

CHAPTER I

THE ENVIRONMENT

I. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GREAT BRITAIN

DURING the eighteenth century Great Britain prepared herself to win and to maintain her supremacy in the nineteenth century. It was a martial century for Britain. Seven wars and two rebellions blared the red trumpet during thirty-eight of the hundred years. It was a century of territorial aggrandizement. The late seventeenth century's naval victories had made Britain mistress of the seas, and this contributed largely to the increase of the national domain during the eighteenth century. An island gained dominion over continents. In the east, British sovereignty began to extend over India, and Australia became a British colony. In the west, the Seven Years' War made North America, from pole to gulf, bend the knee to the British sovereign.

The possession of vast and far distant territories called for an able colonial policy. Perhaps the most important lesson in colonial policy which the century taught Britain, was that Anglo-Saxon colonies may be controlled best by being controlled least—the lesson of the protracted, but vain effort to retain the American colonies. Owing in part to sea control, and in part to growing colonies, British commerce in the eighteenth century greatly increased.

Thus wars, widening territory, developing colonies, and rapidly expanding foreign commerce were the large factors in British international relations in the eighteenth century.

Within Britain's own island territory, a new life, reflective of her widening world life, was everywhere in evidence.

Roads were made, canals were dug, wastes were redeemed, commons were inclosed, and harbors were improved. In her manufacturing life, the great change from the domestic to the factory system occurred, with its concomitants of labor and machinery problems, and its consequent development of manufacturing centers. To sustain the wars and colonial enterprises, and to further the large internal improvements, greater revenue was demanded.

The great problems, then, which would naturally attract the attention of a British student of politics and economics in the eighteenth century, were those concerning wars, colonies, population movements, machinery, trade relations, internal improvements, and taxation.

II. BRISTOL

Second city of the kingdom, Bristol, in the eighteenth century, was the busiest of the outports. It was naturally fitted to become a great commercial center; it swam upon the waters and "had its streets full of ships."¹ In the fourteenth century docks had been built, and from time to time they had been improved and extended. Its naturally excellent harbor, thus improved by art, attracted the world's shipping. The rivers Avon, Severn, Wye, Usk, Parrett, and Tone afforded natural water connections with the inland district about Bristol. A system of canals, built during the eighteenth century, connected the upper waters of these streams and perfected the means for inexpensive transport of domestic commerce. This brought all of South Wales and of West England into intimate market relations with the city by the sea.

Bristol also entered early upon a manufacturing career. Woollen manufacture began there about 1340. Thomas

¹ A statement credited to Alexander Pope.

Blanket, whose name still clings to a class of woollen fabrics, was among the Bristolians who early distinguished themselves in this branch of manufactures. The manufacture of soap began, at Bristol, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and the manufacture of pins and of stockings began there in the last quarter of the same century.

Eighteenth century Bristol made good use of her manufacturing and commercial legacy. By the close of this century Bristol shot had a reputation; crown, flint, and bottle glass, soap, hats, tanned and dressed leather, shoes and saddlery, brass, copper and zinc goods were being made, and there was a considerable tobacco and an extensive snuff manufacture. The domestic commerce had become large, Bristol foreign imports and local manufactures supplying a wide inland district. This district in turn sent its products to the seaport city for sale or for shipment. The most important sea traffic was being carried on with the West Indies. They took Bristol building materials, clothing, bottled liquors and sugar-making implements, in exchange for their products, sugar, rum, coffee and cotton. From Spain there came annually 4,000 bags of Spanish wool. In order of further importance, ranked the city's trade with Ireland, with Newfoundland, and with British America, in all of which a considerable capital was invested.

Thus the commercial and the manufacturing problems of eighteenth century Great Britain were Bristol's problems. Its merchants were sending their vessels laden with its manufactures to far lands, whence they returned with cargoes ranging from timber and tar to human beings.¹ If there were outport grievances against London, Bristol would have them. If national trade restrictions unfavorably

¹ It was to the Bristol slave mart that Rev. Thomas Clarkson came, in June of 1788, when he began his study of the slave trade. *Annals of Bristol*, by John Latimer, p. 473.

affected commerce, Bristol merchants would suffer. If frequent and prolonged wars interfered with commercial prosperity, British merchantmen would lie idle in Bristol's harbor. Bristol coffee-houses would discuss colonial relations, for had not that city been foremost in equipping early exploring expeditions,¹ and was not its commercial intercourse with Newfoundland, the Americas and the West Indies most active throughout the eighteenth century, excepting only when war checked it?

Again, Bristol's manufacturers were patenting and were introducing new machinery and were developing a factory system. If statutes preventing the free movement of laborers to their points of greatest productivity curtailed the supply of labor needed by the rising manufactures, the leather manufacturers, the sugar refiners, and the foundrymen of Bristol would have their complaints to make. If British jealousy of foreigners checked their immigration by refusal to give them full naturalization privileges, there were in Bristol evidences of contributions toward British prosperity made by the capital of rich immigrants and by the skilled labor of artisan foreigners. Since the manufacturers of the city were beginning to use patented machinery, the anti-machinery agitation would be certainly thrust upon even the least thoughtful observer of Bristol business life. Itself a historic slave mart, and in close touch with the slave-using colonies of the kingdom, Bristol's news records and current tales of slaves and of slavery would stimulate an analytic mind, in the presence of developing manufactures, to question the relative economic efficiency of slave and of free labor.

Sufficient illustration has been given to make it evident that eighteenth century Bristol epitomized eighteenth century Great Britain in manufactures and in commerce.

¹ Sebastian Cabot was a native of Bristol and voyaged from that port.

Perhaps no other place in the empire would have furnished environment more apt to lead an inquiring mind to analyze the economic life of the day. The very prominence, politically and commercially, of London would lead the outport student to familiarize himself with its industrial and commercial conditions. The capital's attempt to monopolize foreign trade, through the wide reach of privileges granted to its chartered companies, would certainly arouse in the outport a spirit of self-preservative criticism and opposition. This was conducive to a study of underlying principles of trade. Thus, a Londoner, studying the manufactures and commerce of the day, would tend to favor customs, for the customs favored London; a Bristolian would advocate an examination of customary privileges, in the hope that new thought might destroy old tradition, and give the growing smaller cities a chance to obtain, in rivalry with London, a larger share of the nation's business. London environment made for the advocacy of stereotyped ideas; Bristol environment made for that critical re-examination of these same stereotyped ideas, in the light of new conditions, which is so essential to progress in any realm of thought. The constructive critic is the potent factor in all thought progress; the apologist for existing conditions is, at worst, a complete check to any advance, and, at best, he has the negative virtue of preventing rash experiment. London was environment for an apologist, Bristol for a critic, of economic conditions. Out of Bristol, then, one conversant with eighteenth century Britain might rationally expect a teacher to come, who would teach as nearly the truth concerning the nation's economic life as any one of his generation.