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# **Crisis in Europe 1560 - 1660**

*Edited by*  
**Trevor Aston**

*With an Introduction by*  
**Christopher Hill**



*Routledge Revivals*

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## **Crisis in Europe 1560-1660**

*Past and Present* began publication in 1952. It has established itself as one of the leading historical journals, publishing in lively and readable form a wide variety of scholarly and original articles.

Much important work by English and foreign scholars on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries first appeared in the form of articles in the journal. Originally published in 1965, this collection brings together a broad selection of these articles which have much common ground in the questions they discuss. Together they cover many aspects of crisis and change in most European countries – in society, government, economics, religion and education. The book will be welcomed by all interested in this much debated period.

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CRISIS IN EUROPE

1560-1660

Essays from *Past and Present*

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CHRISTOPHER HILL



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## PREFACE

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MR. CHRISTOPHER HILL, in his Introduction, explains the general background to these articles and the journal from which they are drawn. The actual selection of the articles was done by the Editorial Board of the journal. In making our selection, we omitted all articles which had already been reprinted or incorporated in books by their authors, with the sole exception of the article by Professor Pierre Goubert which may be more accessible to readers than his two volumes on *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris, 1960). The collection thus presents a good deal less than the sum of work which appeared on its subject in *Past and Present* 1952-62; and (in addition to articles mentioned by Mr. Hill on page 2), it may be worth drawing attention to the following (issue number, and date being given in brackets): Christopher Hill, 'Puritans and the Poor' (No. 2, Nov. 1952); S. F. Mason, 'Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England' (No. 3, Feb. 1953); W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England' (No. 4, Nov. 1953); Eric Mercer, 'The Houses of the Gentry' (No. 5, May 1954); Lawrence Stone, 'The Inflation of Honours' (No. 14, Nov. 1958); Francis Haskell, 'The Market for Italian Art in the Seventeenth Century' (No. 15, Apr. 1959); and C. B. Macpherson, 'Harrington's Opportunity State' (No. 17, Apr. 1960).

Since the volume was planned, further important contributions have appeared in *Past and Present*, closely bearing on themes in the anthology. In particular may be mentioned: W. T. MacCaffrey, 'Elizabethan Politics: the First Decade, 1558-1568' (No. 24, Apr. 1963); the debate on Harrington between John F. H. New and C. B. Macpherson (in Nos. 24 and 25, Apr. and July 1963); Joan Simon, 'The Social Origins of Cambridge Students 1603-1640' (No. 26, Nov. 1963); Christopher Hill, 'William Harvey and the Idea of Monarchy' (No. 27, Apr. 1964); Lawrence Stone, 'The

#### PREFACE

Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640' (No. 28, July 1964); and H. F. Kearney, 'Puritanism, Capitalism and the Scientific Revolution' (*ibid.*).

The articles here appear for the most part in their original form. All authors were invited to make necessary corrections and minor alterations in the text and notes; and a few additions have been made to references in the footnotes, but no attempt was made to bring these generally up to date. Some preliminary matter in Dr. Manning's article has been omitted in this reprinting. Otherwise the substantial alterations are twofold. First, it was impossible to reprint all the contributions to the symposium on Professor Trevor-Roper's article on the General Crisis; this necessarily involved the author adjusting his reply to the contributions. Second, Dr. Hobsbawm has added a short postscript to his two original articles.

We hope that this volume may be the first of several anthologies, in which the articles are by no means necessarily limited to pieces which first appeared in *Past and Present*.

I am grateful to the publishers for undertaking the labours of compiling the index.

*Corpus Christi College,  
Oxford*

TREVOR ASTON

I  
INTRODUCTION  
Christopher Hill

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THE first number of *Past and Present* appeared in February 1952, so that the periodical is now thirteen years old. During these years it has expressed an attitude towards history which is peculiarly its own, and which has, we hope, contributed something of value to historical scholarship. The title of the present volume, with its emphasis on change and movement, and the articles themselves, drawn from those which appeared in *Past and Present* between 1952 and 1962, exemplify this attitude. In the first number of the periodical the Editors stated their aims in an Introduction. We took issue both with the then fashionable tendency to reject all historical generalization and with the danger of oversimplified application to history of techniques drawn from other disciplines, whether economics, psychology, sociology or anthropology. 'Our main task', we said, 'is to record and explain these "transformations that society undergoes by its very nature".' (The words are those of Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century Arab scholar.) Polybius was cited for the view that 'the facts themselves may be interesting, but hardly useful. It is the study of causes that makes history fruitful.' Yet the Editors stated a preference for 'example and fact' rather than 'methodological articles and theoretical dissertations'.<sup>1</sup>

The articles reprinted in this volume illustrate the preoccupation with historical change which has always characterized *Past and Present*, and the willingness to range over large areas in the

<sup>1</sup> *Past and Present*, no. 1 (Feb. 1952), pp. i-iii. The words in the last quotation are those of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre.

CHRISTOPHER HILL

attempt to find causal explanations. The contributors would, I imagine, agree on few points except that it is the duty of the historian to explain, not merely to record. It is this belief which gives unity to the present book. Its guiding conception is that in the seventeenth century there was a 'general crisis'. This idea was first put forward by Dr. Hobsbawm in nos. 5 and 6 of *Past and Present* (1954); it was developed by Professor Trevor-Roper in no. 16 (1959), and his stimulating article was followed by a discussion in no. 18 (1960), from which contributions by Professor Mousnier and Dr. Elliott, together with Professor Trevor-Roper's reply, are here reprinted. The related articles of Dr. Elliott on Spain and Professor Roberts on Sweden followed in nos. 20 and 22 (1961 and 1962). Mr. Kiernan's article on foreign mercenaries and absolute monarchy (no. 11, 1957) covers similar ground, though not specifically related to the question of a general crisis in the seventeenth century. Dr. Manning's article on the nobles, the people and the constitution (no. 9, 1956) deals with a crisis in England, as Dr. Ranger's article on Strafford (no. 19, 1961) with a crisis in Ireland; and Professor Goubert discusses the victims of crisis in France (no. 10, 1956), though none of these refer specifically to the theme put forward by Dr. Hobsbawm and Professor Trevor-Roper. Attention should also be drawn to articles not included in the present volume: Professor J. V. Poliřenský, 'The Thirty Years' War' (no. 6, 1954), Professor B. F. Porshnev, 'The Legend of the Seventeenth Century in French History' (no. 8, 1955), R. Ludloff, 'Industrial Development in Sixteenth- to Seventeenth-century Germany' (no. 12, 1957), and to the Report of a *Past and Present* Conference on 'Seventeenth-century Revolutions' in no. 13 (1958).<sup>2</sup>

In most countries reactions to the seventeenth-century crisis were expressed in religious forms. Another group of articles here reprinted deals with the relation between religion and society in England. Sociological analyses of Puritanism are familiar enough; but Dr. Bossy's sociological approach to 'The Character of English Catholicism' (no. 21, 1962) is as novel as it is intriguing. Professor Curtis relates Puritan lecturers to the society which produced them (no. 23, 1962), and Messrs. Cole and Thomas (nos.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Hobsbawm has continued the discussion in an article in *Science and Society*, xxiv (1960): 'The Seventeenth Century in the Development of Capitalism'.

## INTRODUCTION

10 and 13, 1956 and 1958) deal with the radical sects which appeared during the revolution which was England's reaction to the crisis.

