerals up to the surface, by means of special machinery, to cleanse them in buddles, to sort them on sliding tables, and to crush or break them up in crushing-mills. It was used to move the hammers which moulded metals and the grindstones which made them into tools. At the same time men learned how to regulate the use of wind in bellows, so as to obtain in their high and low blast furnaces a higher and more regular temperature and produce a larger quantity of metal. They learned how to employ the power furnished by vegetable and mineral fuel to better purpose in forges, glassworks, and potteries, and in Styria and in Germany were constructed the first blast furnaces, which were much more powerful than the old Catalan or Swedish hearths. Graduation houses and distillation works were set up in the salt industry. This growing use



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of machinery and technical innovations gave an already marked superiority to the industry of the last century of the Middle Ages.

The West continued to strengthen its hegemony over the East in the industrial sphere, and this despite the temporary eclipse of French industry. Italy, Germany, the Low Countries, Spain, and even new districts, rivalled each other in activity. The impetus was most marked in the mining, metallurgical, and textile industries. Men were no longer content to exploit the gold-strewn sands of the rivers. They now attacked the seams of yellow metal contained in the rocks of the Bohemian Mountains, the Carpathians, and the mountains of Carinthia and Transylvania. From the first of these gold to the value of 20,000,000 francs was extracted in 100 years, and the last brought the King of Hungary in 100,000 florins a year. Above all, silver-mines and argentiferous lead-mines were everywhere opened—in Italy, France, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, and especially in Alsace, the Harz Mountains, Saxony, Bohemia, and the Tyrol.

Before the discovery of Peru and Mexico, the Saxon, Czech, and Tyrolese mines furnished Europe with silver, which was more and more sought after. The Schwartz mines produced metal to the value of 40,000,000 francs in 200 years; those of Freiburg and Annaburg produced 1,300 to 20,000 kilogrammes a year, and those of Kutnahora, the Potosi of Bohemia, as much as 2,000,000 kilogrammes in three centuries. Everywhere, in the most favoured districts of Italy, France, and the Low Countries, flourished quarries of marble and of calcareous stone for building.

In Italy, Spain, Portugal, and, above all, France, sea salt was actively exploited, and the lagunes of Comacchio furnished 40,000 loads a year for export. The marshes of Saintonge, Bas-Poitou, and Brittany provided a great part of the West with salt. From the rock salt-mines of Transylvania the kings of Bohemia drew a revenue of 100,000 florins a year, and from those of Poland and Galicia the Jagellons derived over 100,000 thalers.

Men sought out and utilized more actively the iron-mines of Italy, Biscay, France, and Germany, the lead-mines of Brittany, the Harz Mountains, Devonshire, and Cornwall,



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the copper-mines of England and Germany, where the workings at Mannsfeld produced 8,000 to 30,000 hundredweights a year. In Sweden from 1347 the exploitation of the Kopparberg began, and in Hungary copper and sulphates were mined. From Cornwall and Devonshire a growing quantity of tin was obtained and exported, especially to Antwerp, where the trade reached a value of two million francs. The stan-naries of Altenberg in Saxony and Ober Graupen in Bohemia quadrupled their output, which finally reached 1,000,000 tons a year and rivalled that of England. Poland exploited calamine and saltpetre, Spain mercury, Tuscany and the state of Rome alum. Coal began to be better appreciated, and the workings round Newcastle, Liège, Aix-la-Chapelle, and Dortmund became active. Pains were taken to develop the Italian, French, German, and Czech mineral and thermal springs.

The progress in metal working and in the military arts stimulated the metallurgical industries. For the first time it was possible by means of the blast furnace to increase the production of cast-iron, to keep the apparatus working from eight to twenty-five weeks in the year, and to produce directly ordinary raw iron. Germany, mistress of the art of mining, took the first place in the great metallurgical industries, and the French metallurgical enterprises, once so flourishing, now declined. A large number of forges were set up in Italy and Northern Spain, Hainault, the Namur district, the principality of Liège, and the German and Scandinavian countries. The use of the rolling-mill and the hydraulic hammer transformed the operations of rolling and hammering, and facilitated metal working. Bell foundries and gun foundries multiplied in Germany and the East of France. The Italian and German founders carried artistic cast-iron and bronze-work to a high degree of perfection. The fabrication of arms and of materials of war prospered in Italian, Spanish, French, and German workshops and in those of Liège. Nuremburg excelled in locksmith's work, ironmongery, hardware, and clock-making, surpassing the French manufactures. If the French invented brass wire, it was the Germans who resuscitated the making of edged tools, of nails, and of iron wire, leaving to Italy a quasi-monopoly of the medallist's and moneyer's art, and to the workshops of



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the Low Countries, at Dinant, Malines, and Douai, that of copper and pewter-work.

The textile industries enriched Italy above all. In that country Naples, Pisa, Siena, and, chief of all, Florence, Milan, and Venice worked at the fabrication of fine or dyed cloths for export. Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century had 300 manufactories and 30,000 workmen, wove 100,000 pieces a year, and sold 16,000 of them in the Levant, while a single one of her merchant companies—the *Calimala*—made 300,000 golden florins a year on its sales. In the Milan district the cloth manufacture occupied 60,000 workers, and the export of fabrics brought in 300,000 ducats. Venice employed 16,000 workers to produce the most beautiful fine cloths of the peninsula. The workshops of Catalonia, the Balearic Isles, and Flanders rivalled those of Italy, and the Majorcans exported 16,000 florins' worth of cloth annually. While war meant death to the majority of the French workshops (which preserved a little vitality only in Languedoc, Berry, Brittany, and Picardy), the prosperity of the manufactures of fine cloth in Flanders and Brabant reached its height in the fourteenth century. When it was threatened in the fifteenth century by the rise of prices and the shortage of English wool, it was replaced by another industry—that of drapery made of combed wool, plain or mixed, and known as “bayes and sayes” (*bourgetterie* and *sayetterie*), which took the place of the old and moribund manufacture, and developed with an astonishing rapidity from Picardy to the Netherlands, saving the towns and country districts of Flanders and Brabant from ruin. On its side, Germany made use of its indigenous coarse wools in the fabrication of hundreds of thousands of pieces of coarse cloth, from Silesia and Westphalia to the Rhineland. Finally, England built up round Norwich her first great industry, that of fine cloths, friezes, kerseys, and worsteds, the export of which rose from 5,000 to over 80,000 pieces in less than a century.

The growth of luxury was favourable to the success of the art of silk weaving in Italy, which inherited the supremacy of Byzantium. From the workshops of Sicily and Calabria, and, above all, of Lucca, Siena, Florence, Genoa, and Venice, the last of which numbered 3,000 workers, there came forth the silken thread and the cloth of gold and silver,



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the brocades, the damasks, the satins, and the velvets, in which the wealthy classes loved to flaunt themselves. Catalonia and Valencia manufactured light silks. In spite of attempts to rival them made at Paris, Zürich, and Basle, Eastern Spain and Italy preserved something like a monopoly of this lucrative silk industry.

The manufacture of fine linens was another Italian speciality, practised in particular at Milan and Venice. That of semi-fine linen and table linen was kept up in Catalonia, Champagne, Languedoc, and Normandy; that of sail-cloth in Brittany and Galicia. In Northern France and the Low Countries were manufactured those famous fabrics in linen thread which have made the names of Cambrai, Malines, Brussels, and Holland illustrious. In the country districts of Germany the manufacture of coarse linen and hempen goods was carried on; Ulm produced 20,000 to 60,000 pieces each year. A new variety of stuff called fustian was made with cotton imported from the Levant, and had an enormous vogue; the chief centres of its manufacture were Milan and Venice (where 16,000 weavers were occupied with it), Catalonia, and, in Germany, Augsburg and Ulm, where 6,000 weavers were employed and produced 350,000 pieces.

Arras in Artois, Oudenarde and Tournai in Flanders, Brussels and Enghien in Brabant, won universal renown in the art of tapestry weaving, which spread to Paris, Venice, and Ferrara; they excelled also in lace-making.

Venice made over 100,000 ducats annually from the export of her gilded leathers. Paris rivalled her in furrieries. Manufactures of chemical and pharmaceutical products, and of confectioneries and syrups, were set up in Italy in imitation of those of the East. The French, Flemish, and German cabinet-makers, the Italian, Catalan, and Valencian potters, the Italian inlayers, the Venetian and Czech glass-makers, rivalled each other in skill. The arts of building, painting, sculpture, and goldsmith's work produced new wonders in the West in an early Renaissance, the forerunner of that of the sixteenth century. Paper-mills began to pour out the new material upon which, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, map-makers exercised their talent and copiers of manuscripts their activity, up to the time when the process of xylographic printing with movable wooden characters first



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appeared at Limoges (1381) and Antwerp (1417), followed by the invention of typography, based on the use of metal characters, by Gutenberg (1436-50).

In this medieval society, now drawing to its close, industry was manifesting a feverish activity in all directions, multiplying the sources of wealth, and strengthening the power of the labouring classes.



CHAPTER III

CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL CLASSES.—URBAN REVOLUTIONS AND PROGRESS OF THE TOWNS AT THE CLOSE OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

WHILE commerce and industry were thus taking a new course, the primitive unity of the commercial and industrial classes, already severely shaken during the preceding period, was finally broken up. At the top appeared a growing minority of bourgeois capitalists; in the middle developed the small or medium bourgeoisie of masters, who formed the free crafts and corporations, below were the workmen, who were slowly becoming separated from the class of small masters; and at the bottom of all came the hired wage-earners of the great industry, reinforced by casual elements, who formed a new urban proletariat.

