

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OF FRANCE AND GERMANY
1815-1914

**CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON : Fetter Lane**



**NEW YORK
The Macmillan Co.**

**BOMBAY, CALCUTTA and
MADRAS
Macmillan and Co., Ltd.**

**TORONTO
The Macmillan Co. of
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THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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THIRD EDITION

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1928

X.53.N1
F8
10638

First Edition 1921
Second Edition 1923
Third Edition 1928

X.55.N1 pp195-401

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

THIS edition differs very little from the second. On p. 5 I have modified the summary of the causes of the growth of population during the nineteenth century in the light of recent inquiries. On p. 31 some references to the racial conditions of East Prussia have been altered to meet the criticisms of Professor Häpke. On pp. 219-227 various arguments have been restated and some facts corrected, in the paragraphs dealing with cooperation in Germany, as a result of the expert criticism of Professor C. R. Fay. The rest of the book is substantially unaltered.

J. H. CLAPHAM

Dec. 15, 1927

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INTRODUCTION

§ 1. No one is ever likely to doubt the political unity of the hundred years from 1815 to 1914. The dates are true starting and finishing points for a great age. In economic history starting and finishing points are always hard to find. But it seems likely that 1914 will remain a recognised finishing point. And though the fall of Napoleon, as an isolated episode, was only of second rate importance in the economic sphere, it marked the end of an age which had witnessed economic events, both destructive and creative, of the very first order. The mere cessation of wars which have been almost continuous for over twenty years is in itself an economic event of some magnitude. In 1815 the significance of peace was increased by the very unusual economic position in which the continent at that time stood in relation to England.

“From 1500 to 1850 the great social question of the day in Europe was the peasant question¹.” For this question the French Revolution had offered a solution which Napoleon endorsed. The revolutionary land settlement stood throughout the nineteenth century and stands to-day. In that settlement much was destroyed; something was created; and, though the peasant went on tilling his land almost exactly as his fathers had tilled it, there were real changes in the daily life of this representative common man of Western Europe. He was his own master as he had never been before. By example and the sword France had commended her settlement of the peasant question to her neighbours. She was not the first peasant country to attempt a final solution. Some of her smaller neighbours were before her. Some rulers of great states had made beginnings. (See *ppst*, § 9.) But her Revolution opened the last phase of the peasant problem in the West. From her revolutionary land settlement, through peasant emancipation in Prussia, to the emancipation of the

¹ Gustav Schmoller, *Volkswirtschaftslehre*, I, 520.

Russian serfs, and even to the modern land legislation for Ireland, there is a continuous historic chain. That settlement also completed her "unity and indivisibility." Not until after 1789, it is said, were the German speaking peasants of Alsace proud to be Frenchmen.

In the sphere of industry the revolutionary age was less decisive for France and the continent, because equally important questions were not ripe for settlement. What is called capitalism had long existed in Western Europe. In one or other of its forms, agrarian commercial or industrial, it is as old as civilisation. Only in the dark ages, after the fall of Rome, and later on the outskirts of civilised peoples could a society really ignorant of capitalism be found. By the eighteenth century industrial capitalism, the youngest of the three forms, was at least known all over Europe. The employer controlling capital, the life-long wage earner, the dealer who stands between producer and consumer, were all familiar types in France and Italy and Switzerland; though they became rarer with every day's march north-eastward towards the outskirts of civilisation in Russia. But the life-long wage earners of industry were a minority in every continental country, and a tiny minority in most. Where they existed they were usually either outworkers or what might be called workshop hands, not factory hands. Their characteristic grievances, hopes and ambitions lay in the subconscious regions of national life. There they were working; but the nations were hardly aware of them.