Now that they are collected together in book form, these articles, I believe, suggest that a basis of agreement may have been reached on some features of seventeenth-century history:

1. There was an economic and political crisis all over western and central Europe in the seventeenth century.
2. Though reactions to this crisis took very different forms in different countries, the existence of the underlying crisis itself makes it worth while comparing these reactions in the light of differing national circumstances.
3. These national circumstances must be analysed in relation to social and political structures and to religious institutions and beliefs.
4. The outcome of the crisis in the Netherlands and England, where political revolutions led to significant economic and social changes, was decidedly different from the outcome in other European countries; though France and Sweden in some respects may represent a half-way house.
5. The history of the British Isles (and no doubt of the Netherlands too, though this is not dealt with in the present volume) may be illuminated by considering continental parallels for the path which England did not take; just as the history of France, Spain, Italy may be illuminated by considering their abortive revolts in the light of the successful revolutions in the Netherlands and England.
6. This suggests that, applied with discretion, the comparative method is a useful tool for the historian, the nearest he can get to a laboratory test. It is yet another argument against the narrow parochialism which still afflicts the teaching of history in too many schools and universities, and which still leads us to think of English history as something unique and God-given.

One of the declared aims of *Past and Present* was 'to widen the somewhat narrow horizon of traditional historical studies among the English-speaking public', to attempt to break down barriers of nationality and social system. We have not yet been as successful as we would have wished in 'bringing to non-specialist readers knowledge of Indian, Chinese, Arab, African or Latin-American history',<sup>3</sup> but the present volume suggests that in one field at least we have helped to widen horizons.

<sup>3</sup> *Past and Present*, no. 1 (Feb. 1952), p. iv.

## II

# THE CRISIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY\*

E. J. Hobsbawm

---

### I

IN the first part of this essay I wish to suggest that the European economy passed through a 'general crisis' during the seventeenth century, the last phase of the general transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy. Since 1300 or so, when something clearly began to go seriously wrong with European feudal society,<sup>1</sup> there have been several occasions when parts of Europe trembled on the brink of capitalism. There is a taste of 'bourgeois' and 'industrial' revolution about fourteenth-century Tuscany and Flanders or early sixteenth-century Germany. Yet it is only from the middle of the seventeenth century that this taste becomes more than a seasoning to an essentially medieval or feudal dish. The earlier urban societies never quite succeeded in the revolutions they foreshadowed. From the early eighteenth century, however, 'bourgeois' society advanced without substantial checks. The seventeenth century crisis thus differs from its predecessors in that it led to as fundamental a solution of the difficulties which had

<sup>1</sup> E. Perroy, R. Boutruche, R. H. Hilton have discussed this in recent years in *Annales E.S.C.*, and elsewhere. See also the discussion among M. Dobb, P. M. Sweezy, H. K. Takahashi, R. H. Hilton and C. Hill in *Science and Society*, xiv-xvii (1950-3), and the general survey by M. Malowist in *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, i (1953). (I am indebted to the Polish Institute, London, for a translation of this.)

\* From nos. 5 and 6 (1954).



E. J. HOBSBAWM

previously stood in the way of the triumph of capitalism, as that system will permit. In the first part of this essay I propose to marshal some of the evidence for the existence of a general crisis, which is still disputed by some, and to suggest an explanation of it. In the second part I propose to discuss some of the changes it produced, and how it was overcome. It is very probable that a great deal of historical work will be done on this subject and period in the next few years. Indeed, lately historians in various countries have tentatively suggested something like that 'general check to economic development' or general crisis with which this paper deals.<sup>2</sup> It may therefore be convenient to take a bird's eye view of the field, and to speculate about some sort of working hypothesis, if only to stimulate better ones, or further work.

THE 'GENERAL CRISIS'

A good deal of evidence for the 'general crisis' is available. We must, however, be careful to avoid the argument that a general crisis equals economic retrogression, which has bedevilled much of the discussion about the 'feudal crisis' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is perfectly clear that there *was* a good deal of retrogression in the seventeenth century. For the first time in history the Mediterranean ceased to be a major centre of economic and political, and eventually of cultural influence and became an impoverished backwater. The Iberian powers, Italy, Turkey were plainly on the downgrade: Venice was on the way to becoming a tourist centre. With the exception of a few places dependent on the north-western States (generally free ports) and the pirate metropolis of Algiers, which also operated in the Atlantic,<sup>3</sup> there was little advance. Farther north, the decline of Germany is patent,

<sup>2</sup> F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée . . . au temps de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), p. 1097. R. Romano, 'Industries textiles et conjoncture à Florence au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Annales E.S.C.*, vii<sup>e</sup> année (1952), p. 510. French historians regard the 'phase de contraction du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle' as 'un fait maintenant établi' (P. Chaunu in *Rev. Hist.*, ccx [1953], p. 379). In what follows I owe a great deal to discussion with J. Meuvret who confirmed many of my non-specialist guesses. However I doubt whether he would agree with much of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> C. A. Julien, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1931), pp. 538 ff; the 'industrial revolution' in piracy, due to the introduction of northern sails by English and Dutch after 1604 may be noted.

#### THE CRISIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

though not wholly unrelieved. In the Baltic Poland, Denmark and the Hanse were on the way down. Though the power and influence of Habsburg Austria increased (perhaps largely because others declined so dramatically), her resources remained poor, her military and political structure rickety even at the period of her greatest glory in the early eighteenth century. On the other hand in the Maritime Powers and their dependencies—England, the United Provinces, Sweden, and in Russia and some minor areas like Switzerland—the impression is one of advance rather than stagnation; in England, of decisive advance. France occupied an intermediate position, though even here political triumph was not balanced by great economic advance until the end of the century, and then only intermittently. Indeed an atmosphere of gloom and crisis fills the discussions there after 1680, though conditions in the previous half-century can hardly have been superior. (Possibly the huge catastrophe of 1693–4 accounts for this.<sup>4</sup>) It was in the sixteenth not the seventeenth century that invading mercenaries marvelled at how much there was to loot in France, and men in Richelieu's and Colbert's era looked back on Henry IV's as a sort of golden age. It is indeed possible that, for some decades in the middle of the century, the gains made in the Atlantic did not replace the losses in the Mediterranean, central Europe and the Baltic, the total proceeds from both stagnating or perhaps declining. Nevertheless what is important is the decisive advance in the progress of capitalism which resulted.