Henceforth the capitalist bourgeoisie, few in numbers and all powerful in wealth, was organized and grew. At Basle out of 80,000 inhabitants these capitalists formed only 4 per cent. of the population, and at Venice, the richest city of the West, they were a mere 2,000 patricians, each of whom owned an income ranging from 200,000 to 500,000 francs. But they held in their hands the greater part of the wealth of their towns; at Freiburg, for instance, thirty-seven burgesses had possessed themselves of 50 per cent. of the movable and immovable capital of the city, so that over a third of the inhabitants were without possessions. The bourgeois capitalists were able to equal and, indeed, to surpass the magnates of the landed aristocracy. A Florentine merchant banker, Cosimo de Medici, left a fortune of 225,000 golden florins in 1440, greater than that of the appanaged princes of France. Dino Rapondi, the banker of Lucca, once advanced two million francs to the Duke of Burgundy, and the famous mercer Jacques Cœur, treasurer of Charles VII, amassed a capital of twenty-seven million francs, which was, indeed, less than that of the *surintendant* Pierre Rémy, who, in the time of Philip VI, was supposed to possess a fortune of fifty-seven millions. In the second half of the fifteenth century the merchant

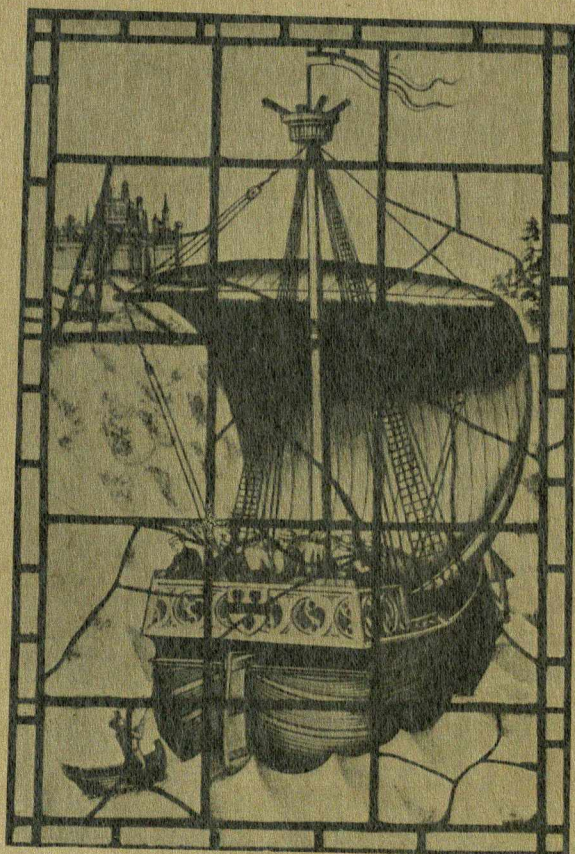


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capitalists of Nuremburg and Augsburg were worth from three and a half to five million francs, which had been amassed in part during the first half of the century, when some of them possessed incomes of 10,000 to 15,000 florins apiece; it was then that the ascendancy of the bourgeois dynasties of the Fuggers, the Baumgartners, the Hochstetters, and the Hervaths began.

They owed their success to their business capacity, their activity or their audacity, and to the spirit of enterprise which led them to spy out all possible sources of profit. They accumulated land rents; they got into their hands the greater part of the urban house property, which, in Venice in 1420, represented a capital of nearly 100 million francs; they bought lordships and lands in the country. But it was, above all, banking, commercial, and industrial enterprises which enriched them. Through their associations they were the masters of credit and of money, and they even began to tap the savings of private individuals on the pretext of increasing them. They monopolized the great international commerce, the trade in foodstuffs and in luxuries, corn, fish, wine, cattle, and spices. They speculated in the raw materials necessary to industry and in manufactured goods, in lard, potash, tar, wood, hides, skins, furs, cotton, silk, wool, as well as in woollen and silken fabrics, fustians, coverlets, mercery, and soap. They undertook the exploitation of mines, set up metallurgical and textile manufactures, and everywhere the capital which they engaged bore fruit.

These great manipulators of money and men of affairs were animated by a cosmopolitan spirit and detached from narrow urban interests. They were, on the contrary, glad to become the agents of kings and princes, and were the best auxiliaries of absolute monarchy, whose interests they served in serving their own. Often they adopted the magnificent and luxurious way of life of the high aristocracy. Men such as the patricians of Venice, Jacques Cœur, or the Portinari at Bruges, dwelt in palaces or mansions worthy of princes. They took a pride in playing the part of Mæcnas, and they were among the intelligent promoters of the Renaissance. But into medieval economic organization they brought unrest and pernicious ways: reckless speculation,



Bourges

JACQUES COEUR'S SHIP
(15th Century)

[face p. 300]



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the practice of rings and monopolies, even of Cartels, the most complete absence of scruples and a contempt for every law of morality. They were reproached (as in one of the German diets) with "destroying all chance of work for small trade or trade on a moderate scale," or, as a contemporary wrote concerning Jacques Cœur, with "impoverishing a thousand worthy merchants to enrich a single man." By their manœuvres and their failures, which harmed "their opulence" not at all, as a contemporary pamphlet complained, they overthrew all honest labour and trade. They upset the harmony of the old urban organization, shaking or annihilating it by making the protective regulations which it enforced illusory. They forced a large part of the industrial and commercial population to submit to their domination. They established a veritable dictatorship over certain forms of work, and contributed to the creation and development of those redoubtable evils inseparable from hired labour and an urban proletariat, which they bequeathed to the modern world.

If the struggle born of the formation of the capitalist bourgeoisie and its acquisitive spirit was then less serious than it became in the following centuries, the reason was that it was modified by the power which force of numbers and association gave to the small and middle class of bourgeois. This class, composed of small urban proprietors, of the mass of officials and, above all, of the traders and masters of the crafts, formed the great majority of the population in most towns; at Basle, for instance, they formed 95 per cent. They were content with modest fortunes; in Germany, in the fifteenth century, the middle class of the bourgeoisie frequently owned from 2,000 to 10,000 florins. At Basle one-fifth of the bourgeois possessed on an average 200 to 2,000 florins, and one-third, among whom were many artisans, from 30 to 200 florins. In France the bourgeois of this category usually gave their daughters dowries equivalent in value to 500 to 2,000 francs. This numerous class, not very adventurous, but often independent enough in character, was the object of the fostering care of the state, which often associated it in the work of government and abandoned to it a considerable part of urban administration, in which it allowed popular elements to participate.



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It was, indeed, a precious element of vitality and stability in society. It never for an instant slackened its work, and at every moment new professions arose within the framework of the small commerce and the small industry. At Frankfort-on-Main, in the fifteenth century, for instance, there were 191 organized crafts, 18 of them engaged in the iron industry alone; at Rostock there were 180; at Vienna and Basle, 100. Even in centres where the great industry seemed to exercise an undisputed sway, as at Ypres, its supremacy was challenged by the small industry, which occupied 48·4 per cent. of the workers, as compared with 51·6 per cent. who were employed in the cloth manufacture. In the immense majority of towns the greater part of the inhabitants were grouped in the crafts of the small industry; at Frankfort, which may serve as a type, they comprised 84 per cent. of the working population, and the great industry only 14 per cent.

The organization which had assured independence, dignity, and equitable conditions of labour to the working classes still prevailed with all its distinctive characteristics. The small crafts predominated, requiring neither great capital nor costly tools, giving the producer the possibility of enjoying the full fruit of his labour and securing a certain equality in the way in which the produce of the collective activity was divided. The majority of the working population was grouped into free crafts, which exacted neither a *chef d'œuvre*, nor a long term of apprenticeship, and which governed only by means of simple rules, which promoted rather than harmed the cheapness and good reputation of the manufactures. Up to the middle of the fifteenth century great towns like Bordeaux, Lyons, and Narbonne were living under this régime, and even in those in which sworn corporations existed, the proportion of free crafts might be as high as a half (as at Poitiers) or two-thirds (as at Paris and Rennes) of the total number of occupations.

Nevertheless, at this period sworn or privileged corporations were increasing with extreme rapidity, whether in order to stimulate the languishing activity of labour, or to institute a satisfactory method of regulating industry and commerce, or to discipline the working classes, or to exploit their fiscal and military resources for the profit of the Government.



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Such corporations appeared at this time in France, at Tours, Besançon, Rennes, and many other towns, at Douai and Tournai and in the majority of towns in the Low Countries, England, Germany, Italy, and Spain, whence the movement spread to the rest of Europe. At Frankfort in a hundred years their number rose from 14 to 28, at Vienna from 50 to 68, at London from 48 to 60, and at Venice from 59 to 162. The corporations themselves subdivided and gave birth to new sworn crafts. The corporative régime was applied in some countries so widely as to include fiddlers, blind men, beggars, nay, even rogues and courtesans. Federations or unions of trades were organized, such as the *safran* at Basle, into which were grouped 100 crafts, or the brotherhood of tailors in the county of Hohenzollern, or the *nations* and *liden* of the towns of the Low Countries. Privileged corporations even arose in the little towns and townships. Without entirely submerging the free crafts, the sworn corporations enormously increased the extent of their own dominion.

In some respects this régime continued to exercise the beneficial influence which it had exerted in the preceding period. It contributed towards maintaining the tradition of probity and technical capacity, of stability and social equilibrium in the world of labour. But the corporations were not slow to show themselves also possessed of that spirit of selfishness, exclusiveness, and even of dead routine, which in the end animates all privileged bodies. They carried monopoly and regulation to an extreme point, multiplied lawsuits between rival trades, pursued all independent labour with their hatred, exaggerated the minutiae of their rules. They established an inquisitorial police, and became fortified Bastilles of privilege, in which a minority of employers ambushed themselves. The ill-advised policy of the municipal and central authorities allowed them to multiply enterprises, which were against the general interest, under all sorts of fallacious pretexts.

Worse was yet to come, for division spread to the world of labour. In each centre rich or powerful corporations were striving to bring into dependence those which were less fortunate or weaker. In Florence the *major arts* trampled upon the *middle arts*, and yet more upon the *minor arts*.



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In London the twelve great livery companies, which had the right to bear coats-of-arms, separated themselves from the fifty crafts which did not enjoy this right. In Paris the six merchant bodies, among which were the drapers and mercers, erected themselves into an aristocracy, and in Basle the corporations of "gentlemen," the *herrenzünfte*, did the same. In each sworn craft itself the old masters tried to monopolize the government at the expense of the young. In London, for instance, the 114 masters who were known as the Livery of the Brewers' Company ruled the 115 others.

