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The Evolution of Industry

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THE enclosures did not merely end the Feudal system as an economic institution; they produced important results in the towns and the industries. Sheep-rearing required much less labour than did ordinary farming, and more men were free to take part in industrial activity. The growing volume of trade and the widened area of the market gave many of them their opportunity, but the monopolists of the towns stood in the way. The men were there, the opportunity was there, and men and opportunity combined were a force far stronger than Guild regulations or legislative enactments. The towns lost their hold upon industry, and the Craft oligarchy decayed, but before the Craft Guild passed away, the smaller men within it, the journeymen and small masters had already been crushed out of its ranks and had formed the journeymen's associations, as distinct from the larger bodies which had become transformed into the pompous, ceremonial livery companies—no longer progressive, but reactionary to the highest degree.

Domestic Industry.

During the 15th Century, the decay of the towns became pronounced. Enterprising craftsmen who desired to be free from Guild control and hampering regulations, moved out of the towns and settled in the country districts, together with many a newcomer into industry. Industry was still in the handicraft stage technically, but the degree of specialisation was more pronounced, and became still more so as the Domestic system became more firmly established. The country, too, was becoming one economic whole instead of being, as hitherto, a mere collection of almost isolated municipalities, each well-nigh as self-contained as the family or village on a smaller scale had been. In the day of the Guild each town produced practically all it required in addition to the goods passed on to the merchants. With Domestic Industry, however, there began that localising of industry which is so marked a feature of the present, when Lancashire and cotton, Yorkshire and wool, Birmingham and small metal ware, and the Clyde, Mersey and Tyne and ships are synonymous terms. The specialised locality needs a freer movement of people, and a better means of communication than were possible before the 15th Century. Thus did one phase of development make another phase possible just as is the case today.

Some Features of the Domestic System.

Scattered about in various parts of the country, and particularly in rural Lancashire, there are still to be found stone cottages, of ordinary appearance except for the large number of windows contained in the upper storeys. In these upper rooms, and sometimes in sheds adjoining the house, before the factory had come into its own, the domestic worker, aided by the members of his own family or by an apprentice or a journeyman or two, spun wool or wove the cloth for the distant market. In the early days of the Domestic system, the first craftsman either provided his own wool from the backs of his own sheep, or bought and then spun it into yarn. Having thus performed his industrial function, he sold his finished product, which then became the raw material for the weaver, who in turn worked upon it, and then sold it to the dyer, and so on to the finisher, etc. The last craftsman was thus in possession of a finished commodity, for which he had to

find a market. Each craftsman, though a specialised worker in relation to the product, was by no means a worker only. To the extent that he bought raw materials and sold his finished product, he was a merchant. To the extent that he employed a journeyman or an apprentice, he was an employer. To the extent that he supervised these workers he was a foreman, and to the extent that he himself functioned as a craftsman, he was a worker. Merchant, employer, foreman, worker, truly a many-sided industrial figure. The craftsmen at either end of the productive process, those who purchased the original raw materials and those who finally disposed of the finished commodity, in the course of time tended to devote more of their time to the purely merchanting function, and gradually they became wholly absorbed in the work of market finding. Their evolution was accompanied by a corresponding change in the position of the other craftsmen, who became more and more dependent upon them for materials and for the disposal of their goods. This delegation of functions took two forms. There were the merchants who bought raw materials and sold them to the craftsmen, who worked upon them and then sold them as outlined above, sometimes selling them ultimately to the same merchant. There were also those merchants who owned the product at every stage, and only gave it out to the craftsmen to be worked up. This latter class was a distinct advance upon the former and represented in embryo the employing class of today—the class owning the product and paying wages to those whose labour is embodied in it.

It was these merchants, these thrifty-souled individuals, puritanical in outlook and in sentiment because it was economically essential that they should be, who came into conflict with the last refuge of the Feudal System—the Feudal State. Finally, because they had become so important in the economic sphere and Feudal legislation and Government hampered them at every turn, they were forced to oust personal government by kings who believed in their own Divine right. They became the revolutionaries of their day, and carried through the first stage of the Capitalist Political Revolution—the Revolution of the 17th Century. Taxed to support a dissolute line of kings, who, with their hangers-on appeared to have little to do but waste on ostentation and futile warfare the substance of the striving capitalists, obstructed by tolls, fees, and dues on every hand, they, like the townsmen before them, looked ahead and revolted. But, like the townsmen also, when they had secured recognition for themselves, the merchants became as reactionary as those who had been opposed to them, and again and again they compromised with the aristocracy in order that the slumbering fires their own actions had fanned into flames, might be damped down. Revolutionary themselves in their own interests, they did not desire the common people to follow their example, and in the years that followed they or their class descendants crushed out every attempt on the part of the submerged to come into their own.

From village to village, with pack horse or wagon, went the merchants, collecting the goods made by the stay-at-home craftsmen. They amassed wealth in the process, and the industrial workers became more dependent upon them. They formed

their own corporations, and in return for favours given received charters and privileges from needy monarchs. They secured monopoly trading rights in distant lands (Levant Company, 1581; East India Company, 1600. Party sent to Jamestown, America, by London Company, 1607,) and equipped maritime expeditions that sought for new continents, which meant new markets and new trade routes. They bought and sold men in the slave markets of the world with as little compunction as they financed many a privateer whose name is emblazoned upon the scroll of England's heroes. In this they were no worse and no better than the merchants of other lands. "Spaniards and Dutchmen and Frenchmen, and such men," all were engaged in a great contest for the world's best markets, and the contest was made possible by, all the wealth to wage it was obtained from the industry of the people at home, who, because of the greater speculation that had gradually transformed industry, were able to produce a volume of goods infinitely greater than had ever before been possible. But even yet the industrial worker was not completely divorced from control over his own tools. He had very largely lost control over the product (during the 17th and 18th Centuries that movement went on rapidly) but the fact that he owned his own means of production gave him a sense of economic security that he was later to lose. In addition, up to the 18th Century, many, if not most, of the craftsmen could provide to some extent for their wants in the way of foodstuffs. If trade was bad or if some of the numerous wars had closed up some trade route or other, or prevented access to markets, they could still exist upon the produce of their own gardens or small plots. That is not to say that England was a paradise for the craftsman, or that we should emulate those who are for ever looking backward to a condition of things they call "Merrie England," a something that exists only in their own imaginations. Working in a small room or shed was unhealthy, roads were indescribably bad, sanitary conditions were worse, and social intercourse was almost non-existent. But the fact, nevertheless, remains that though "Contentment spinning at the cottage door" is a myth, the industrial population were not completely proletarianised, they were not without some hold upon the means of life, and a journeyman had the knowledge that with reasonable care he could hope to "set up" for himself.

The agricultural population were in a much worse position. Continued enclosures and evictions from the 15th to the 18th Centuries had driven them from pillar to post, had robbed them of practically all their holdings except such as were held at the will of the landlord and could be taken back at his pleasure, and very little indeed was left of the old common lands and the people's rights thereon. Custom and status, the dominant features of Feudal agricultural society, had passed away, and the merchants, traders, and manufacturers turned their attention to land speculation, to marrying into the ranks of the landed aristocracy and to becoming country squires. The methods they had adopted in business with such good results—for themselves—were brought into play in their dealings with the land, which, from being a class preserve of the old

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