The scattered figures for European *population* suggest, at worst an actual decline, at best a level or slightly rising plateau between the mounting slopes of the population curve in the later sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Except for the Netherlands, Norway and perhaps Sweden and Switzerland and some local areas, no major increases in population appear to be recorded. Spain was a byword for depopulation, southern Italy may have suffered, and the ravages of the mid-century in Germany and eastern France are well known. Though Pirenne has argued that Belgian population increased, figures for Brabant do not seem to bear him out. Hungarian population fell; that of Poland even more. English population growth probably slowed down rapidly and may actually have

<sup>4</sup> J. Meuvret in *Mélanges d'Histoire Sociale*, v (1944), pp. 27–44; in *Population*, i (1946), pp. 643–50 and an unpublished paper on the effects of the 1693–4 and 1709–10 famines on French diplomacy.

ceased after 1630.<sup>5</sup> In fact it is not easy to see why Clark concludes that 'the seventeenth century in most of Europe saw, like the sixteenth, a moderate increase in population'.<sup>6</sup> Mortality was certainly higher than in either the sixteenth or eighteenth. No century since the fourteenth has a worse record for epidemic disease and recent work has demonstrated that its ravages cannot be dissociated from those of famine.<sup>7</sup> While a handful of court and

<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, no reliable statistics and not always good indirect indices. This paragraph is based, in particular, on: K. Larsen, *History of Norway* (Princeton, 1948) (figures only for 1665 and after); K. Mayer, *The Population of Switzerland* (New York, 1952), and Patavino's estimate for 1608 which is as great as Mayer's for 1700, in H. Nabholz, Muralt, Feller, Bonjour, Dürr, *Gesch. d. Schweiz* (Zurich, 1932-8), ii, p. 5; H. Wopfner, *Gueterteilung u. Uebervölkerung* (Berlin 1938), pp. 202 ff; H. v. z. Muehlen, 'Entstehung d. Gutsherrschaft in Oberschlesien', in *Vierteljahrsschrift f. Soz.- und Wirtschaftsgesch.*, xxxviii, pp. 334-60; K. L. Beloch, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens* (Leipzig, 1937), i, pp. 153, 225 ff; E. Keyser, *Bevölkerungsgesch. Deutschlands* (Leipzig, 1941), pp. 304 ff, 361 ff; G. Roupnel, *La Ville et la campagne dijonnaises au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1922); P. Goubert, 'Problèmes démographiques du Beauvaisis au 17<sup>e</sup> s.' (*Annales, E.S.C.*, vii<sup>e</sup> année [1952], pp. 452-68), for an area which seems to have suffered rather less; G. Debien, *En Haut-Poitou; Défricheurs au Travail (XV-XVIII siècles)*, and for absence of forest-clearing and recovery of forests, *Bull. Soc. Hist. Mod.*, lvii (1953), pp. 6-9; H. Pirenne, *Hist. de Belgique* (Bruxelles, 1900), iv, pp. 439-40; A. Cosemans, *Bevolkering v. Brabant en de 17<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Brussels, 1939), pp. 224-4; G. N. Clark, *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1929); J. Rutkowski, *Hist. Econ. de la Pologne avant les Partages* (Paris, 1927), pp. 91-92; L. Stone in *IX Congrès International des Sciences Historiques*, ii (1951), pp. 49-50; W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding Rural England 1570-1640', *Past and Present*, no. 4 (Nov. 1953).

<sup>6</sup> op. cit., p. 6. The same criticism may be made of the estimates of Uralis, *Rost nasielenia v. Jewropie* (Moscow, 1941), p. 158, which seem rather optimistic. I am indebted to Mr. A. Jenkin for drawing my attention to these figures.

<sup>7</sup> S. Peller, 'Studies in mortality since the Renaissance', *Bull. Inst. Hist. of Medicine*, xiii (1943), pp. 443, 445, 452, and esp. p. 456; *ibid.*, xvii (1947), pp. 67, 79. Meuvret and Goubert, op. cit. and the literature quoted in H. J. Habakkuk, 'English Population in the Eighteenth Century', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., vi (1953). For the epidemiology of the century, in addition to innumerable local studies, H. Haeser, *Gesch. d. Medizin u. d. epidem. Krankheiten* (Jena, 1882); C. Creighton, *Hist. of Epidemics in Britain* (Cambridge, 1891, 1894); L. F. Hirst, *The Conquest of Plague* (Oxford 1953); L. Prinzing, *Epidemics resulting from wars* (Oxford, 1916); J. Brownlee, 'Epidemiology of Phthisis in Great Britain and Ireland', *Medical Research Council* (London, 1918); Campbell, 'The Epidemiology of Influenza', *Bull. Inst. Hist. Medicine*, xiii (1943); W. J. Simpson, *A Treatise on the Plague* (Cambridge, 1905).

## THE CRISIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

administrative metropolises or centres of international trade and finance grew to great size the number of great cities, which had risen in the sixteenth century, remained stable and small and medium towns frequently declined. This appears to apply in part even to the maritime countries.<sup>8</sup>

What happened to *production*? We simply do not know. Some areas were plainly de-industrialized, notably Italy which transformed itself from the most urbanized and industrialized country of Europe into a typical backward peasant area, most of Germany, and parts of France and Poland.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand there was fairly rapid industrial development in some places—Switzerland, and, in the extractive industries, England and Sweden, and an important growth of rural out-work at the expense of urban or local craft production in many areas which may or may not have meant a net increase in total output. If prices are any guide we should not expect to find a general decline in production, for the deflationary period which followed the great price-rise of the pre-1640 era is more easily explained by a relative or absolute falling-off in demand rather than by a decline in the supply of money. However, in the basic industry of textiles there may have been not only a shift from 'old' to 'new' draperies, but a decline of total output for part of the century.<sup>10</sup>

The crisis in *commerce* was more general. The two main areas of established international trade, the Mediterranean and the Baltic, underwent revolution, and probably temporary decline in the volume of trade. The Baltic—the European colony of the western urbanized countries—changed its staple exports from foodstuffs to products like timber, metals and naval stores, while its traditional imports of western woollens diminished. Trade as measured by

<sup>8</sup> W. Sombart, *Luxus u. Kapitalismus*, pp. 26–27; G. F. v. Schmoller, *Deutsches Staedtwesen in älterer Zeit* (Bonn and Leipzig, 1922), pp. 60–95; B. Bretholz, *Gesch. Boehmens u. Maebrens* (Reichenberg, 1924), iii, pp. 61–63; E. Baasch, *Hollaendische Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Jena, 1927), pp. 24–25.

<sup>9</sup> C. M. Cipolla, 'The Decline of Italy', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., v (1952); Roupnel, op. cit., for reversion of Burgundy to autarky; R. Reuss, *Hist. de Strasbourg* (Paris, 1922), pp. 280–6; P. Boissonade, 'La Crise de l'industrie languedocienne 1600–1660', *Annales du Midi*, xxi (1909); G. Aubin and H. Kunze, *Leinenerzeugung . . . im oestl. Mitteldeutschland* (Stuttgart, 1940).

<sup>10</sup> For figures of the Dutch and Florentine production, N. W. Posthumus, *Gesch. v. d. Leidsch. Lakenindustrie* (Hague, 1932); Romano in *Annales*, loc. cit.

the Sound tolls reached its peak in 1590–1620, collapsed in the 1620s, and declined catastrophically after some recovery until the 1650s, remaining in the doldrums until 1680 or so.<sup>11</sup> After 1650, the Mediterranean became like the Baltic an area exchanging locally produced goods, mainly raw materials, for the Atlantic manufactures and the oriental goods now monopolized by the north-west. By the end of the century the Levant got its spices from the north, not the east. French Levantine trade halved between 1620 and 1635, sank almost to zero by the 1650s and did not really recover from depression levels until after the 1670s. Dutch Levantine trade did poorly from about 1617 to about 1650.<sup>12</sup> Even then the French hardly exceeded pre-depression levels much before 1700. Did the British and Dutch sales drive in the south make up for losses in the Baltic markets? Probably not. It may barely have made up for the decline in previous sales of Italian products. The international trade in foodstuffs—Baltic corn, Dutch herrings and Newfoundland fish—did not maintain its Jacobean levels. The international trade in woollen cloths may have shrunk; nor was it immediately replaced by other textiles, for the great centres of exportable linen, Silesia and Lusatia, seem to have declined somewhat after 1620. In fact it is not unlikely that a general balance of rising and declining trade would produce export figures which did not rise significantly between 1620 and 1660. Outside the maritime states it is unlikely that sales on the home markets made up for this.