This spirit, so hostile to liberty and so different from that of the preceding epoch, was particularly marked in the relations between the masters and the workmen or journeymen. In a large number of crafts the workman was evicted from all dignities and responsibilities and reduced to playing a silent part in assemblies. Worse still, he was excluded from the mastership, which the masters made a property transmissible from father to son, accessible to sons-in-law, open to rich journeymen, but closed to the poor. The proof of technical capacity, the masterpiece, became for this reason obligatory, and its conditions were purposely made more complicated. All these regulations, which were aggravated by high entry fees, or the obligation to give costly banquets, were intended to put the mastership out of reach of the great mass of the workers. A simple tinker in Brussels found himself asked to pay 300 florins for permission to set up shop. The stages through which the aspirant to mastership had to pass became more numerous and longer. Both the apprentice stage and the journeyman stage became obligatory, and sometimes lasted for as long a period as twelve years for all save the sons of masters, for whom it was reduced. Journeymen and apprentices were subjected to examinations, entry fees, and payments, which allowed the masters to exercise a despotic authority over them. Everything combined to keep the mass of the workmen in a situation from which there was no escape, for the advantage of a small number of privileged persons, for whom the rewards of labour were reserved. It was only in the free crafts and in a few corporations that communal life, a modest scale of business, and a small number of journeymen and apprentices



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were still the rule and kept alive the old relations of cordiality and equity.

But on all sides where the monopolistic policy of the masters triumphed, the journeymen entered into conflict with them, or else became consolidated into a class, whose interests were distinct from those of their employers. The gild regulations now only served to bow the worker beneath an intolerable yoke, preventing him from working for anyone but the master, who kept him in strict dependence, refused him any legitimate rise in wages (as happened after the Black Death), and allowed him only a humble place in the meetings of the craft and even in the fraternities.

Wounded alike in his self-esteem and in his interests, the journeyman sought in rival corporative organizations the guarantees of liberty, equality and equity, and the means of protection which the privileged craft no longer gave to him. In the last century of the Middle Ages there began to appear a number of journeymen's guilds, called associations of *compagnonnage* in France and *bruderschaften* in Germany. These workmen's unions were founded and often obtained recognition under cover of piety, charity, or technical instruction; they were sometimes set up without permission as secret societies practising mysterious rites. They broke from the rigid framework of the city, spread to whole regions and countries, formed (for example, in the Rhineland) regular federations, and concluded treaties of alliance and reciprocity among themselves.

They made the acquisition of technical instruction easier for their members by organizing journeys from town to town and country to country, tours of France and tours of Germany, which in the latter country sometimes lasted for as long as five years. They had correspondents everywhere, and could secure lodgings and jobs on equitable terms for the workers. They were able, at need, to impose advantageous wages contracts upon masters, and sometimes they even admitted women to the benefits of their association. They had their officials, assemblies, subscriptions, treasuries, fêtes and banquets, even their police and their secret meetings, such as those of the builders or "freemasons," with romantic rites of initiation, oaths, and means of correspondence. Moreover, they were intolerant and exclusive, and made war on the in-



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dependent workman (the "fox" or "savage," as the French were wont to call him) in order to force him to enter their association. They claimed the sole right of placing workmen and fixing conditions of work and wages. Thus they sketched, as it were, the first Workers' International, which coexisted with innumerable other local groups, brotherhoods, *confréries*, the object of which was primarily religious, but which the journeymen could use to organize mutual understandings and defence, in spite of the disapproval and prohibition of the Church and public authorities.

Some of the workers in the small industry, in spite of the journeymen's organizations, had to resign themselves to living in a perpetual state of subordination under the rule of the masters, and to accept the rates of wages which were often imposed upon them by the guild or municipal regulations. These men went to swell the ranks of the urban proletariat, the chief element in which was, however, formed by the hired wage-earners of the great industry.

The latter, more numerous now than in the preceding era, were more than ever subject to the domination of great entrepreneurs, who distributed orders to them at will, bought the produce of their labour, paid them famine wages, obliged them to take part of their payment in truck at arbitrarily fixed prices, kept them in dependence by means of an ingenious system of advances, which lured them into debt, and exposed them to crises of over-production and unemployment. Hence these proletarians lived in a permanent state of discomfort and discontent, which found vent in strikes or unions, accompanied by boycotts, when it was found impossible to settle them by arbitration or to suppress them by force. Hence also attempts at risings and revolutions which more than once brought trouble and bloodshed into the towns. The proletariat usually gained only ephemeral successes, which they compromised by their violence, intolerance, and tyranny; the final victory remained with those powers which were the traditional defenders of order and of the privileges of the masters.

Henceforth, too, began the development of those two endemic ills of the proletariat—tramping and begging. Numbers of workmen, discontented with their lot, wandered from country to country in search of work. Thus it was that



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during the Hundred Years' War 20,000 Norman workmen emigrated to Brittany, and others as far as Germany, while Flemish workmen crossed the Channel and the Rhine in large numbers, and German workmen spread over Italy, France, and England. At the same time the transformation of industry, the competition of rural and female labour, which the great entrepreneurs preferred to employ, and of foreign labour, which grew in spite of the gild regulations, brought with them prolonged crises of unemployment, and developed pauperism among the proletariat. Bands of unemployed workmen and other poor wretches crowded the poorer quarters and outskirts of the industrial towns to such an extent that at Florence there were 22,000 beggars, or else took to the roads, begging their way from town to town and from city to city. In France they were called *quémans* or *quaïmans*.

Capitalism above and pauperism below were the two disturbers of equilibrium which crept into the closing years of medieval life; but happily their range of action was still limited. The great mass of the industrial and commercial classes, outside the capitalist bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the proletariat, on the other, enjoyed conditions of life which were nearer comfort than poverty, at least, in those countries which were not the prey of war or other crises. Small fortunes were widespread among the middle and smaller bourgeoisie. The organization of the small industry was always in favour of stability, and guaranteed a certain level of comfort to the majority of artisans and small masters. The workman himself continued to benefit under this régime by the rules which protected him against competition, secured him the right to work, and guarded him from overwork.

Better still, he benefited by the general rise of wages which followed upon the scarcity of labour resulting from the great epidemics, which all the ordinances of the governments were powerless to prevent. In Italy and Spain the rise varied from double to triple the previous rates. The average daily wage of the Italian workman rose from 0 fr. 41 to 1 fr. 54. In France the ordinance of 1350 sought in vain to limit the rise to a third as much as the former wage, and to fix the daily wage of the builders at 16d. to 32d., accord-



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ing to the winter or summer season. It was so unsuccessful that the carpenters who were earning two sous at Poitiers in 1349 were making five in 1422 and six in 1462, while at Paris the builder was receiving in 1450 the equivalent of 4 fr. 60, as much as the wage-earner of the same union earned in the middle of the nineteenth century. In England the workers in this trade were earning 6d. instead of 3d. a day, and others were receiving $5\frac{1}{2}$ d. instead of $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. Thorold Rogers asserts that the real value of the English workman's nominal wage was then twice what it was in the twelfth or in the seventeenth century. In Germany wages in certain classes of trades rose during the fifteenth century from 18d. to 25d., and the boatmen of the Rhine were making as much as a florin a day. In Westphalia and Alsace the nominal and real wage became equivalent; it exactly sufficed, that is to say, to meet the cost of living.

For the masters and workers in the small industry in most countries the conditions of material life remained, to say the least of it, advantageous. They were, indeed, exceptionally favourable in Italy, the Low Countries, and Germany, which rapidly recovered from the population crisis and enjoyed an economic prosperity superior to that of other regions. As in the preceding period, although the wage-earners in the great industry usually lived miserably in the hovels and outskirts of the towns, the masters and journeymen of the small trade and industry lived an easy enough life, in which the chief element—food—seems to have been plenteous, not to say abundant, notably in the Rhineland, Flanders, and England. In Frankfort, in the fifteenth century, the consumption of meat was as high as 125 to 150 kilogrammes per head; as much as it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A traveller of this period remarks that in the Low Countries and England "more folk die of too much eating and drinking than of the pains of hunger." In the towns there were never more fêtes and taverns, more furious gaming, and more moral licence; Florence and Venice each supported from 12,000 to 14,000 prostitutes. Never, also, was the urban population more mobile, more given to works of solidarity and charity, more inclined to welcome the new ideas which were working underground among the masses in the guise of religious reform. Never, finally,



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did it show a more vivid consciousness of its rights and a greater boldness of spirit and strength of character in taking action to vindicate them and bring about their triumph.

The last century of the Middle Ages is, indeed, *par excellence* the century of great urban revolutions. Although the pressure of the working classes had, in general, modified urban organization in the West during the preceding period in the direction of democracy, the popular elements were far from preponderating. Sometimes, as in Germany, the patriciate had been partly successful in maintaining itself in power; sometimes, as in Flanders, the working democracy had had to share the power with the bourgeoisie; sometimes, as in France, the bourgeoisie of officials and merchants or of masters of the chief crafts formed the governing body of the town; sometimes, as in Bohemia, the municipal offices were seized by a middle class of alien origin; sometimes, as at Florence, the greater and lesser bourgeoisie united to drive the wage-earning proletariat from the urban government.

The conquest of political power was thus the objective pursued by the lower classes, who desired to make use of the wide prerogatives of the urban authority, to alleviate the fiscal and military charges which the bourgeoisie preferred to heap upon their shoulders, and to prevent capitalists and bourgeois from regulating the conditions of labour at their own will. Indeed, these classes were sometimes not content with claiming equality and justice in the communal administration, but more than once cherished a dream of syndicalist government, class domination, a dictatorship of the proletariat exercised in their favour and at the expense of other social grades. Hence the bitter, violent, tragic aspect of most of these urban revolutions, some of which were, indeed, no more than blind explosions of popular hatred or misery.

