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ECONOMICS

AN INTRODUCTION
FOR THE GENERAL READER

BY

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TO

ALBERT MANSBRIDGE

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PREFACE

AN apology is needed for adding another to the large number of books that attempt to deal with the whole subject-matter of Economics in a single volume. I offer two pleas in extenuation. The first is that nearly all existing introductions to the subject are intended primarily for the University student. The pious wish is generally expressed that they may be of use also to the general reader; but the general reader's special needs and opportunities are seldom borne in mind. His needs are different, inasmuch as he has not the guidance of a teacher and the leisure of the student; on the other hand, his opportunities are some compensation for these disadvantages, since he has usually a practical interest in the economic system and an experience of its working, which the academic student lacks. It seemed, therefore, worth while to try to do for the economic organisation as a whole what Bagehot and Mr. Hartley Withers have done for a part of it, the credit system—to explain the principles of its construction and working in the language of ordinary life, and with reference to the experience and interests of the ordinary man. While it would need a Bagehot to succeed, I hope that the mere

attempt will have done something to make it easier for the general reader to perceive the bearing of economic studies on the political and social problems in which he is interested.

My second plea is that existing introductions to Economics give the student too little help in applying its conclusions, since they give too little attention to the most interesting and important part of the subject, that, namely, where it borders on the allied studies of Politics and Ethics. The instinct which leads the working-man in discussions on economic questions to return constantly to the ethical aspect of them is a sound one, and Economics will gain rather than lose in authority by discarding its Mid-Victorian pose of the one and only science of society. No study of Economics, therefore, it seems to me, is worth making which does not include some consideration of the relation of the economic organisation to political and ethical aims and standards; which does not, in other words, indicate what light Economics can throw on Ruskin's question, "What is Wealth?" Hitherto economists have tended to confine themselves to explaining how the economic organisation works, postponing indefinitely the consideration of its political and ethical aspects; moralists, on the other hand, have applied their rules to the criticism of the economic organisation without taking too much trouble to understand it first. The chapters of my book, therefore, dealing with the political and ethical aspects of the economic organisation, which to some may seem irrelevant, seem to me to deal, however inadequately, with the most important

section of economic studies; at the same time I hope that any moralist who may take up the book will read the first nineteen chapters first.

I am conscious that my first plea has lost much of its force by the publication of Dr. Cannan's *Wealth*, and my second by that of Mr. J. A. Hobson's *Work and Wealth*. Unfortunately for me, I did not know that these books were being written; they were not published until this book was almost completed, and I did not read them until it was quite completed. I trust that the importance of the subjects, and the differences in my treatment of them, will be considered sufficient to justify another book.

I wish to acknowledge my debt to previous writers. If I do not go beyond a general acknowledgment, it is due not to any wish to conceal an obligation, but solely to the impossibility, after seven years of teaching, of tracing to their sources all conceptions and arguments that I owe to other writers. It is easier to assess one's indebtedness to friends. Professor D. H. Macgregor has helped me with many difficulties. Mr. R. H. Tawney and Mr. G. H. Thompson read my first draft of Chapters II. to VI. and XII. and XIII., and helped me with their criticisms and suggestions. Mr. H. Sanderson Furniss read the whole of my manuscript with a care for which I cannot thank him sufficiently, and enabled me to remove a great many obscurities, errors, and other imperfections. My wife performed a similar service while the book was being written, and Mr. A. E. Zimmern when it was in proof. My thanks are due to the Tutorial Classes Committee of the

University of Oxford for relieving me of lecturing work, and so enabling me to give the book the revision for which it had been waiting a year. And I thank, though they are too numerous to mention by name, all the members of my classes, who have allowed me to draw on their wide and diverse industrial experience, and have helped me with their criticisms of the views, my own and other people's, that I have put before them.

H. C.

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