As we know from the nineteenth century, the malaise of business cannot be measured simply by trade and production figures, whatever these may be. (It is nevertheless significant that the whole tone of economic discussion assumed stable markets and profit opportunities. Colbertian mercantilism, it has often been said, was a policy of economic warfare for large slices of a world trade-cake of fixed size. There is no reason why administrators and traders—for economics was not yet an academic subject—should have adopted views which were greatly at variance with appear-

<sup>11</sup> N. E. Bang and K. Korst, *Tabeller over Skibsfart* (København and Leipzig, 1930–53); A. Christensen, *Dutch Trade and the Baltic about 1600* (Copenhagen, 1940).

<sup>12</sup> G. Tongas, *Relations entre la France et l'Empire Ottoman durant la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Toulouse, 1942); P. Masson, *Le Commerce français dans le Levant au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1896), esp. pp. 130–4, App. xv, p. 236; H. Wätjen, *D. Niederländer im Mittelmeergebiet* (Berlin, 1909), pp. 145, 149.

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ances.) It is certain that even in countries which did not decline there were secular business difficulties. English East India trade languished until the Restoration.<sup>13</sup> Though that of the Dutch increased handsomely, the average annual dividend of their East India Company fell for each of the ten-year periods from the 1630s to the 1670s (including both), except for a slight rise in the 1660s. Between 1627 and 1687 sixteen years were without dividend; in the rest of the Company's history from 1602 to 1782 none. (The value of its goods remained stable between 1640 and 1660.) Similarly the profits of the Amsterdam Wisselbank reached a peak in the 1630s and then declined for a couple of decades.<sup>14</sup> Again, it may not be wholly accidental that the greatest messianic movement of Jewish history occurred at this moment, sweeping the communities of the great trading centres—Smyrna, Leghorn, Venice, Amsterdam, Hamburg—off their feet with special success in the middle 1660s as prices reached almost their lowest point.

It is also clear that the *expansion of Europe* passed through a crisis. Though the foundations of the fabulous colonial system of the eighteenth century were laid mainly after 1650,<sup>15</sup> earlier there may actually have been some contraction of European influence except in the hinterlands of Siberia and America. The Spanish and Portuguese empires of course contracted, and changed character. But it is also worth noting that the Dutch did not maintain the remarkable rate of expansion of 1600 to 1640 and their Empire actually shrank in the next thirty years.<sup>16</sup> The collapse of the Dutch West India company after the 1640s, and the *simultaneous* winding-up of the English Africa Company and the Dutch West India Company in the early 1670s may be mentioned in passing.

<sup>13</sup> Bal Krishna, *Commercial Relations between India and England 1601-1757* (London, 1927), chaps. ii-v; S. A. Khan, *East India Trade in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1923), pp. 74 ff.

<sup>14</sup> C. de Lannoy and H. Van der Linden, *Hist. de l'Expansion des Peuples Européens, Néerlande et Danemark (XVII et XVIII siècles)* (Bruxelles, 1911), pp. 334, 344-5, 363. The indebtedness of the Company was also higher than before or after; J. G. Van Dillen, *Bronnen tot d. Geschiedenis d. Wisselbanken* (Hague, 1925), ii, pp. 971 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Barbados began to export sugar in 1646, Jamaica started planting in 1664, Haiti re-established plantation in 1655, Martinique began it in the same year, St. Kitts's sugar exports passed its indigo exports in 1660: E. O. v. Lippman, *Gesch. d. Zuckers* (Leipzig, 1890).

<sup>16</sup> For a comparison of its size in 1641 and 1667, J. Saintoyant, *La Colonisation Européenne* (Paris, 1947), pp. 271-3.

It will be generally agreed that the seventeenth century was one of *social revolt* both in western and eastern Europe. This clustering of revolutions has led some historians to see something like a general social-revolutionary crisis in the middle of the century.<sup>17</sup> France had its Frondes, which were important social movements; Catalan, Neapolitan and Portuguese revolutions marked the crisis of the Spanish Empire in the 1640s; the Swiss peasant war of 1653 expressed both the post-war crisis and the increasing exploitation of peasant by town, while in England revolution triumphed with portentous results.<sup>18</sup> Though peasant unrest did not cease in the west—the ‘stamped paper’ rising which combined middle class, maritime and peasant unrest in Bordeaux and Brittany occurred in 1675, the Camisard wars even later<sup>19</sup>—those of eastern Europe were more significant. In the sixteenth century there had been few revolts against the growing enserfment of peasants. The Ukrainian revolution of 1648–54 may be regarded as a major servile upheaval. So must the various ‘Kurucz’ movements in Hungary, their very name harking back to Dozsa’s peasant rebels of 1514, their memory enshrined in folksongs about Rakoczy as that of the Russian revolt of 1672 is in the song about Stenka Razin. A major Bohemian peasant rising in 1680 opened a period of endemic serf unrest there.<sup>20</sup> It would be easy to lengthen this catalogue of major social upheavals—for instance by including the revolts of the Irish in 1641 and 1689.

Only in one respect did the seventeenth century as a whole overcome rather than experience difficulties. Outside the maritime powers with their new, and experimental bourgeois régimes most of Europe found an efficient and stable form of government in *absolutism* on the French model. (But the rise of absolutism has

<sup>17</sup> B. Porshnev in Biryukovitch, Porshnev, Skazkin, *et al.*, *Novaya Istoriya, 1640–1789* (Moscow, 1951), p. 444. This follows a suggestion of Marx in 1850 (*Sel. Essays*, ed. Stenning [London, 1926], p. 203). The coincidence has often been noted, e.g. Merriman, *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions* (Oxford, 1938).

<sup>18</sup> Merriman, *op. cit.*; B. Porshnev, *Narodnie vosstaniya vo Frantsii pered Frondoi 1623–1648* (Moscow, 1948); O. Schiff, ‘D. deutschen Bauernaufstaende 1525–1789’, *Hist. Zeitschrift*, cxxx (1924), pp. 189 ff; R. Feller, *Gesch. Berns*, ii (Bern, 1953), chaps. iv and v.

<sup>19</sup> J. Lemoine, *La Révolte du Papier Timbré* (Paris, 1898), prints numerous documents.

<sup>20</sup> H. Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1910), p. xxxvii; Bretholz, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–61.

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been taken as a direct sign of economic weakness.<sup>21</sup> The question is worth exploring further.) The great age of *ad hoc* devices in politics, war and administration vanished with the great world empires of the sixteenth century, the Spanish and Turkish. For the first time large territorial States seemed capable of solving their three fundamental problems: how to have the orders of government obeyed directly over a large area, how to have enough cash for the large lump-sum payments they periodically needed, and—partly in consequence of this—how to run their own armies. The age of the great independent financial and military subcontractors faded with the Thirty Years' War (1618–48). States still had to subcontract, as the practice of selling offices and farming taxes bears witness.<sup>22</sup> However, the whole business was now officially controlled by governments, not merely controlled in practice by the fact that, as the Fuggers and Wallenstein had found to their cost, the monopoly buyer can dictate terms as much as the monopoly seller. Perhaps this obvious political success of the absolutist territorial states with their pomp and splendour has in the past distracted attention from the general difficulties of the age.