From East to West, in the last half of the fourteenth century, the hurricane of revolution rose with violence on every side. At Salonica (1342-52) the sailors and artisans set on foot a sort of red terror, accomplished by massacre and ravage, under which the rich (*archontes*), landowners, captains of industry, and clergy bent for ten years. In Italy



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there was unchained a struggle between the *fat* and the *thin*, between the plebeians of the small crafts and the proletariat, on the one hand, and the great bourgeoisie of masters and capitalists, on the other. In the two Sicilies the Crown put a stop to it by closing access to the urban government to artisans; but while at Rome the visionary tribune Cola di Rienzi (1347) tried, with the support of the people, to break down the authority of the noble patriciate, at Bologna (1376), Genoa (1339), and Siena (1355-70), the masses sought to obtain the absolute mastery of municipal power. At Florence the wage-earners of the great industry, the *piccolini* or *popolani*, deprived of political rights, rallied, at first, round a dictator, the French adventurer Gauthier de Brienne, Duke of Athens (1342). Then, pushed to extremes by a law of 1371, which took from them all hope of paying off their debts to the entrepreneurs, they organized the celebrated revolt of the *Ciompi*. Under the direction of an intelligent and energetic wool-carder, Michel Lando, they forced the bourgeoisie to admit them to the ranks of the official corporations or *arti*, to give them a share in the government, to free them from the jurisdiction of the agents of the great industrialists, and to decree a twelve years' moratorium for the debts of all wage-earners. But they were soon carried away by extremists, proclaimed an anarchical and bloody dictatorship for the profit of the proletariat alone, whom they dignified by the name of "God's people," and thus provoked a reaction which swept away the proletarian revolution in a few weeks (July, 1378). The sole result of these disturbances was to throw the Italian bourgeoisie into the arms of an enlightened despotism, which, under the name of principate, pacified the communes in the fifteenth century by dint of enslaving them.

Nowhere did the revolutionary spirit display a more mystical ardour, a greater spirit of international propaganda, and a more violent pursuit of class demands and the dictatorship of labour than in the Low Countries. There hundreds of thousands of men struggled with fierce energy and an extraordinary bravery (sullied by hideous excesses) against nobles, clergy, and, above all, bourgeoisie, for the triumph of their ideal. They cherished the dream of an equality of fortunes and the suppression of all hierarchy, all authority,



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beyond that of the people who lived by manual labour. A first experiment had already been tried at Ypres and at Bruges (1323 and 1328) in the *jacquerie* of maritime Flanders, under the leadership of two workers, Guillaume de Decken and Jacques Peit, who proclaimed war on all rich men and priests, and maintained a reign of terror, until the bourgeoisie united with the nobles, and inflicted upon them the disastrous defeat of Cassel (1328). A second attempt, longer and still more serious, was made by a bold and eloquent tribune, himself a member of the great bourgeoisie, the draper James van Artevelde. By means of an alliance between the working classes and a section of the bourgeoisie, he succeeded in realizing his plan of setting up a hegemony of Ghent in Flanders, with the support of the King of England (1338-45). But he was soon outrun by the democracy of weavers, impatient to establish the sole government of the working class. This last dictatorship, which began with the rising in which Artevelde perished, employed as its methods forced loans, massacres, confiscations, and pillage; it set workers against workers, and ranged the fullers (who were crushed on March 2nd, 1345) against the weavers. It ended in the fall of the latter (January 13th, 1349), against whom princes, nobles, clergy, peasants, bourgeois, and small artisans were all united. A number of the vanquished emigrated to England; the others prepared their revenge, and attempted it in 1359 and, above all, in 1378.

This time the movement of the workers of Ghent only just missed having an immense repercussion in the West and unchaining an international revolution. The leaders of Ghent sought to set on foot a pure workers' dictatorship to despoil and destroy the bourgeoisie, and to raise journeymen against masters, wage-earners against great entrepreneurs, peasants against lords and clergy. It was said that they had contemplated the extermination of the whole bourgeois class, with the exception of children of six, and the same for the nobles. Masters of Flanders under their two leaders, Philip van Artevelde and the weaver Ackerman, the workers of Ghent for four years made established governments tremble. The Battle of Roosebecque brought this nightmare to an end in November, 1382, and cost 26,000



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proletarians their lives. No other movement attained such proportions, but sporadic attempts at Liège in 1330 and 1343, at Louvain in 1340, at Brussels in 1359, 1366, and 1368, and at Bruges in 1359, 1366, 1367, showed how tenaciously the working classes of the Low Countries clung to the hope of a renovation of society. Little by little, in the fifteenth century, the movement became confined to Bruges and, above all, to Ghent and Liège, where, as in Italy, it was destined to be stifled by the princely power.

In the rest of Europe, particularly in the West, the working classes indulged in less audacious visions. They were content, with more or less success, to claim a share in municipal power or to try and reform the organization of urban government. Thus in Germany a series of risings at Cologne (1396), Strasburg (1346-80), Regensburg, Wurzburg, Bamberg, Aix-la-Chapelle, Halberstadt, Brunswick, Magdeburg, Lübeck, Rostock, and Stettin, forced the bourgeois patricians to yield up their monopoly and to hand civic offices over to the crafts. These displayed a certain sense of equity and balance, so that the German towns enjoyed a really liberal régime. In Spain, on the contrary, although the great bourgeois, the "honourable citizens" of the Eastern towns, Palamos, Figueras, Barcelona, Valencia, and Palma, had to resign themselves (not without a stubborn resistance) to sharing their power with the artisans (*menestrals*), the latter failed to wrest the civic offices from the nobles and wealthy bourgeois in Castile. In Bohemia and Poland, France and England, the democratic urban governments in most cases declined, as happened at Paris, Rheims, Rouen, Verdun, Montpellier, and Nîmes, or only with difficulty clung to a few of their conquests, as at Amiens and London.

For the rest the commercial and industrial classes were not usually successful in endowing the towns with stable and equitable institutions. Working democracies or bourgeois aristocracies had in their hearts only one common sentiment, municipal patriotism, which often inspired them with an admirable zeal to preserve the autonomy, greatness, and glory of their cities. But, except in those centres in which mixed governments were established, urban administrations were animated by a rigid caste selfishness, which was contrary to all spirit of justice and true equality. They sought to monopolize power and office, now on behalf of



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the bourgeoisie, now on behalf of the people. Their despotism was exercised here against the rich bourgeoisie, there to the detriment of artisans and wage-earners. The workers themselves, when they got the upper hand, were not content with oppressing the bourgeoisie, but tore each other to bits. Each class governed in its own exclusive interest, trying to direct labour and regulate the production and sometimes the distribution of wealth to its own advantage. The spirit of intrigue and the lust of power showed itself in bourgeois and proletarians alike. The former often gave more heed to wealth than to talent in the apportionment of municipal dignities; the latter showed a blind faith in the most unworthy adventurers and the lowest demagogues; at Paris they hailed a skinner as their leader, at Ghent a street-singer, and at Liège a pavior. Neither the one nor the other knew how to maintain good order and probity in their dealings.

Nor did they think of breaking away from the narrow spirit of the old urban economy. They had but one ideal, to preserve and increase the particular privileges of their city and of its constituent groups. Thus they were ready to defend their commercial and industrial monopolies even by force of arms. Bruges claimed to reserve for herself the import trade in wool and spices to the Low Countries; Ghent, that of corn; Malines, that of salt and fish. Economic rivalries set Venice and Genoa, Bruges and Sluys, Ghent and Bruges, Malines and Antwerp, Dordrecht and Amsterdam, Paris and Rouen, at grips with one another. Sometimes towns aspired to build up an exclusive colonial or commercial domain for themselves, like that of the Venetians, the Genoese, and the Hansards. Sometimes they extended their dominion over the small towns in their neighbourhood, as Ghent, Ypres, and Bruges did in Flanders, Genoa in Liguria, Florence in Tuscany, Venice in Lombardy, and Barcelona in Catalonia. Everywhere they subjected the neighbouring countryside and tried to make the peasants their docile purveyors, while at the same time forbidding them to exercise any industry in order that it might be reserved for the urban crafts.

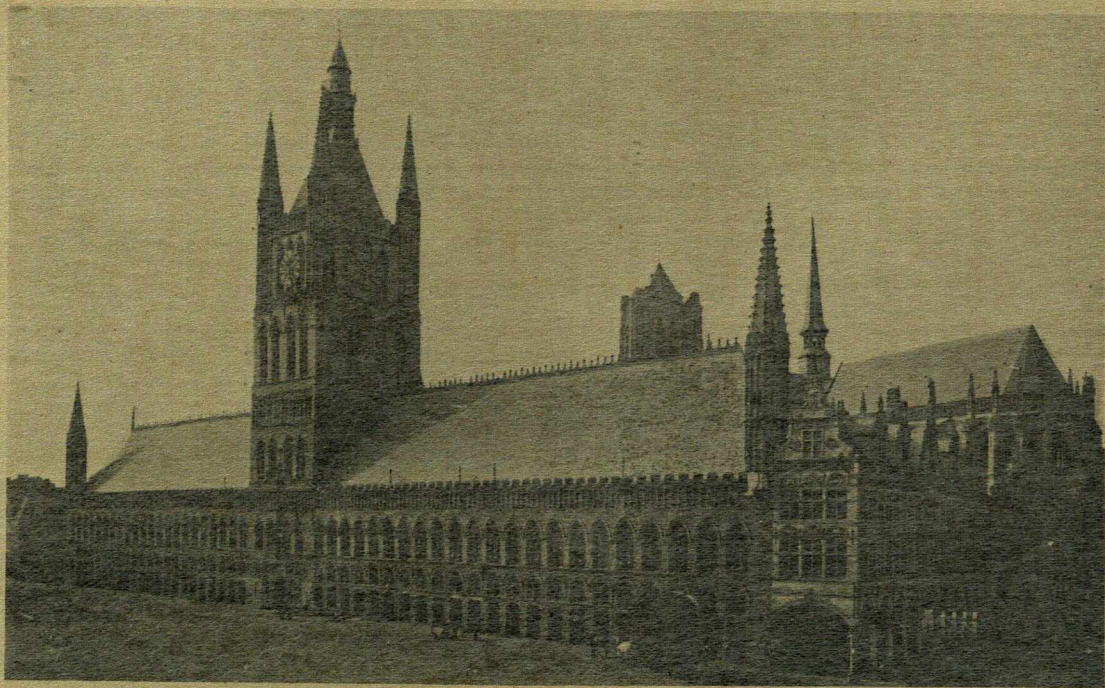
The towns thus opened the way for the encroachment of the princely power, which undertook the re-establishment of order and social equilibrium in the towns by submitting them to a more or less rigid control. This new power in its



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turn, however, provoked a fresh series of revolutionary movements, by reason of the partiality which it showed to the wealthy classes, the encroachments of its fiscal policy, and the arbitrary actions of its administrative agents. The most famous of these risings were those which agitated the great urban centres of France and the Netherlands. At Paris, in 1356 and 1358, the revolution led by the rich draper Etienne Marcel had as its chief supporters the mercantile bourgeoisie and the guilds of artisans, who lent their aid on the famous day of February 22nd, 1358, and inspired certain articles in the great ordinance of reform, by which an attempt was made to repress the abuses of royal administration.

