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REVIEWS.

THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

HENRI PIRENNE. *Le Mouvement Economique et Social au Moyen Age*. Extract from "l'Histoire Generale" published under the direction of G. Glotz. (Paris : Presses Universitaires. 1933.)

It is a difficult task to summarize the economic and social history of Europe over a period as long and complex as the Middle Ages, but it could not have been better done than in this book by Professor Henri Pirenne. Indeed, in reading these pages it is difficult to know what most to admire, the range and precision of his knowledge, the historical intelligence which so penetratingly interprets the significance of the changes, or the charm of style which presents this rather austere subject in so attractive a manner.

Even a cursory perusal of the volume reveals the importance which M. Pirenne attaches—and rightly so—to commercial relations. He gives prominence to the fact that, if in the Carolingian period the economic equilibrium of the ancient world was destroyed, it was because trade relations between east and west were interrupted by the Arab invasions. For two centuries an economy of local markets predominated and every phase of economic life contracted. The revival of commerce in the eleventh century was likewise an event of the first importance. The author describes the two principal directions of this commerce : one connecting Venice with the Byzantine Empire and Islam ; the other, a parallel movement which carried the Scandinavians towards the Baltic and the North Sea and even into Russia. Later came the development of Italian trade in the Mediterranean and north of the Alps. The Flemish cloth trade was also the basis of a great international commerce. In a first-rate chapter M. Pirenne depicts the revival of city life, which had almost completely disappeared in the eighth century, and shows the part which the merchants played in building up the new institutions.

An excellent section is devoted to the rural classes and the agricultural changes which occurred from the twelfth century onward. The increase of population, the reclamation of the waste, the creation of "villes neuves"—the significance of these and other events is remarkably well demonstrated. M. Pirenne attributes more importance than is usually given to the influence that the towns had on the country-side. He emphasizes the progress of the money economy which contributed to the transformation of dues in kind to money dues, to greater agrarian mobility, and also to the emancipation of the serfs which was accelerated in the thirteenth century.

M. Pirenne rightly insists on the importance of trade relations, on the fairs, coinage, credit, and finance. The Church maintained its condemnation of usury, but practical necessities led irresistibly to infringements of the canon law. In describing the objects and direction of trade on a large scale, M. Pirenne is convinced of its capitalistic nature, even though to twentieth century eyes its volume appears insignificant.

The sections on town economy, the regulation of industry, and the trade guilds are equally interesting. In a final chapter the author shows how the changes which occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contributed to the misfortunes and social disorders which marked the end of the Middle Ages. It was also the period when the intervention of the State in economic life introduced the mercantilist policies which were further developed in the succeeding centuries.

HENRI SÉE.

JAMES WESTFALL THOMPSON. *Economic and Social History of Europe in the later Middle Ages*. (New York: The Century Company, 1932. \$5.)

This text-book is a sequel to the same author's *Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages*, and to those who know the earlier volume the characteristic quality of the present one will not come as a surprise. They will find in it a catholicity of outlook extending to every aspect of medieval civilisation and every part of European territory. In Professor Thompson's text, as in his bibliographies, poetry rubs shoulders with double-accountancy, courtly tradition with class war. The great nations of western Europe do not monopolise the stage, eastern Europe and the Levant are also allowed their part. If England is omitted, the omission is explained and amply justified; if the allowance of Byzantium appears scanty, the deficiency is compensated by the treatment given to the Byzantine succession states. Professor Thompson's readers will also recognise the characteristic vigour and freshness of his exposition. He does not mince either his words or his conclusions. Some of the judgments are perhaps too fresh and too independent to be placed before a novice, but to a palate dulled by the non-committal manner of modern text-books they will bring pleasure and relief.

Where merits are so choice, defects should not be unduly stressed. If the reviewer nevertheless finds himself in a critical mood, it is not because the defects are singularly grave and cry out to be exposed. On the contrary, the feature of the book, to which most of the criticism may be drawn, is so common in books of this kind that it may not even be recognised as a defect by the majority of readers. And what is more, it appears not so much in the substance of Professor Thompson's facts as in the order of their presentation.

The order is frankly chronological, and the chronology is that of the principal political events of the later middle ages. And as the politics of the age are all dominated by the Hundred Years War, that war also becomes the central topic of the book. Four whole chapters and large sections of another three are devoted to the conflict and its repercussions. The sections of the book which are not occupied by the Hundred Years War are also largely political in the choice of topics and the order of presentation. Thus the excellent chapter on the German towns is introduced under the title of "Town Leagues" and dominated by that largely political subject. The equally excellent chapter on the Hanse is more concerned with the political career of the League than with the economic problems of northern trade. The same is largely true of the chapters on the Italian cities, the Teutonic Orders and