If only part of this evidence holds water, we are justified in speaking of a 'general crisis' in the seventeenth century; though one of its characteristics was the relative immunity of the States which had undergone 'bourgeois revolution'. It is probable—though here we venture on the complex territory of price history<sup>23</sup>—that the crisis began about 1620; perhaps with the slump period from 1619 into the early 1620s. It seems certain that, after some distortion of price movements by the Thirty Years War, it reached its most acute phase between 1640 and the 1670s, though precise dates are out of order in the discussion of long-term economic movements. From then on the evidence is conflicting. Probably the signs of revival outweigh those of crisis, not only (obviously) in the Maritime States but elsewhere. However, the wild oscillations of boom and depression, the famines, revolts, epidemics and other signs of profound economic trouble in 1680–1720 should warn us against antedating the period of full recovery. If the trend was upwards from, say, the 1680s—or even earlier in *indi-*

<sup>21</sup> A. Nielsen, *Daenische Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Jena, 1933), pp. 94–95.

<sup>22</sup> R. Mousnier, *La Vénalité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII* (Rouen, 1946); K. W. Swart, *Sale of offices in the Seventeenth Century* (Hague, 1949).

<sup>23</sup> See the Note on Price History, below p. 28.



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*vidual* countries—it was still liable to disastrous fluctuations.

It may, however, be argued that what I have described as a 'general crisis' was merely the result of seventeenth-century wars, particularly of the Thirty Years' War. In the past historians have in fact tended to take (or rather to imply) this view. But the crisis affected many parts of Europe not ravaged by generals and quartermasters; and conversely, some traditional 'cockpits of Europe' (e.g. Saxony and the Low Countries) did notably better than more tranquil regions. Moreover, there has been a persistent tendency to exaggerate the long-term and permanent damage done by seventeenth-century wars. We now know that (other things being equal) the losses of population, production and capital equipment of even twentieth-century wars, whose destructive capacities are much greater, can be made good within a matter of twenty to twenty-five years. If they were not in the seventeenth century, it was because wars aggravated already existing tendencies of crisis. This is not to deny their importance, though their effects were more complex than appears at first sight. Thus against the ravages of the Thirty Years' War in parts of central Europe we must set the stimulus it gave to mining and metallurgy in general, and the temporary booms it stimulated in non-combatant countries (to the temporary benefit of Charles I in the 1630s). It is also probable that, but for it, the great 'price-rise' would have ended in the 1610s and not the 1640s. The war almost certainly shifted the incidence of the crisis and may, on balance, have aggravated it. Lastly, it is worth considering whether the crisis did not to some extent produce a situation which provoked or prolonged warfare. However, this point, which is not essential to the argument, is perhaps too speculative to be worth pursuing.

#### THE CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

In discussing the seventeenth-century crisis we are really asking one of the fundamental questions about the rise of capitalism: why did the expansion of the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not lead straight into the epoch of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution? What, in other words, were the obstacles in the way of capitalist expansion? The answers, it may be suggested, are both general and particular.

The general argument may be summarized as follows. If capital-

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ism is to triumph, the social structure of feudal or agrarian society must be revolutionized. The social division of labour must be greatly elaborated if productivity is to increase; the social labour force must be radically redistributed from agriculture to industry while this happens. The proportion of production which is exchanged in the supra-local market must rise dramatically. So long as there is no large body of wage-workers; so long as most men supply their needs from their own production or by exchange in the multiplicity of more or less autarkic local markets which exist even in primitive societies, there is a limit to the horizon of capitalist profit and very little incentive to undertake what we may loosely call mass production, the basis of capitalist industrial expansion. Historically, these processes cannot always be separated from one another. We may speak of the 'creation of the capitalist home market' or the divorce of the producers from the means of production which Marx called 'primitive accumulation':<sup>24</sup> the creation of a large and expanding market for goods and a large and available free labour force go together, two aspects of the same process.

It is sometimes assumed that the development of a 'capitalist class' and of the elements of the capitalist mode of production within feudal society automatically produces these conditions. In the long run, taking the widest view over the centuries from 1000 to 1800, this is no doubt so. In the shorter run it is not. Unless certain conditions are present—it is by no means yet clear what they are—the scope of capitalist expansion will be limited by the general prevalence of the feudal structure of society, that is of the predominant rural sector or perhaps by some other structure which 'immobilizes' both the potential labour-force, the potential surplus for productive investment, and the potential demand for capitalistically produced goods, such as the prevalence of tribalism

<sup>24</sup> V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, chap. i (conclusions), chap. ii (conclusions), chap. viii (the formation of the Home Market). *Capital*, i (1938 edn.), pp. 738, 772–4. That Marx did not think primarily of the actual accumulation of resources is shown, I think, by a preparatory draft to the Critique of Political Economy: 'Eigen ist dem Kapital nichts als die Vereinigung von Haenden und Instrumente, die es vorfindet. Es agglomeriert sie unter seiner Botmaessigkeit. Das ist sein wirkliches Anhaeuften; das Anhaeuften von Arbeitern auf Punkten nebst ihren Instrumente' (*Formen die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen* [Berlin, 1952], pp. 49–50).

or petty commodity production. Under those conditions, as Marx showed in the case of mercantile enterprise,<sup>25</sup> business might adapt itself to operating in a generally feudal framework, accepting its limitations and the peculiar demand for its services, and becoming in a sense parasitic on it. That part of it which did so would be unable to overcome the crises of feudal society, and might even aggravate them. For capitalist expansion is blind. The weakness of the old theories which ascribed the triumph of capitalism to the development of the 'capitalist spirit' or the 'entrepreneurial spirit' is that the desire to pursue the maximum profit without limit does not automatically produce that social and technical revolution which is required. At the very least there must be mass production (that is production for the greatest aggregate profit—large profits, but not necessarily large profits per sale) instead of production for the maximum profit per unit sale. Yet one of the essential difficulties of capitalist development in societies which keep the mass of the population outside its scope (so that they are neither sellers of labour-power nor serious buyers of commodities) is that in the short view the profits of the really 'revolutionary' types of capitalist production are almost certainly less, or look less attractive, than those of the other kind—especially when they involve heavy capital investment. Christian Dior then looks a more attractive proposition than Montagu Burton. To corner pepper in the sixteenth century would seem much sounder than to start sugar plantations in the Americas; to sell Bologna silks than to sell Ulm fustian. Yet we know that in subsequent centuries far vaster profits were achieved by sugar and cotton than by pepper and silk; and that sugar and cotton contributed far more to the creation of a world capitalist economy than the other two.

Under certain circumstances such trade could, even under feudal conditions, produce large enough aggregate profits to give rise to large-scale production; for instance if it catered for exceptionally large organizations such as kingdoms or the Church; if the thinly spread demand of an entire continent were concentrated into the hands of businessmen in a few specialized centres such as the Italian and Flemish textile towns; if a large 'lateral extension' of the field of enterprise took place, for example by conquest or

<sup>25</sup> *Capital*, iii, pt. iv (Merchant's Capital); and esp. vol. ii, p. 63. See also R. H. Hilton, 'Capitalism, What's in a Name?', *Past and Present*, no. 1 (Feb. 1952).