Twenty-two years later, in 1379-82, from Languedoc to Picardy, from Montpellier, Carcassonne, and Béziers to Orleans, Sens, Châlons, Troyes, Compiègne, Soissons, Laon, Rouen, Amiens, Saint-Quentin, and Tournai, a whirlwind of revolution, with Paris as its centre, once more hurled the urban classes, weary of royal fiscal and administrative despotism, against the central power. The movement collapsed; the political privileges of the craft guilds were attacked, and in some places, as at Amiens, they were dismissed from the chief municipal offices. At Béziers forty working weavers and cordwainers were hanged, and at Paris and Rouen the crafts were severely treated. A third attempt, the Parisian revolution of 1413, once more brought the working democracy into power, in brief alliance with the bourgeoisie, and gave rise to a fresh attempt at administrative reform, the "Ordonnance Cabochienne," which was rendered fruitless by civil war and a terror, led by the skinner Caboché and the hangman Capeluche (1413-18). The central government finally prevailed, and henceforth, the communal bourgeoisie having grown wiser and the common folk of artisans somewhat calmer, the direction of urban policy was left in its hands. The same thing happened in the Low Countries, when the Dukes of Burgundy repressed the last particularist rebellions of Bruges (1436-38), Ghent (1431-36-48), Liège and Dinant (1408-66-68). For the Middle Ages were now drawing to a close, and, except in Germany, the urban economy was finally disappearing before the triumph of a national economy.



THE HÔTEL DE VILLE AT YPRES
(From a photograph taken before the Great War)

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Nevertheless, despite revolutions and internal conflicts, the movement of commercial and industrial expansion was so powerful that urban life, far from declining, took on a renewed vigour. In the East, Byzantium, Salonica, and Athens threw out a last flicker of glory. France, though crippled by the English wars, still kept great and vital centres, such as Paris (with 300,000 inhabitants in the fifteenth century), Lyons, Bordeaux, Rheims, Rouen, and Amiens. In Central Europe, Prague numbered, perhaps, 100,000 citizens; London reached a total of 35,000; and in Spain, where small towns abounded, Barcelona, the queen of Iberian cities, attained to 60,000 or 70,000 souls, followed closely by Valencia and Palma.

But the chief centres of urban life were, on the one hand, and above all, Italy, where Venice had 190,000 inhabitants, and Florence 100,000, only just outstripping Milan and Genoa, and supreme among 120 other cities both large and small; and, on the other hand, the Netherlands, where beside Bruges, with its 100,000 inhabitants, Ghent seems to have had 80,000, and Ypres 40,000. Flanders had the aspect of "a continuous town," so preponderant was the urban population; in Brabant it comprised no less than a quarter of the whole. This was likewise the golden age of the urban republics of Germany, those 96 free German towns, chief among which were Cologne, with its 40,000 souls, and Basle, Strasburg, Augsburg, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Vienna, Constance, Speier, Treier, Frankfort, Mainz, Magdeburg, Erfurt, Lübeck, and Breslau, in which the population normally ranged between 5,000 and 20,000.

The towns, above all those of the West, were filled with a generous spirit of emulation; they adorned themselves with magnificent monuments, dowered themselves with a host of charitable institutions, developed all the grades of education, and became more than ever before the homes of literary and scientific culture, playing an eminent part in the literary and artistic renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Before going down beneath national economy and monarchical rule, urban civilization, thanks to the economic activity of the bourgeois and working classes, blazed out in a last magnificent brilliance, the forerunner of the splendour of modern civilization.



CHAPTER IV

VICISSITUDES OF COLONIZATION AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION.—
CHANGES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED PROPERTY AND IN THE
CONDITION OF THE RURAL CLASSES AT THE CLOSE OF THE MIDDLE
AGES.—THE PEASANT REVOLTS.

THE end of the Middle Ages was a period of marked contrasts in the domain of agriculture. Certain regions, such as the old Eastern Empire, Bohemia, and Hungary, grew poorer and more depopulated, and others, such as Sweden, Ireland, and Scotland, were unable to emerge from their condition of poverty. France, the most prosperous country in the West, became, in Petrarch's words (1360), "a heap of ruins"; from Loire to Somme nothing was to be seen but "uncultivated fields, overgrown with brambles and bushes," as Bishop Thomas Basin said in 1440, when a third of her territory lay uncultivated. But other more favoured regions continued to exploit their soil to its utmost value. In Italy the embankment of the Po was carried on from the place where it joined the Oglio; a number of marshes (*polesine, corregie*) were converted into cultivated "polders" in Lombardy and Tuscany, irrigation canals or trenches fed from the Naviglio Grande and the Naviglio Interne, besides those of Martesana, Panarello, and Chiaro, fertilized the fields of Lombardy and Modena. A similar work was being carried out in Eastern Spain.

In the Low Countries the work of defence against the sea, which, in 1377 and 1421, had swallowed up ninety townships and increased the area of the Zuider Zee, went on. The dykes were reinforced at the end of the fifteenth century, and 1,100 square kilometres of "polders" were conquered. From the Vistula to the Niemen, under the auspices of the Teutonic Order, the formation of "werder" was accelerated. In Hungary, under the Angevins, and in Poland, under the Jagellons, the clearing of the land made active progress, as also in those Baltic territories which were occupied by the Scandinavians. Finally, in the East, the merchants of Novgorod and the Great Russian monks and peasants of



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Muscovy carried across marsh and forest that great work of colonizing Finnish and Tartar lands, which was to make Russia mistress of the immense stretch of territory which lies between the middle Volga, the Arctic Ocean, and the Obi (1363-1489).

Popular activity tended to turn in the direction of the most advantageous forms of production, to follow variations in demand and in foreign markets, and to be governed by the natural aptitude of each region. The maritime populations of the North-West and North of Europe—Norwegians, English, Scots, Hansards, Netherlanders—drew increasing revenues from their fisheries, especially from that of the herring, which was *par excellence* the food of the people. The Netherlands employed 40,000 boats in this work, and benefited by the discovery of a new method of preserving the favourite fish of the masses, by packing it in kegs or barrels, which facilitated export, and was due to the Zeelander, Gilles Beucholz. From the North Cape to Galicia, sailors pursued the whale, the seal, and, above all, the cod, which, swept on by the Gulf Stream, they sought even as far as the "new-found land."

While deforestation was going on apace in England, the Low Countries, Italy, and Spain, the lands of the North, East, and Centre of Europe were turning their forest resources to more and more profitable account. Princes and lords increased the number of their studs in Italy and England. The raising of sumpter-horses, battle-horses, and race-horses prospered in regions rich in grasslands, as did that of horned cattle in the Alpine zone and in the Western countries, which furnished meat, bacon, and lard to the rest of Europe. In the Low Countries the art of fattening cattle on turnips and leguminous plants was first invented. Elsewhere milch cows were the chief speciality. The scarcity of labour after the Black Death, combined with the fact that sheep required but little labour and expense, and with the growing demand for and high price of wool, led to an extraordinary development in one form of pasture-farming, that of sheep-rearing. In the majority of European countries this business became once more extremely popular, and pasture-farming even took the place of corn-growing in Central Italy, the Roman Campagna, the Castiles and Upper Aragon, and,



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finally, in England. In Spain, in the fifteenth century, the great association of sheep-farmers known as the Mesta grouped into a single organization 2,694,000 sheep, out of the 10,000,000 then kept in the peninsula. In England the great landowners, attracted by a system of rural economy which gave them ten or twelve times as high a return as corn-growing, kept flocks of 4,000 to 25,000 sheep. In 1400 the English were exporting as many as 130,000 packs of fine wool, weighing 364 pounds apiece, and had ousted the Spaniards as masters of the market.

On their side new countries began to turn their attention to corn-growing. Prussia, Poland, and Hungary henceforth took their place as the great producers of cereals, side by side with old centres of production, such as France. In the Low Countries and in England, where methods of intensive cultivation were used, farmers succeeded in getting returns of seven to one, instead of four to one. Horticulture, floriculture, and arboriculture developed in the rich lands of the West, and it was now that the reputation of the Flemish florists and the nurserymen of Nuremburg and Augsburg was founded. The cultivation of the vine tended to become localized, and to increase in Italy, Spain, France, the Rhineland, and Hungary. Italian and Spanish wines supplanted those of the East, and the wines of France kept their popularity. At the beginning of the fifteenth century Bordeaux was still exporting from 28,000 to 30,000 casks a year. The cultivation of textile and dye plants benefited by the progress of industry.

The decline of production in one part of Europe was counterbalanced by its increase in another. The rise in the price of agricultural produce was in favour of the development of landed property in privileged regions. While in France, a prey to war, the value of land fell to a half between 1325 and 1450, and in Normandy even reached as low a figure as from 325 to 23 francs the hectare, it rose in the inverse direction in the states of the Dukes of Burgundy, and in Italy, England, the Low Countries, Southern Germany, and Eastern Spain.

The break-up of landed property continued along the lines laid down in the preceding period. Agrarian collectivism finally disappeared, even in the Germanic countries, and in



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general the only traces left of it were the commons, which were still numerous in the Scandinavian countries, Eastern and Central Europe, and the hilly districts of the West, such as Upper Italy, where they covered a sixth or a seventh of the soil, or even in the North of Spain. Everywhere communal property was enclosed and the major part of it appropriated. The large properties of the state, the greater aristocracy, and the Church continued to spread. Everywhere princes sought to build their domains up again. In Muscovy they claimed three-fifths of the land for themselves, and in Moldavia and Wallachia the whole. In France the Valois kings, despite their prodigality, drew a revenue of 4 million livres from the state lands, and the Dukes of Burgundy 160,000 *écus d'or*. In England the Yorkist kings, in 1460, laid hold of a fifth of the soil. But the sovereigns were unable to maintain this property intact, and it was continually breaking up to the profit of the Church and the nobles.

