

Book Review**The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830****T. S. ASHTON**

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Reviewed by D. P. Mukerjea, Lucknow

It is difficult to overpraise Prof. Ashton's little classic. The combination of compactness with lucid learning was expected of one of the leading authorities on this seminal period of modern history. In addition the reader gets a sifting of the researches that followed Mantoux, the Hammonds, Fay, Usher and Clapham's well-known treatises, and a fresh point of view. The originality of Prof. Ashton's treatment flows from his firm hold on the central problem of the age, 'how to feed and clothe and employ generations of children outnumbering by far those of any earlier time. In other words, the Industrial Revolution was an achievement, often unconscious and 'rough, oftener halting and mis-guided, yet a collective response to the challenge of growing millions. The alternatives were emigration, starvation and disease. conditions to which Ireland succumbed and the plains of India and China have been inured by long subjection. "Such Asiatic Standards, and such unmechanised horrors, are the lot of those who increase their numbers without passing through an industrial revolution"—is a conclusion which should make our addicts to romantic villagism and others equally blind to the menace of growing numbers pause.

A few more bubbles are burst by the delicate needle of Prof. Ashton. For example, England borrowed foreign capital quite liberally to lubricate her revolution. About three sevenths of the British National Debt in 1776, and one third of the major stocks, including those of the East India Company, were in the hands of Dutch bankers in the middle of the century. There were quite a number of depressions and booms in, the period

covered, and they were mostly due to the irregular flow of investment caused by the exigencies of the war and the wrong banking policy. Individualism was not the rule, but laissez faire. 'The defect of the law (Corn Law of 1815) was not that it maintained a consistently high level of prices for grain, but that, in times of dearth, it prohibited relief from abroad until conditions approached those of famine." Similarly: the Industrial Revolution was carried in the midst of many vigorous wars; voluntary societies and friendly benefit organisations, clubs and organisations knocked off the edge of crude individualism; the shift in the burden of new taxation occasioned by the demand of landlords in the Parliament to repeal the income-tax imposed during the war and the introduction of increased duties on grain, rather than an open conflict of classes led by intransigent labour, postponed the fulfilment of the Industrial revolution; these and more conclusions remove many prejudices

nursed by earlier studies. True indeed that 'the face of England is patient, of modulation

We strongly recommend this gem of a book to students and laymen alike. It is not a substitute for Trevelyan's two great chapters on Cobbett's England in his English Social History but though less inspired it is a fine introduction and supplement, Prof. G. N. Clark had brought the story up till 1760; Prof. Ashton has carried it forward to the morning of England's economic prosperity; who will describe her Indian summer? The Oxford University Press are to be congratulated on the excellent work they have done. The paper, typeface and binding leave nothing to be desired.

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