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## RETAIL DISTRIBUTION

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# RETAIL DISTRIBUTION

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

By  
HENRY SMITH

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## PREFACE

ANY study of retail trading offered to the public at the present time must necessarily partake of the nature of an interim report. The serious accumulation of statistical data by the Economics and Statistics Section of the Bank of England in co-operation with the Incorporated Association of Retail Distributors is just commencing, the Co-operative Wholesale Society is about to produce a report which may be in print by the time this book is published, and it is even possible that the reluctance of the Government to spend a little money on a census of distribution will be overcome in the immediate future. It would therefore be impertinent to attempt to forestall those more intimately concerned and more adequately informed with a study of the internal organization of retailing. It would also be superfluous to superimpose a further purely descriptive study upon Mr. Dobbs's *Distribution of Consumable Goods* (incorporating material prepared by the pioneer in the investigation of retailing, the late Mrs. Braithwaite) and Mr. Neal's *Retailing and the Public*.

There is, however, perhaps still room for a work which, like the present essay, applies the tools of economic analysis to the problems of retail distribution in an attempt to detect, examine, and evaluate the forces which are at work. Room too, perhaps, for a critical analysis which is free to incorporate the sort of statistical investigation which official and semi-official bodies are (quite rightly) reluctant to undertake. In the hope that it may help to set the contemporary development of retailing, considered as a whole, in its place in the current stream of economic development, therefore, this work is presented.

I am indebted to the Editor of the *Economist* for permission to include that portion of Chapter III which originally appeared as an article in his pages. My gratitude is also due to Mr. Colin Clark for information and advice; to the Incorporated Association of Retail Distributors, to the Co-operative Wholesale Society (and especially to Mr. Darling), and to the International Association of Department Stores,

for access to information in their possession. I have also received considerable assistance from a large number of friends engaged in various branches of retail trade and from a number of academic friends who have discussed with me various sections of the book. My sense of obligation causes me to hasten to accept undivided personal responsibility for any opinion advanced in its course.

H. S.

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL,

*June 1937.*

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