In spite of measures taken everywhere against the extension of mortmain, ecclesiastical property grew to a monstrous extent, which aroused the cupidity of lay lords and the desire for secularization. In the two Sicilies and Central and Northern Italy, the clergy, in the fifteenth century, held two-thirds and sometimes as much as four-fifths of the land; in the state of Venice their landed capital was worth 129 million *écus*. In the Castiles, where the Church held from a third to a fifth of the land, it had a revenue of 10 million ducats. In France, ruined by the war, it was so successful in building up its landed wealth again in fifty years that it recovered from a quarter to a half of the land, and drew from it a revenue greater than that of the state—to wit, 5 million livres *tournois* (100 million francs). The revenue of the English clergy was twelve times greater than that of the king, and they held about the same proportion of the land as in France. In Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and Eastern Europe that proportion was as high as a third or a half, and even two-thirds.

A minority of great lords, barons, landlords, magnates, sovereign lords (*landesherren*), sometimes owned immense domains which they called "states" (*estados*, estates) in Spain and England, sometimes scattered, and sometimes



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concentrated. In Italy a Colonna, in the fifteenth century, owned 97 fiefs and had 150,000 vassals; a Villena at Castile had 80,000 *ensitaires* and a revenue of 100,000 ducats; a Duke of Orleans had an income of 540,000 livres; a Duke of Anjou, 400,000; a la Trémoille, 336,000; a Rohan, 280,000. In England Lord Cromwell drew £66,000 sterling from his possessions, and the German princes each owned lands yielding on an average 240,000 marks, a tenth of the revenue which was later to be enjoyed by Charles V. But they formed only a very small minority. The mass of noblemen, save in a few countries, such as England, neglected the cultivation of their estates, and alienated them one by one to pay their debts or to meet their expenses.

It was usually the rich bourgeoisie which stepped into their shoes and laboured to build up a fortune in land, accumulating it by means of copyholds or *accensements* and reclamations, as well as by purchase. They owned fine farms well stocked with cattle, like the one which belonged to the Chancellor d'Orgement at Gonesse (1858). They sometimes even rivalled the great nobles; Jacques Cœur possessed twenty-five lordships, and the Chancellor, Nicolas Rolin, was one of the greatest landowners in Burgundy. Bladelin, the Treasurer of Philip the Good, employed a large part of his fortune in draining "polders." The middle and lower ranks of the bourgeoisie, and even the urban artisans, followed the example of these great bourgeois, coveted land, and appropriated numerous holdings; the communes did the same. Thus a London mercer, in the fifteenth century, leaves several manors to his children, and a cook, a blacksmith, and a dyer of York all have small landed properties. This state of affairs was still more frequent in France, the Low Countries, Italy, and the Rhineland, where there was no burgess, however humble, who did not dream of a little estate and a country house.

Among the rural classes the number of small proprietors also went on increasing in the West, although it diminished in Eastern and Northern Europe, where they had been very numerous. In the West of Europe a rural third estate came into being, sometimes, as in Central and Northern Italy, favoured by the public authorities, who reserved to it the right of pre-emption in the purchase of non-noble lands.



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In France so greedy was the peasant for land that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, 60 per cent. of the changes in landownership in certain provinces took place in his favour, and in the end peasant proprietors occupied a fifth, and in some parts as much as a third, of the soil. It is true that the peasants were able to build up only very small properties; peasant owners, holding from ten to fifty hectares with several yokes of oxen, formed in some regions no more than a sixth of the total peasant population. In England these freeholders or franklins, whose jolly countenances live again in the pages of Chaucer, dwelt on estates averaging eighty acres, which brought them in about £20 a year. In the German Rhineland the little peasant estates contained no more than about twenty to thirty acres each. Most of the small peasant proprietors had only moderate incomes, to which the growing *morcellement* was a constant menace. In the Rhineland, for instance, the size of the holding diminished by three-quarters in the course of this period. All the tenacity and economy of the peasants was needed to prevent the dissolution of these small rural properties, which they, nevertheless, consolidated and extended by slow degrees.

The great mass of the rural populations was then composed of *censitaires* who had not an absolute property in the land, but held it in perpetual usufruct. In the West of Europe they had gained their liberty, and no one dared any longer to contest it. In England hardly one per cent. of the rural population was unfree. In France it was a sacred maxim that every Frenchman was born free. In the Low Countries the *échevins* of Ypres declared proudly that among them "never was there heard tell of folk of servile condition nor of *mortemain*." Commutation spread with renewed activity; for example, in France after the Hundred Years' War, and in all regions in which there prevailed the old systems of mixed farming, which required a great deal of labour. Free *censitaires* or copyholders were by the end of the Middle Ages cultivating five-sixths of the soil in different parts of France, and a third of it in England. It was rarely that they were unable to obtain advantageous terms, which assured them, together with the divers prerogatives of civil liberty, the majority of the effective rights



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of property, such as alienation and succession, while limiting their labour services and dues.

But even in the West a social and economic evolution was on foot, which was, in part, unfavourable to them. On the one hand, landowners, clergy, lords, and burgesses took advantage of the troublous times to try and increase the obligations of their tenants, or to take away the guarantees and advantages which had been granted to them, to the point of menacing them with a return to villeinage or serfdom. On the other hand, they deprived the villeins of that stability which they had always enjoyed. The fact was that the new practices—the substitution of pasture-farming for mixed farming, and that of *métayage* or leasehold farming or the direct farming of the estate by the lord for the old method of *accensement*, the appropriation of commons by great landlords by means of the enclosure system—all contributed to make the assistance of *censitaires* less indispensable. They soon became a positive nuisance to all the large landowners who wanted to increase their revenues and diminish the cost of labour. Attempts were, therefore, made to evict them, to profit by their temporary difficulties, or by their failure to execute the clauses of their contract, as well as by their impoverishment or desertion, to take back their holdings into the lord's hands. All over the West a considerable number of these *censitaires* and copyhold tenants, thus deprived of the land which they cultivated, went to swell the ranks of the agricultural wage-earners or proletariat, notably in England. A vast number of others, in Central and Eastern Europe, were even more unfortunate, and fell back into the condition of the villeins, or, worse still, of the serfs in the previous period.

In Western Europe, where such a retrogression was no longer possible on account of the level reached by manners and civilization, new classes grew up at the expense of the *censitaires*, some farming by themselves or in partnership, others seeking a means of existence in the sale of their labour.

Farming as a free business enterprise, the so-called *fermage* or tenant-farming, became a speculation which was readily taken up by the rich bourgeoisie, who contracted for



HARVEST
(Early 16th Century)

[face p. 322]



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the cultivation of the lands of the Church and the nobility, and made themselves administrators of *fermes générales*, vast domains belonging to individuals or to corporations. Soon the most enterprising section of the rural third estate developed a taste for this system, and side by side with these big contract farmers, there appeared a growing number of small farmers, farming landed estates less wide in extent. In Italy, the Low Countries, the German Rhineland, England, and France (where it became general in the provinces of the Parisian basin, Champagne, Picardy, and Orléanais), and in the East tenant-farming made considerable progress under the two forms of agricultural leases and stock leases (called *bail à cheptel* in France, and *socida* in Italy). The latter were signed for one year, or sometimes for three to five years; the former were sometimes concluded for life, and sometimes for one or more generations, but tended to become restricted to shorter terms: seventy years in England, thirty to fifty years in France, six to twenty-nine years in Italy. Sometimes the rent payable by the farmer was fixed, sometimes it varied with the produce of the farm, and the rate was more or less high according to agreement. It was as low as a quarter or even an eighth of the land rent in Provence, and stood at 3·13 per cent. and 2·33 per cent. of the revenue in various other districts of France; while in England, where, from the fifteenth century, the farmers were, above all, big graziers, the figure mounted steadily, enriching landlords and tenants alike.

Co-operative farming (*mezzadria*, *colonat partiaire*, *métayage*) grew in some districts more widely than tenant-farming, notably in Italy, the South and West of France, Eastern Spain, and the Rhineland. It was a method more easily accessible to peasants without capital, and it sometimes gave them appreciable advantages, in cases where the demand for labour was greater than the supply, and where it was necessary to bring uncultivated or ill-cultivated lands under the plough. In Provence and Italy there were a number of *métayers* who had to pay only a fifth, a fourth, a tenth part of the produce of their farms, or even a rent which varied from year to year with the harvest. But more often they had to pay a strict half of the land rent to the lord, and their economic independence was far less than that



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of the *fermier* or ordinary tenant-farmer. In Tuscany they were forbidden to emigrate to the towns and to leave the land without having paid their debts, and the disciplinary powers of the landowner over them were not sensibly dissimilar from those formerly exercised by the lord over the free villein. It is true that the *métayer* only alienated his liberty for a short period, a year, or sometimes longer—for instance, ten years in Provence; but, on the other hand, he enjoyed neither the stability of the old *censitaire* nor the privileged position of the independent farmer.

The different forms of agricultural wage labour developed yet more widely than tenant-farming and *métayage* towards the close of the Middle Ages. The ranks of the free day labourers, who had appeared during the preceding period, were swelled by evicted *censitaires* and peasants who had no resources other than the sale of their labour, and by others, like the German *kossaten* and the English cotters, whose tiny holdings (sometimes only three or four acres) were too small for their entire support. Hiring themselves out by the day or the week, or on taskwork, these *brassiers*, *varlets*, labourers, servants in husbandry (as they were called in different places), often set a high price on their services, when labour became scarce after some great epidemic, such as the Black Death. But although free they were still subject to strict regulation. In Italy, France, Spain, and England, Draconian laws, such as the Italian municipal statutes, the French ordinance of 1350, and the famous English Statutes of Labourers (1350-1417), punished all who refused to work by heavy fines and even by imprisonment, allowed them to be taken by force, and sometimes to be thrown into chains if they left their work, forbade them to change their domicile, or to apprentice their sons, and fixed their wages. The theoretical freedom of these wage-earners did not prevent them from being tied hand and foot by iron laws, which the public authorities claimed the right to impose upon them, laws from whose clutches they only succeeded in escaping when the urgent need for labour obliged their employers to capitulate.