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colonization. A fair amount of social re-division was also possible without disturbing the fundamentally feudal structure of society—for instance the urbanization of the Netherlands and Italy on the basis of food and raw materials imported from semi-colonial territories. Nevertheless the limits of the market were narrow. Medieval and early modern society was a good deal more like 'natural economy' than we care to recall. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French peasant is said hardly to have used money except for his transactions with the State; retail trade in German towns was unspecialized, like that in village shops, until the late sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Except among a small luxury class (and even there changing fashion in the modern sense probably developed late) the rate of replacement of clothes or household goods was slow. Expansion was possible and took place; but so long as the general structure of rural society had not been revolutionized it was limited, or created its own limits; and when it encountered them, entered a period of crisis.

The expansion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was essentially of this sort; and it therefore created its own crisis both within the home market and within the overseas market. This crisis the 'feudal businessmen'—who were the richest and most powerful just because the best adapted for making big money in a feudal society—were unable to overcome. Their unadaptability intensified it.

Before analysing these things further, it may be worth stressing that the purely *technical* obstacles to capitalist development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not insuperable. While the sixteenth century may not have been capable of solving certain fundamental problems of technique, such as that of a compact and mobile source of power which so baffled Leonardo, it was quite capable of at least as much innovation as produced the eighteenth-century revolution. Nef and others have made us familiar with the innovations which actually occurred, though the phrase 'Industrial Revolution' seems less apt for the period 1540–1640 than for the Germany of 1450–1520 which evolved the printing press, effective

<sup>26</sup> J. Meuvret, 'Circulation monétaire et utilisation économique de la monnaie dans la France du XVI<sup>e</sup> et du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Etudes d'Histoire Moderne et Contemp.*, i (1947), pp. 14–29; R. Latouche, *La Vie en Bas-Quercy* (Toulouse, 1923); E. Koehler, *Der Einzelhandel im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1938), pp. 55–60.

fire-arms, watches, and the remarkable advance in mining and metallurgy summarized in Agricola's *De Re Metallica* (1556). Nor was there a crippling shortage of capital or capitalist enterprise or of labour, at least in the advanced areas. Sizeable blocks of mobile capital anxious for investment and, especially in the period of rising population, quite important reservoirs of free wage-labour of varying skill existed. The point is that neither were poured into industry of a potentially modern type. Moreover, methods for overcoming such shortages and rigidities of capital and labour supplies might have been utilized as fully as in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The seventeenth-century crisis cannot be explained by the inadequacies of the equipment for industrial revolution, in any narrowly technical and organizational sense.

Let us now turn to the main causes of the crisis.

*The specialization of 'feudal capitalists': the case of Italy*

The decline of Italy (and the old centres of medieval commerce and manufacture in general) was the most dramatic result of the crisis. It illustrates the weaknesses of 'capitalism' parasitic on a feudal world. Thus sixteenth-century Italians probably controlled the greatest agglomerations of capital, but misinvested them flagrantly. They immobilized them in buildings and squandered them in foreign lending during the price-revolution (which naturally favoured debtors) or diverted them from manufacturing activities to various forms of immobile investment. It has been plausibly suggested that the failure of Italian manufacture to maintain itself against Dutch, English and French during the seventeenth century was due to this diversion of resources.<sup>27</sup> It would be ironic to find that the Medici were Italy's ruin, not only as bankers but as patrons of the expensive arts, and Philistine historians are welcome to observe that the only major city-State which never produced any art worth mentioning, Genoa, maintained its commerce and finance better than the rest. Yet Italian investors, who had long been aware that too large cathedrals harm business,<sup>28</sup> were acting quite sensibly. The experience of centuries had shown that the

<sup>27</sup> A. Fanfani, *Storia del Lavoro in Italia dalla fine del secolo XV agli inizi del XVIII* (Milan, 1943), pp. 42-49.

<sup>28</sup> R. S. Lopez, 'Economie et architecture médiévales', *Annales E.S.C.*, vii<sup>e</sup> année (1952), pp. 443-8.

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highest profits were not to be got in technical progress or even in production. They had adapted themselves to business activities in the comparatively narrow field which remained for them once one left aside the majority of the population of Europe as 'economically neutral'. If they spent vast amounts of capital non-productively, it may have been simply because there was no more room to invest it progressively on any scale within the limits of this 'capitalist sector'. (The seventeenth-century Dutch palliated a similar glut of capital by multiplying household goods and works of art<sup>29</sup> though they also discovered the more modern device of a speculative investment boom.) Perhaps the Italians would have been shocked into different behaviour by economic adversity; though they had made money for so long by providing the feudal world with its trade and finance that they would not have learned easily. However, the general boom of the later sixteenth century (like the 'Indian summer' of Edwardian Britain) and the suddenly expanded demands of the great absolute monarchies which relied on private contractors, and the unprecedented luxury of their aristocracies, postponed the evil day. When it came, bringing decay to Italian trade and manufacture, it left Italian finance still upright, though no longer dominant. Again, Italian industry might well have maintained some of its old positions by switching more completely from its old high-quality goods to the shoddier and cheaper new draperies of the north. But who, in the great period of luxury buying from 1580-1620, would have guessed that the future of high-quality textiles was limited? Did not the Court of Lorraine, in the first third of the century, use more textiles imported from Italy than from all other non-French countries put together?<sup>30</sup> (One would like to reserve judgement on the argument that Italy lost ground because of higher production costs for goods of equal quality, until stronger evidence for it is brought forward or until we have a satisfactory explanation for the failure of Italian production, after promising beginnings, to shift as wholeheartedly from towns to countryside as did the textile industries of other countries.<sup>31</sup>)

The case of Italy shows why particular countries went down in

<sup>29</sup> G. Renier, *The Dutch Nation* (London, 1944), pp. 97-99.

<sup>30</sup> H. Roy, *La Vie, la mode et le costume au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1924), prints a full list of all the types of textile used at this Court.

<sup>31</sup> Cipolla, 'The decline of Italy' (cited above n. 9), for the high-cost argument.

the crisis, not necessarily why it occurred. We must therefore consider the contradictions of the very process of sixteenth-century expansion.

*The contradictions of expansion: eastern Europe*

The comparative specialization of west-European towns on trade and manufacture was to some extent achieved in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the creation of a sizeable surplus of exportable food in eastern Europe and perhaps by ocean fisheries.<sup>32</sup> But in eastern Europe this was achieved by the creation of serf agriculture on a large scale; that is a local strengthening of feudalism. This, we may suggest, had three effects. It turned the peasant into less of a cash customer than he had been or might have been (or else it forced him off good-quality western textiles into cheap locally produced cloth). It diminished the number and wealth of the minor nobility for the benefit of a handful of magnates. In Poland the former controlled 43.8 per cent of ploughs in the mid-fifteenth century, 11.6 per cent in the mid-seventeenth; the share of the latter rose from 13.3 to 30.7 per cent in the same period. Lastly, it sacrificed the livelier market of the towns to the free trade interests of exporting landlords, or else seized much of what trade was going for the benefit of the already bloated lords.<sup>33</sup> The expansion thus had two results. While creating the conditions for the expansion of manufactures in western Europe, it cut down, for a time at least, the outlets of these manufactures in the Baltic area—perhaps its most important market. The desire to cash in rapidly on the growing demand for corn—the Baltic now began to feed not only northern Europe but also the Mediterranean—tempted serf-lords into that headlong expansion of their demesnes and

<sup>32</sup> M. Malowist in Report of IX Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, I (1950), pp. 305–22.