The revolutionary legislators, individualists almost to a man, had only one common and keen desire for industry—to rid those who directed it from surviving medieval restrictions and the excesses of official control. They abolished the half decayed guilds and cut down state interference. But problems of the wage contract hardly interested them. These unfamiliar problems, when forced upon them, were handled with the prejudices and assumptions natural at the time to men who had never worked for wages, not with the imaginative sympathy extended to those problems of the land which had been for so long before the world of thought. Yet the early revolutionary labour policy, if so it may be called, marks a definite if not a decisive stage in the

economic history of France, and of the adjacent continental countries which came under French influence in the Napoleonic age. It cleared the ground for the industrial growths of the nineteenth century. The unsympathetic rulings of revolutionary legislators on the grievances and hopes of industrial wage earners were given precision and permanence in Napoleon's Codes. (See *post*, § 17.) This in its turn gave precision to the hopes and grievances. French town workmen became self-conscious in hostility to the law; just as the English wage earners became self-conscious in hostility to the Combination Acts of Napoleon's enemy. There was the added sore in France that fraternity and equality had been proclaimed and then hidden away. If French political history from 1789 to 1815 had run a different course, the labour history of the nineteenth century might have done so too.

The essentials of commerce were less affected by the revolutionary and Napoleonic age than were those of industry. Trade no doubt was diverted wholesale, and traders enriched or ruined in ranks, by British sea power and Napoleon's furious reactions against it. But when the artificial circumstance of war ended, commercial methods, staple branches of trade, the extent to which continental nations were dependent on commerce, and the nature of that dependence, reverted to something very like late eighteenth century conditions. Commerce was more capitalistic, more modern, more mature and so less easily altered in 1789 than either industry or rural life. It sprang back towards the old position when stress was removed. Only after many years, and under the pressure of immensely powerful new forces, were some of its essentials modified. A merchant of even the late nineteenth century would have been less out of place in an eighteenth century counting house than a late nineteenth century manufacturer or peasant would have been if moved back to his appropriate eighteenth century position.

Whatever its defects, the Congress of Vienna at least inaugurated a period of ninety-nine years in which Western Europe was free from long and devastating wars. That of 1870-1 was short and cannot be called devastating, when compared with those of any other century. It did not divert the course of civilisation; cripple or destroy great industries; completely ruin

populous cities; throw wide stretches of land out of cultivation; or impose a fearful strain on the population of the combatants. The great wars of other centuries have done some or all of these things. Recovery from them has often been a matter not of years but of decades and generations. And between 1815 and 1914 the short, bitter, struggle of 1870-1 stands alone. Compared with the wars of other centuries those of 1859 and 1866, for instance, were hardly campaigns—just battles. The crops were trampled at Solferino or Sadowa—not much more. The Crimean War was fought *en champ clos*, like a tournament, and that far to the east.

About the year Napoleon was born, there had begun in England that familiar transformation of manufacturing methods which gave its character to the industrial history of the nineteenth century. Continental Europe knew a little about it before 1789; but technical knowledge spread slowly, even in time of peace, during the eighteenth century. Before the transformation had gone far in England—steam was first used to drive a cotton mill in 1785—war came down like a curtain between her and the continent. Although her mechanical knowledge leaked out during the wars and the one short interval of peace (Mar. 1802–May, 1803), she did her best to keep a monopoly of it; and with some success. Constant warfare distracted the continent from economic development. The entire absence of war on English soil, her special geographical advantages, and her vast colonial and commercial acquisitions enabled her to maintain her lead during the peace.

The opening years of the long peace of the nineteenth century, for so history will regard it when the ages are put in due perspective, saw this accumulated and accumulating English mechanical knowledge available for the continent. Official English attempts to retain a monopoly of it soon broke down. Never before had the close of a period of wars coincided with the unloosing of new economic forces on such a scale. The long peace gave these forces free play. They tended to draw the nations together. And the nations were more willing to play the part of good Europeans—at least in economic matters—than at any time since the fall of Rome.