The class of domestic and farm servants also grew in numbers; hired by the month or year, they enjoyed more stable conditions, and were protected from unemployment



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and from the rise in price of the necessities of life, since they were lodged, fed, and clothed; but domestic service in those days, although based upon freedom of contract, was exceedingly restricted by the authoritarian traditions of the past, which obliged the servant to remain in his place until he had obtained permission to leave, and which even conferred upon the master the right of corporal punishment.

Finally, the more undisciplined and adventurous elements, or those less apt for labour or less industrious, formed henceforth a rural proletariat analogous to the urban proletariat, and, like the latter, often became tramps and beggars. Medieval society bequeathed to the modern world these two evils, destined to grow worse, and the redoubtable problem of pauperism was already appearing in the country in as acute a form as in the town.

Sporadically in the West and in enormous proportions in the Centre, North, and East of Europe, a real retrogression was, indeed, going on. Serfdom, which had been declining and seemed on the point of extinction, took on a new vigour when the scarcity of labour made itself felt. It was extirpated with greater difficulty in the less populous districts of Western Europe, where it had survived, and it established itself and advanced in a great part of the continent to the East and North.

In the West, where it survived in the attenuated form of *mainmorte*, which fell rather on the land than on the person of the serf, it maintained itself obstinately in Friuli, Montferrat, Piedmont, Aragon, the Balearic Isles, and Upper Catalonia, the Limousine March, Champagne, the Nivernais, and divers regions in the East of France, in Luxemburg, Namurois, Drenthe, Guelders, and Over-Yssel; and it still lay upon one per cent. of the rural population of England. In the Spanish states the hard-working Moslem population of *mudejares*, as well as the Jews, who, in the preceding period, had enjoyed extensive franchises, were now reduced to serfdom.

But it was, above all, in the rest of Europe that a renaissance of serfdom took place, favoured by the rising influence of the feudal classes. In the North of Germany, notably in Pomerania, Mecklenburg, and Brandenburg, and even in the Austrian lands, Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola, not only the old Slav populations, but also a large number



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of villeins (*hörigen*) of other race fell into serfdom (*leibeigenschaft*). It often happened that the mere fact of living on servile land was sufficient to bring about the loss of liberty. "The air alone makes serfs," ran a German saying. The peasant, thus pushed into serfdom and despoiled of his old customary rights and commons, was reduced, as a proverb of Brandenburg expressed it, to wishing long life to the junker's horses, lest he might conceive the notion of riding on his tenants.

In Hungary, Transylvania, Poland, and Denmark the rural populations, among whom freemen had once predominated, were reduced to serfdom by the invading aristocracies. In Serbia, Roumania, and Bulgaria and in the old Eastern Empire the liberty of the peasant disappeared in like manner, and the cultivator, assimilated to the Byzantine *paroikos*, became the most miserable peasant in Europe, the forerunner of the Turkish *rayah*. In Muscovy alone the necessities of colonization were able to maintain the inhabitants of the countryside in a condition analogous to that of the villein or *colonus*. Russian serfdom is a modern institution. But, on the other hand, the Muscovites, Lithuanians, and Poles reduced all their prisoners to slavery—pagans or Moslems, Finns, Tartars, or Turks. At the same time the slave trade woke into life again in the South of Europe, Italy, and Spain, even in the French provinces of the Mediterranean littoral, at the expense of the paynims, and sometimes provided landowners with a considerable contingent of cultivators. There were as many as 20,000 of these slaves in Majorca, and Italian statutes show that in Sicily, Tuscany, Venetia, and Istria slave labour was more than once called in to supplement the scarcity of free labour.

The many crises of all kinds which marked the close of the Middle Ages and gave rise now to anarchy and misery, now to conflicts between landlords and labourers, aristocrats and peasants menaced with serfdom, filled the rural world at this period with an effervescence similar to that which was disturbing the towns. The second half of the fourteenth century, and to a less extent the first half of the fifteenth, were marked by constant risings, usually without either programme, unity, or direction, mere anarchical and bloody manifestations of the suffering and hatred of the people.



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Such, in particular, was the character of the famous revolt of the French peasants, the *Jacques*, as they were called, whom the nobility mocked and despised and drove to desperation by their brigandage. In the spring of 1358, at a time when the prestige of the nobles had been shaken by the disaster of Poitiers (1356), the peasants of the North of France, Normandy, the Ile-de-France, Picardy, Brie, Eastern Champagne, and the country round Soissons, rose under the leadership of an old soldier, Guillaume Cale, burned hundreds of castles, spread pillage, fire, and sometimes murder far and wide, and even aroused the sympathy of the lesser bourgeoisie in towns such as Rouen, Senlis, Amiens, Meaux, and Paris itself (May 28th to June 16th). According to Froissart 100,000 men took up arms, but the peasants were crushed by the nobles at Meaux and at Clermont-sur-Oise and fell back again into their miserable state. The aristocratic classes revenged themselves by executing 20,000 hapless creatures in cold blood, and crushed the rebellious villages beneath fines. The Jacquerie seems to have formulated no precise demands. The same thing happened twenty years later in the revolt of the *Tuchins*, which spread from Upper Italy as far as the central plateau of France and Poitou, though its chief centre was in Languedoc. Peasants and artisans made common cause, and organized a sort of guerilla warfare in heaths and woods, which dragged on for six years (1379-1385); they ill-treated all who had not horny hands, and, finally, succumbed to a pitiless repression. The English, in their turn, for a brief space masters of Western France, where they ravaged the countryside, provoked jacqueries in Maine, Cotentin, and Normandy, the best known of which was directed by the peasant Cantepie (1424-1432), and drowned the land in blood.

Other rural revolutions had a better defined and sometimes a more widely socialistic character than those of France. In Spain the *serfs* (*pageses de remensa*) of Upper Catalonia thrice took up arms between 1395 and 1479 against the nobles and clergy who oppressed them, and finally succeeded in winning their freedom, thanks to the intervention of the Crown. Less fortunate, the peasants (*foreros*) of Majorca, in spite of four insurrections (1391-1477), the most violent of which was directed by a labourer named Tort



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Ballester, did not succeed in preventing the appropriation of rural property by the bourgeoisie, nor in obtaining better conditions of labour for *censitaires* and day labourers. Some were massacred or left the country, the rest were obliged to submit.

In the Low Countries the jacquerie of maritime Flanders, which lasted from 1322 to 1328, had already displayed all the characteristics of a class war, which ranged the free peasants, menaced with serfdom, against the nobles, and was accompanied by unexampled violence on both sides. The rural populations, though beaten, succeeded in consolidating their freedom. Henceforth they upheld the princely power against the towns, and thus increased their influence and won a right to exist for rural industry. But in the East the principality of Liège was, in 1458, the scene of the strange revolt of the *cluppelslagers*, who took a ploughshare for their badge and wore it on their caps, and whose complaint was against the abuses of feudal justice and taxation.

The two most original rural revolutions were those of the English labourers and of the peasants of Bohemia. The English Peasants' Revolt, provoked by oppressive legislation which obliged labourers and artisans to work for fixed wages and to remain in their jobs, was fanned by the preaching of revolutionary mystics, poor priests imbued with Wycliffite doctrines, such as John Ball and Jack Straw. Villeins discontented with their labour services also joined the movement, and the government, by imposing a graduated poll tax, which fell heavily on the poorer classes (1377-80), set a light to the terrible conflagration which made every owner of property tremble. A village artisan, an old soldier named Wat Tyler, led the rebels, who raised the eastern and south-eastern counties and even part of the north. Straw and Ball were the theorists of the revolution. In the name of the Bible they preached the spoliation of the nobility, clergy, and bourgeoisie, the abolition of serfdom and of all social distinctions, the equality of rank and the community of property. But the rebels had, in reality, no common programme or uniform line of conduct; in one place they confined themselves to abolishing labour services and pulling down enclosures; in another they condemned themselves by acts of pillage and anarchy. At one moment



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they were masters of London and of King Richard II (June 13-14, 1380); but they allowed themselves to be disarmed by the promise of charters of enfranchisement, and in a few days the revolt collapsed, to be followed by a bloody repression. The crown, satisfied with the annulment of concessions which had been wrung from it by violence, contented itself with executing the revolutionary leaders, but was not always strong enough to arrest a blind reaction. Calm was re-established for sixty years. The short rising of the Kentish peasants, led by the adventurer Jack Cade (June 12th, 1450), was not as serious as that of 1380, although it gave rise to grave disturbances in London.

Bolder still, and of far longer duration and wider scope, was the Hussite Revolt, which was in part a religious and in part a social movement. Under cover of the religious reformation preached by John Huss, and of a national reaction against their German aristocracy, the Czech peasants, joining forces with the lesser nobility and led by two illustrious warriors, Ziska and Procopius the Great, dominated Central Europe for twenty years (1418-1437). They created a Puritan democracy which proclaimed the equality of man, the liberation of the country districts from the yoke of feudalism, and the secularization of the goods of the clergy. But this democracy brought about its own ruin by falling under the influence of the extreme radicalism of the sect of Taborites, who ordained the absolute levelling of all social distinctions, whether of fortune, birth, or intelligence, the full emancipation of women, the suppression of private property, marriage and the family—in fact, a complete system of communism. The Hussite Revolt, abandoned by the native bourgeoisie and the lesser nobility, who had at first supported it, was then crushed at the Battle of Lipany, leaving the ground clear for feudal reaction and serfdom.

It had given rise to an immense effervescence in the heart of Europe, which spread to the East of France and, in particular, to Germany, where the peasants rose without success in Saxony, Silesia, Brandenburg, the Rhineland (1432), and in Carinthia, Styria, and far Transylvania (1437). Finally, in the Scandinavian countries, although the free peasants of Sweden, in alliance with the local nobility, and led by Engelbrechtson, carried out a success-



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ful revolt against the establishment of serfdom (1437-40) and even seized the reins of government, in Denmark three great peasant risings, between 1340 and 1441, resulted only in fixing the yoke of the German aristocracy still more heavily upon the Danish peasant, who was reduced first to villeinage and then to the harshest serfdom.