<sup>33</sup> For the extent of this increasing exploitation, J. Rutkowski, 'Le Régime agraire en Pologne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Rev. Hist. Econ. and Soc.*, xix, xx (1926 and 1927), esp. 1927, pp. 92 ff; J. Rutkowski, 'Les Bases économiques des partages de l'ancienne Pologne', *Rev. d'Hist. Moderne*, N.S., iv (1932); R. Rosdolsky, 'The distribution of the agrarian product in feudalism', *Jl. of Econ. Hist.*, xi (1951), pp. 247 ff. For the unimportance of cash payments, Rutkowski, op. cit., 1927, p. 71 and 1926, p. 501; Malowist, op. cit., pp. 317 ff. For an example of town impoverishment due to this, F. Tremel, 'Handel d. Stadt Judenburg im 16 Jh.', *Ztschr. d. hist. Vereins fuer Steiermark*, xxxviii (1947), pp. 103–6.

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intensification of exploitation which led to the Ukrainian revolution, and perhaps also to demographic catastrophes.<sup>34</sup>

##### *The contradictions of expansion: overseas and colonial markets*

Much of the trade between Europe and the rest of the world had, as we know, been passive throughout the ages, because Orientals did not need European goods to the same extent as Europe needed theirs. It had been balanced by bullion payments, supplemented from time to time by such exports as slaves, furs, amber or other luxuries. Until the Industrial Revolution the sales of European manufactures were not important. (African trade, which was not deficitary, may be an exception because of the staggeringly favourable terms of trade which European goods commanded among the ignorant local buyers and indeed—almost by definition—because the continent was valued chiefly as a source of bullion until late in the seventeenth century. In 1665 the Royal African Company still estimated its gain from gold at twice its gain from slaves.<sup>35</sup>) The European conquest of the main trade-routes and of America did not change this structure fundamentally, for even the Americas exported more than they imported. It greatly diminished the cost of eastern goods by cutting out middlemen, lessening transport charges and enabling European merchants and armed bands to rob and cheat with impunity. It also greatly increased bullion supplies, presenting us with American and African Peters to be robbed to pay the Asian Pauls. Unquestionably Europe derived immense windfall gains from this. General business activity was immensely stimulated as well as capital accumulated; but our exports of manufactures were on the whole *not* greatly expanded. Colonial powers—in good medieval business tradition—followed a policy of systematic restriction of output and systematic monopoly. Hence there was no reason why exports of home manufactures should benefit.

The benefit which Europe drew from these initial conquests was

<sup>34</sup> An expansion of the total area of serf export-agriculture, e.g. in the Black Sea area, might have offset this. But this did not take place until the eighteenth century, possibly owing to Turkish strength and grain policy earlier: D. Ionescu, *Agrarverfassung Rumaeniens* (Leipzig, 1909), pp. 10–19; A. Mehlan, 'D. grossen Balkanmessen in der Tuerkenzeit', *Vierteljahrsschrift f. Soz.- und Wirtschaftsgesch.*, xxxi (1938), pp. 2–7.

<sup>35</sup> *Cal. S. P. Col.*, 1661–8, p. 266.



thus in the nature of a single bonus rather than a regular dividend. When it was exhausted, crisis was likely to follow. Among the colonial powers costs and overheads rose faster than profits. In both east and west we may distinguish three stages: that of easy profits, that of crisis, and with luck eventually that of a stable and more modest prosperity. In the initial phase conquest or interloping brought temporarily unchallenged profits at low costs. In the east, where profits rested on the monopoly of a restricted output of spices and the like, the crisis was probably brought on by the steep rise in 'protection costs' against old and new rivals; rising all the more steeply as the colonial power tried to screw up the monopoly price. It has been estimated that the Portuguese spice trade barely paid its way for these reasons.<sup>36</sup> In the west, where they rested on the cheap bulk production of bullion and other raw materials, 'protection costs' probably played a smaller part, though they also rose with piracy and competition. However, there the technical limits of the primitive 'rat-hole' mining of the Spaniards were soon reached (even allowing for the uses of the mercury process), and very possibly the labour force was virtually worked to death, being treated as an expendable asset.<sup>37</sup> At any rate American silver exports diminished after 1610 or so. Eventually, of course, in the east colonial powers adjusted themselves to the new level of overheads and perhaps found new sources of local taxation to offset them. In the west the familiar structure of quasi-feudal large estates came into being in the seventeenth century.<sup>38</sup> Since the economic basis of the Spanish colonial system was broader than the Portuguese, the results of crisis would be more far-reaching. Thus the early emigration to the Americas temporarily stimulated the export of goods from the home country; but as, inevitably, many of the colonists' wants came to be supplied locally, the expanded manufactures of Spain had to pay the price. The attempt to tighten the metropolitan

<sup>36</sup> F. C. Lane, 'National Wealth and Protection Costs' in Clarkson and Cochran eds., *War as a Social Institution* (New York, 1941), pp. 36 ff.

<sup>37</sup> C. G. Motten, *Mexican Silver and the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia and London, 1950), chaps. 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> Thus from the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch East India Company expanded the income from colonial taxes, previously about 9 per cent of its revenue, much more rapidly than trading profits. Lannoy and Linden, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-7. F. Chevalier, *La Formation des grands domaines en Mexique. Terres et Société au XVI-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1952).

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monopoly merely made matters worse by discouraging the development, among other things, of the potentially revolutionary plantation economy.<sup>39</sup> The effects of the influx of bullion into Spain are too well known to need discussion.

It is therefore understandable that the 'old colonial system' passed through a profound crisis; and that its effects on the general European economy were far-reaching. A new pattern of colonial exploitation which produced steadily rising exports of manufactures from Europe did indeed replace it. (Acting largely on their own the sugar planters of northern Brazil had shown the way to it from the end of the sixteenth century.) Yet the lure of the old monopoly profits was irresistible to all those who had a chance of capturing them. Even the Dutch remained resolutely 'old-fashioned' in their colonialism until the eighteenth century, though their entrepôt position in Europe saved them from the consequences of colonial inefficiency. Old colonialism did not grow over into new colonialism; it collapsed and was replaced by it.

#### *The contradictions of the home markets*

There can be little doubt that the sixteenth century came nearer to creating the conditions for a really widespread adoption of the capitalist mode of production than any previous age; perhaps because of the impetus given by overseas loot, perhaps because of the encouragement of rapidly growing population and markets and rising prices. (It is not the object of this article to discuss the reasons which caused this expansion to follow the 'feudal crisis' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.) A powerful combination of forces, including even large feudal interests,<sup>40</sup> seriously threatened the resistance of gild-dominated towns. Rural industry, of the 'putting-out' type, which had previously been largely confined to textiles, spread in various countries and to new branches of production (for example metals), especially towards the end of the period. Yet the expansion bred its own obstacles. We may briefly consider some of them.

