

**A GUIDE TO SOME
ASPECTS OF
ENGLISH SOCIAL
HISTORY, 1750-1859**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649489268

A Guide to Some Aspects of English Social History, 1750-1859 by Judith Blow Williams

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OF ENGLISH SOCIAL
HISTORY, 1750-1850

BY
JUDITH BLOW WILLIAMS, M.A.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE FACULTY OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



NEW YORK
1916

Memorandum
Form 6050.2



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PREFACE

STRANGELY enough, what must be recognized as one of the most important periods in the history of mankind, is one which, as a whole, has received comparatively little attention from historians. For mediæval social history there are numerous histories and text-books which survey the whole field, as well as Gross' guide and Hubert Hall's bibliography. Special studies abound, and the source material has been made available to a large degree through the publications of antiquarian and historical societies.

In the field of modern English social history, much less has been accomplished. Cunningham's *Growth of English Industry and Commerce* has been supplemented by numerous valuable monographs by economists, but no adequate survey exists of the sources of a period when improved printing-presses were supplying a reading-public, newly awakened to an interest in economic and social questions, with an output almost staggering in amount. England of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was the setting for the origin of most of what characterizes modern industrial society. The intricate nature of the interrelating social forces is reflected in the literature of the period. To provide some guide to the maze would seem essential before the entire field can be adequately treated in an intensive, scholarly way. At the suggestion of Professor Shotwell, and because no such guide seemed to be forthcoming from the hands of scholars, the author consented to attempt at least in slight part to fill the need.

But the task has proven heavier even than was anticipated. Because of the amount of labor already performed, and the peculiar nature of the work, it has been decided to seek for it the sanction of the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University. With this in view, the following pages have been printed, not with the idea that they alone are offered for the degree, but simply as a sample of the kind of work being done, the amount and character of which is at present to be judged from the manuscript and notes. The completed volume, it is expected, will appear in Professor Shotwell's series, "Records of Civilization."

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In order to avoid a disjointed compendium of titles on all sorts of subjects, two dominant ideas have been adhered to—first, that the Industrial Revolution with its intricate interacting effects on all aspects of life was the keynote of the period; and, second, that this work shall be essentially for the use of students of history, not for the specialist in some of the more remote fields touched upon. Thus some works on chemistry are included because they were constantly referred to by the textile worker, for dye-stuffs, or by the farmer, for scientific agriculture. Similarly, although many works in the province of Economics are included, they appear only because they are essential to an understanding of the history of the period. A book of slight theoretical value, if it made a popular appeal that carried it through many editions, was itself an historical fact of importance, for it either reflected or influenced thought and action. Such works are often of as much interest to the historian as those which still are justified in the field of economic theory. Others of little value at any period in their career contain incidental references of genuine importance. For instance a pamphlet on agriculture with a ludicrous theory of rent might still furnish actual data of prices not to be found elsewhere.

A word should be said as to the method of selection of books to be included. From the bibliographies prefixed to many sections one might judge that from them had been culled the appended lists. This has not been the case. The collection of titles has been built up from reading the literature of the subject, since the accidental character of many library collections might prevent these bibliographies from being truly representative. Only as a final means of checking important omissions was the already prepared bibliography consulted. Thus it is hoped that a just sense of the relative importance of the works has been developed, since from the historian's point-of-view, the estimation of contemporaries gives a valuable indication of historical significance. The knowledge thus gained, however, has been used only as a means of supplementing the author's own judgment of the books.

As concerns the comments on books several points should be noted. They are the result of actual reading of the works to which they are appended. They have been cut down to as brief form as possible, while still aiming to retain whatever is essential to guide

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the searcher to the nature and value of the contents. If it is thought that the title is self-explanatory, further comment has been omitted. The same was done in the cases of supplementary works by an author whose point-of-view had previously been described and remained unaltered.

Similarly the introductory paragraphs are the result of research among the works quoted, and are planned to give, in as condensed form as possible, such information on the topic as it may be useful to have at hand. It is hoped that from them, and from the titles and comments, a bird's-eye view may be obtained of the period, that will, of itself, be of value, aside from the bibliographical aspects of the work.

A severe handicap has been met in the inability to study in England because of the war. The wealth of material to be had in American libraries has, however, been a surprising discovery, and should be an encouragement to Americans to undertake research in modern English social history. Moreover it should be remembered that the usefulness of this guide will depend to a large degree upon the availability of the material which it covers. From this point of view perhaps the handicap which the war has imposed may not have resulted in so serious a loss as would be the case if the work had been intended to cover the obscurer aspects of so vast a field.

Expression of gratitude must be made to Professor Shotwell, my major professor, and to Professor Seligman for his kindness in permitting the use of his library of rare works on economic history, and for his careful review of many of these pages.