Thus in the greater part of Europe, as a result either of these social changes or of the scourge of war and disease, the condition of the rural classes would seem to have grown worse, especially in the East, Centre, and North of the Continent, and even in certain parts of the West, in Scotland, Ireland, Navarre, Aragon, and, above all, in France. Most of the French provinces were ruined; the population diminished by a half; and even Languedoc, although far from the scene of hostilities, lost a third of its inhabitants. In the days of Charles VII, the Bishop of Lisieux describes the frightful misery of the northern countryside, where emaciated peasants, covered with rags, wandered in the midst of the deserted fields. The Englishman Fortescue boasts, in 1450, of the contrast between the destitution of the cultivators in the most fertile country in the world and the well-being of the peasantry across the Channel.

In a few countries, however, the rural districts were more favourably situated; for instance, in Bohemia before the Hussite wars, and in Poland, under Casimir the Great and the Jagellons. It was, above all, Italy, Spain, the Low Countries, Germany, and England which were most successful in preserving and increasing their former prosperity. In these countries the different classes of the rural population enjoyed, in general, a certain degree of ease and comfort. The day labourers themselves benefited by the higher wages, which had doubled and trebled in Italy, as in France, England, and Germany. In England they demanded to be paid in money, and to work only five days a week. In the Rhine and Danube lands the daily agricultural wage was equivalent in purchasing power to the price of a pig or sheep, nine to seven pounds of meat, or a pair of shoes, and the annual wage of a servant to the price of an ox or twenty sheep. In England the small peasant proprietors, yeomen or franklins, and the small tenant-farmers often enjoyed an annual income of £70 or £80, and sent their sons



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to college. The conditions of material life were still further improved, if not in respect of housing and furniture, at any rate, in respect of clothes, and especially of food, which was plentiful and even abundant in the country districts of England, Flanders, and the Rhineland.

One of the most striking indications of this prosperity in the rural districts was the prompt reconstitution of the population in these favoured areas. Between 1450 and 1500 Italy, that "full fair and pleasant land," reached a total of nine to eleven million souls, a third of whom dwelt in the two Sicilies, more than a third in Upper Italy, and a tenth in Tuscany. The Castilian states numbered seven and a half million inhabitants; Catalonia and Roussillon, 300,000; and the whole Spanish peninsula about ten million. The Southern Netherlands, in which the marvellous fertility of the soil and the prosperity of the people were admired by all beholders, contained over three million souls, a half of whom belonged to Flanders and Brabant. England recovered the two and a half million inhabitants whom she had had before the Black Death, and her peasants were among the most prosperous in the Western world. While Bohemia lost half a million out of her three million inhabitants in the Hussite wars, Germany, in the fifteenth century, numbered some twelve millions, and was not to know such prosperity again for three centuries and a half. The progress of this part of the West sufficed to preserve for Western Europe the economic supremacy which it had already won in the domain of rural labour.

It was in this direction that there was to be continued in modern times an evolution which had little by little profoundly transformed the lot of the working classes, an evolution of which the birth and progress are, perhaps, the most important events in the history of the Middle Ages.



CONCLUSION

THE history of labour in the Middle Ages began with a far more terrible shock than that which marked the end of this long period. The latter was only an accident of growth, whereas the former very nearly brought about a complete stop in the march of civilization. The barbarian invasions let loose a real disaster. In two hundred years the ordered edifice of the Roman and Christian Empire, under the shelter of which labour had grown and prospered, was upset from roof to foundation in the West, and formidably sapped in the East. Ruins lay everywhere; anarchy took the place of order, and the reign of force succeeded to that of law; production in all its forms was arrested, the treasury of wealth accumulated by former generations was scattered; economic and social progress ceased. A blind work of destruction was all that was accomplished by these barbarians, whose sole useful influence was to provoke a salutary reaction among the chosen few who preserved the tradition and the remnants of civilization.

It was in the East that those few took up once more the work of Rome. The Byzantine Empire, opposing to barbarism a bulwark which remained for long insurmountable, brought the people back to the land, gave an immense impetus to colonization, commerce, and industry, once more opened the sources of wealth, abolished slavery, fixed men to the soil, and set light once again to the smouldering hearth of civilization. In four centuries it won the barbarian populations of Eastern Europe to civilization, and acted as the teacher of the West, which had sunk halfway back into barbarism. The West itself undertook a more obscure task, but one which was fertile in results. It set on foot the first agricultural colonization which carried the frontiers of a new Christendom to the Elbe and the Lowlands of Scotland. In the framework of a natural and manorial economy, it sought to revive economic activity, substituting serfdom for slavery and, like the Eastern Empire, establishing the mass of the population in great domains, under conditions of stability



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and relative security. But it was unable to give to trade, industrial production, and urban economy the same vitality as its rival.

On all sides the aristocracy had grown and taken possession of the greater part of the land, which, for the most part, passed from collective to individual ownership. In the East this aristocracy did not succeed in obtaining complete political power as well as social influence and economic supremacy. In the West, collecting in its hands all the forms of authority, it became a feudal class. The clerical and military caste, which saved the people from the dangers of the last invasions in the ninth and tenth centuries, brought about the triumph of a new form of organized labour—to wit, the feudal economy, which grew out of the economy of the previous period, and was every whit as oppressive. In the name of the protection which they claimed to secure for the masses, the feudal classes chained men to the soil or to the workshops, claimed to regulate every sort of activity, divided the fruits of labour as they pleased, and weighed down the multitudes under the yoke of a capricious and tyrannical authority, though obliged to allow them a minimum of material advantages. At the end of two centuries Christendom emerged from the isolation, in which it was kept by these thousands of local governments with their narrow horizons, and the framework of feudal economy began to break up in all directions.

There followed the golden age of the Middle Ages, and one of the finest periods in the history of human labour. It lasted for 250 years (twelfth to fourteenth centuries). Commercial activity began again and increased enormously, as also did industrial production, and they gave an immense impulse to movable wealth and to town life. The working classes, grouped in the towns, set to work the irresistible force of their revolutionary unions, and conquered both liberty and power. They encased industrial production in a strong armour of free crafts and sworn corporations. For the first time millions of emancipated workers learned the formidable power of association, won recognition for the social value of their labour, and raised themselves to a level of material and moral existence unknown to their forebears.

Following their example and impelled by new needs, the



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rural classes, whose co-operation assured the success of one of the greatest works accomplished in the whole history of mankind, the colonization of Christian Europe, emancipated themselves in their turn and conquered all those civil and economic liberties, of which they had hitherto been deprived. They began to gain access to the ownership of property, they improved the conditions of their existence, they often attained to ease and well-being. They were associated in the work of local administration, and they rose in the social hierarchy. Finally, taking up the rôle which the enfeebled East was no longer able to perform, Western civilization transformed in its own image the economic and social régime of the young countries in the Centre, North, and East of Europe, the new provinces of Christendom.

But during the last hundred years of the Middle Ages, a crisis threatened the solidity of the new edifice, in which labour was prospering. Nations and states strove with one another; anarchy reappeared; and in the midst of the disorders national economy reaped the heritage of feudal and urban economy. Terrible natural scourges, carrying off half the population of Europe, brought about a momentary scarcity of labour. The primitive unity of the urban classes was more and more shaken. The formation and steady advance of the capitalist bourgeoisie, of international commerce, and of the great industry, accelerated industrial production and trade, but gave rise to the formidable problems of wage labour and pauperism. The interests of master craftsmen and journeymen fell apart, and they opposed union to union. The class war raged in the towns, where revolutions broke out, which had for object now the reform of abuses on the part of the authorities, now the conquest of power, now a new social order. They died out by degrees; the central power re-established order; in one part of Europe the rise of wages and the increase of wealth allowed the masses, the small masters, and the workmen to retain or recover the prosperity of the preceding period.

At the same time agricultural colonization, arrested in a certain number of regions, which were a prey to war and anarchy, went on apace in others. The activity of production was sometimes turned into new channels. Land finally



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passed into the hands of the state, the great proprietors, the bourgeoisie, and even to a small extent into that of the peasants, while the feudal class grew poorer, and the class of *censitaires* gained a partial hold upon the soil. New forms of agricultural exploitation, tenant-farming, *métayage*, and hired labour received a certain extension. Serfdom, which died out in the most civilized part of Europe, revived again elsewhere. A proletariat and a problem of pauperism appeared in the country districts. Peasant revolts, blind risings, due to misery, or violent attempts to bring about social changes, broke out on many sides, incoherent and ineffective manifestations of the distress of the rural classes. Nevertheless, calm reappeared. In the more privileged regions of the West the prosperity of the country districts equalled that of the towns. But in the greater part of Europe the horizon was dark, and the world of labour lived in the midst of inquietude, on the eve of new shocks, which were destined to retard its ascendancy in modern times.

• The work accomplished by medieval civilization nevertheless remained intact in all its main outlines. During this millennium two-thirds of the soil of Europe was conquered by colonization; population doubled; agricultural production increased to vast proportions; individual ownership in its diverse forms replaced the primitive system of tribal, village, or family property. The bourgeois and rural classes themselves attained to the possession of landed capital. Movable wealth, as a result of the increase of commerce and of industrial production, developed anew, and was scattered among a crowd of possessors. But the capital fact which emerges, and which gives to this age its unforgettable importance, is the attainment of freedom by the urban and rural classes.

For the first time the masses, ceasing to be mere herds without rights or thoughts of their own, became associations of freemen, proud of their independence, conscious of the value and dignity of their labour, fitted by their intelligent activity to collaborate in all spheres, political, economic, and social, in the tasks which the aristocracies believed themselves alone able to fulfil. Not only was the power of production multiplied a hundredfold by their efforts, but society was regenerated by the incessant influx of new and vigorous



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blood. Social selection was henceforth better assured. It was thanks to the devotion and spirit of these medieval masses that the nations became conscious of themselves, for it was they who brought about the triumph of national patriotism, just as their local patriotism had burned for town or village in the past. The martyrdom of a peasant girl from the marshes of Lorraine saved the first of the great nations, France, which had become the most brilliant home of civilization in the Middle Ages. They gave to the modern states their first armies, which were superior to those of feudal chivalry. Above all, it was they who prepared the advent of democracy and bequeathed to the labouring masses the instruments of their power, the principles of freedom and of association. Labour, of old despised and depreciated, became a power of incomparable force in the world, and its social value became increasingly recognized. It is from the Middle Ages that this capital evolution takes its date, and it is this which makes this period, so often misunderstood, and so full of a confused but singularly powerful activity, the most important in the universal history of labour before the great changes witnessed by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



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