

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

The Economic Development
of Western Civilization

Third Edition

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To our students

European Economic History: The Economic Development of Western Civilization

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Preface to the third edition

The widespread success which this book has enjoyed, both in the United States and abroad, has encouraged the publishers and the authors to offer this new edition to the scholarly public.

Economic history is a field of study that is very much in motion, and the principle that has guided our revision has been to introduce into the text the newest findings of scholarship and the latest directions in historical research. For example, three areas of heated professional discussion are the relationship between population trends to economic change, the study of popular standards of living, and the analysis of the effects of long-term economic fluctuations on material well-being. We have developed these themes and others like them in the text with the hope that new findings will now reach a wider audience.

Occasionally (very often, in fact), historical debates go unresolved for a time. In order to reflect best the state of the art in economic history, when we have encountered problems that are still under active discussion, our strategy has been to present the facts and the range of possible interpretations, leaving the verdict to the reader. Many history textbooks seem to present facts about the past as if the final word about them had been spoken, whereas scholars know very well that the fertility of history is maintained by a constant turning and overturning of the soil, so to speak. We have worked to make this new edition of a well-established book mirror the vigor and dynamism of modern scholarship in economic history.

Shepard B. Clough
Richard T. Rapp

Preface to the second edition

It will hardly come as an astounding revelation to my readers that I, as a professional historian, hold man's greatest heritage to be knowledge of the past, nor will they be greatly surprised to learn that I believe all current human behavior to be conditioned by "man's experience through time." It is, indeed, my firm conviction that "the wisdom of the ages" is man's choicest possession.

If I am correct in my estimate of the place of history in life, then it follows that historians have a weighty responsibility to discharge for their fellow men. It is their task to select, record, and interpret from myriads of experiences those which are the most useful in helping men to decide what kind of a world they want and in guiding mankind in its eternal quest for that world. Of necessity this assignment requires the study both of detailed events and of exceedingly broad movements.

In the present work, I have labored long and conscientiously to understand and to present a *part* of human experience which will have meaning in the human struggle for the attainment of higher levels of civilization. In other words, it has been my intention to show the relationship of economic activity to the human drama as it has unfolded through time. In addition, I have tried to meet one of the major criticisms of economic historians, so cogently pointed out by one of my masters, the late Wesley C. Mitchell, that we have been guilty of amassing data without plan or reason and that we have made little effort to establish what the necessary

relationships among those data are.¹ Specifically, I have endeavored to organize economic data around the central theme of economic growth and to relate that theme to human strivings for civilization. I have done this for that part of the world known as Western Culture, especially for Europe.

Inasmuch as the preface of a scholarly book is the one place where the author may speak familiarly with his readers, it is not improper that I should confess to them my trepidation regarding the product of my efforts which they hold in their hands. I fear that critics may complain that I have undertaken too huge a task, that specialists may contend that I have not given enough space to some hobby of theirs, and that reviewers may argue that I should have written another kind of book from the one in these covers. These are the usual foibles of men who are dedicated to the proposition that knowledge to be "sound" must be stereotyped; they have to be borne with patience and fortitude by the would-be innovator. At all events, I am of the opinion that both scholar and student should resist allowing education to become so strait-jacketed by tradition that it loses all relevance to the world about us.

I should also confide to my readers that I, like all conscientious scholars, have a fear regarding the possible appearance of errors in my work and that, like most of my kind, I have taken extreme precautions to avoid them. Not only have I spent some seven years in writing this book and over a quarter of a century in the study of economic history, but I have imposed on my friends and colleagues to help protect me from slips. Fortunately I had the expert criticism of Professor Thomas C. Cochran of the entire manuscript and that of Professor A. P. Usher of a large part of the European sections. Furthermore, Elias Bickerman read those parts having to do with Ancient history, John H. Mundy, those dealing with the Middle Ages, and Garrett Mattingly, those covering the first three centuries of Modern Times. To all of these experts I am grateful, and I hereby exonerate them from all blame for those frailties of expression or of interpretation which they did not catch or which I was obstinate enough to retain in spite of their warnings.

The enthusiastic and worldwide reception which the first edition of this work received has warranted a new edition. The text has been brought up to date, and thus deals with the economic *miracles* in several countries since World War II—miracles which provide yet again new reflections upon the process of growth. Moreover, an attempt has been made to provide more economic analysis—more cause-and-effect relationships—of economic issues in the last hundred years. The general nature of the work has, however, been maintained; that is, the central purpose has been to provide a general synthesis of economic growth in Western culture by dealing with

¹ Wesley C. Mitchell, "The Role of Money in Economic History," *The Tasks of Economic History*, a supplement to *The Journal of Economic History*, December 1944, pp. 61–67.

all pertinent factors, be they political, social, or intellectual, as well as economic. It is my belief that only by such a broad view of human behavior can the social scientist provide the guidance which society needs. The results may seem extremely complex to those who want easy answers, but complexity of reality seems something with which we mortals must learn to live.

Shepard B. Clough

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Economic growth