Approximately coincident with the peace was the beginning of an increase in European population for which there was again no precedent. Many causes were at work, all the chief of which were life-saving not life-creating, though the breakdown of old customary restrictions on early marriage may have created some "extra" life. Peace itself saved much life; improved communications kept famine away; above all, improved medical and sanitary knowledge dealt with small-pox and scurvy and ague and then with cholera and the risks of childbirth. In short, Malthus' positive checks were being lifted and his preventive check was not at work except perhaps in France. In France only was the growth of population at first relatively and later absolutely slow; yet the French population grew from 27,500,000 in 1801 to 36,500,000 in 1860, taking the same area at the two dates; and from 36,200,000 in 1871 to nearly 39,700,000 in 1913 on a reduced area. The increase from 1871 to 1913, regarded by contemporaries as most unnaturally slow, would have been rapid in many earlier, less peaceful, and less healthy ages.

All the economic forces which were at work in Western Europe during the long peace can be illustrated in French and German history. That history must be put into a European, and in its later phases an international, setting if it is to be thoroughly understood. Some attempt to do this is made, so far as space permits, in the chapters which follow.

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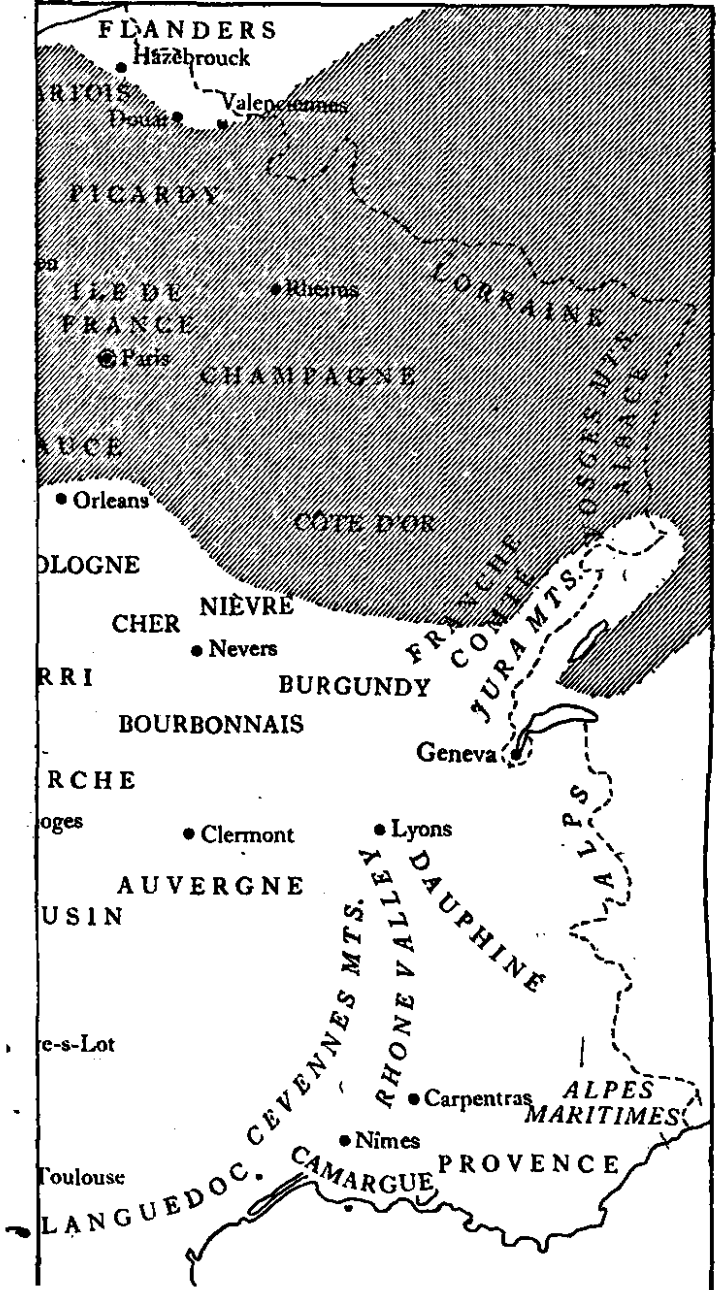
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The shaded line marks the frontier



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(Boundaries of 1871-1918)

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