Except perhaps in England no 'agrarian revolution' of a capital-

<sup>39</sup> For the ending of sugar plantations in the early seventeenth century, E. O. v. Lippmann, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> cf. H. Aubin, 'D. Anfaenge d. grossen schlesischen Leinweberei', *Vierteljahrsschr. f. Soz. und Wirtschaftsgesch.*, xxxv (1942), pp. 154-73.

ist type accompanied industrial change, as it was to do in the eighteenth century; though there was plenty of upheaval in the countryside. Here again we find the generally feudal nature of the social framework distorting and diverting forces which might otherwise have made for a direct advance towards modern capitalism. In the east, where agrarian change took the form of a revival of serfdom by exporting lords, the conditions for such development were inhibited locally, though made possible elsewhere. In other regions the price-rise, the upheavals in landownership, and the growth of demand for agrarian produce might well have led to the emergence of capitalist farming by gentlemen and the kulak-type of peasant on a greater scale than appears to have occurred.<sup>41</sup> Yet what happened? French lords (often 'bourgeois' who had bought themselves into feudal status) reversed the trend to peasant independence from the middle of the sixteenth century, and increasingly recovered lost ground.<sup>42</sup> Towns, merchants and local middlemen invested in the land, partly no doubt because of the security of farm produce in an age of inflation, partly because the surplus was easy to draw from it in a feudal manner, their exploitation being all the more effective for being combined with usury; partly perhaps in direct political rivalry with feudalists.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the relationship of towns and their inhabitants as a whole to the surrounding peasantry was still, as always in a generally feudal society, that of a special kind of feudal lord. (The peasants in the town-dominated cantons of Switzerland and in inland Netherlands were not actually emancipated until the French Revolution.<sup>44</sup>) The mere existence of urban investment in agriculture or urban influence over the countryside, therefore, did not imply the creation of rural capitalism. Thus the spread of share-cropping in France, though theoretically marking a step towards capitalism, in fact often produced merely a bourgeoisie parasitic on a peasantry increasingly exhausted by it, and by the rising demands of the

<sup>41</sup> P. Raveau, *L'Agriculture . . . en Poitou au XVI<sup>e</sup> s.* (Paris, 1926), p. 127; Marc Bloch, *Les Caractères Originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (new edn., Paris, 1952), pp. 148-9; but the 'gentilhomme campagnard' is not *ipso facto* a capitalist farmer.

<sup>42</sup> Bloch, *op. cit.*; Braudel, *op. cit.*, pp. 624 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Bloch, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-6; P. Raveau, *op. cit.*, pp. 249 ff; A. Kraemer, *D. wechselnde . . . Bedeutung d. Landbesitzes d. Stadt Breslau*, *op. cit.*, p. 48, for systematic buying of land from 1500 to the Thirty Years' War.

<sup>44</sup> Baasch, *Hollaend. Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 50; Roupnel, *op. cit.*

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State; and consequent decline.<sup>45</sup> The old social structure predominated still.

Two results may have followed from this. First, it is improbable that there was much technical innovation, though the first (Italian) handbook on crop rotation appeared in the mid-sixteenth century, and certain that the increase in agrarian output did not keep pace with demand.<sup>46</sup> Hence towards the end of the period there are signs of diminishing returns and food-shortage, of exporting areas using up their crops for local needs, etc., preludes to the famines and epidemics of the crisis-period.<sup>47</sup> Second, the rural population, subject to the double pressure of landlords and townsmen (not to mention the State), and in any case much less capable of protecting itself against famine and war than they, suffered.<sup>48</sup> In some regions this shortsighted 'squeeze' may actually have led to a declining trend in productivity during the seventeenth century.<sup>49</sup> The countryside was sacrificed to lord, town and State. Its appalling rate of mortality—if the relatively prosperous Beauvaisis is any guide—was second only to that of the domestic out-workers, also increasingly rural.<sup>50</sup> Expansion under these conditions bred crisis.

What happened in the non-agricultural sectors depended largely on the agricultural. Costs of manufacture may have been unduly raised by the more rapid rise of agrarian than of industrial prices,

<sup>45</sup> Marx, *Capital* iii, xlvii, sect. v, on *métayage*; G. de Falguérolles, 'Décadence de l'économie agricole à Lempaut (Languedoc)', *Annales du Midi*, liii (1941), pp. 142–167—an important article.

<sup>46</sup> Raveau, *op. cit.*, chap. iii. For the non-innovating character of French agricultural handbooks, G. Lizerand, *Le Régime rural de l'ancienne France* (Paris, 1942), pp. 79–81. M. J. Elsas, *Umriss einer Geschichte d. Preise u. Löhne in Deutschland* (Leiden, 1949), for stable agricultural productivity.

<sup>47</sup> G. Coniglio, *Il regno di Napoli al tempo di Carlo V* (Naples, 1951), and Braudel, *op. cit.*; V. Barbour, *Capitalism in Amsterdam* (Baltimore, 1950), pp. 26–27; A. Juergens, *Z. schleswig-holsteinschen Handelsgeschichte im 16. u. 17. Jb.* (Berlin, 1914), pp. 10–12, for change from an exporting to an importing area at end of sixteenth century.

<sup>48</sup> Because they relied on local food supplies, while towns imported in any case, often from great distances. J. Meuvret, 'La Géographie du prix des céréales', *Revista de Economia*, iv (Lisbon, 1951), pp. 63–69. Falguérolles, *op. cit.*, for peasants ceasing to eat wheat, which they had to sell to pay taxes.

<sup>49</sup> Falguérolles, *op. cit.*, argues so.

<sup>50</sup> Goubert, *op. cit.* (above, n. 5); and below chap. 6.

thus narrowing the profit-margin of manufacturers.<sup>51</sup> (However, manufacturers increasingly used the cheap labour of rural out-workers, who were again exploited to the point of debility.) The market also had its difficulties. The rural market as a whole must have proved disappointing. Many freeholding peasants benefited from the price-rise and the demand for their goods, provided they had enough land to feed themselves even in bad years, a regular surplus for sale, and a good head for business.<sup>52</sup> But if such yeomen bought much more than before, they bought less than townsmen of equal standing, being more self-sufficient.<sup>53</sup> The experience of nineteenth-century France shows that a middle and rich peasantry is about as uninviting a market for mass manufactures as may be found, and does not encourage capitalists to revolutionize production. Its wants are traditional; most of its wealth goes into more land and cattle, or into hoards, or into new building, or even into sheer waste, like those gargantuan weddings, funerals, and other feasts which disturbed continental princes at the turn of the sixteenth century.<sup>54</sup> The increase in the demand from the non-agricultural sector (towns, luxury market, government demand, etc.) may for a time have obscured the fact that it grew less rapidly than productive capacity, and that the persistent decline in the real income of wage-earners in the long inflation may actually, according to Nef, have stopped 'the growth of the demand for some industrial products'.<sup>55</sup> However, the slumps in the export markets from the late 1610s onwards brought the fact home.

Once the decline had begun, of course, an additional factor increased the difficulties of manufacture: the rise in labour costs. For there is evidence that—in the towns at least—the bargaining

<sup>51</sup> Elsas, *op. cit.*, O. Roehlk, *Hansisch-Norwegische Handelspolitik im 16. Jb.* (Neumünster, 1935), pp. 74–75 for an excellent discussion of this, though relating to the 'price-scissors' between corn and fish prices; G. D. Ramsay, 'The Report of the Royal Commission on the Clothing Industry, 1640', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lvii (1942), pp. 485–6.

<sup>52</sup> Bloch, *op. cit.*, on this important last point.

<sup>53</sup> M. Campbell, *The English Yeoman* (New Haven, 1942), pp. 186–7, chap. vi *passim*, and Hoskins, *Past and Present*, no. 4 (1953).

<sup>54</sup> H. Widmann, *Geschichte Salzburgs* (Gotha, 1914), iii, p. 354; Feller, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 368; H. Schnell, *Mecklenburg im Zeitalter d. Reformation* (Berlin, 1900), p. 201.

<sup>55</sup> 'Prices and Industrial Capitalism', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, vii (1936–7), pp. 184–5.

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power of labour rose sharply during the crisis, perhaps owing to the fall or stagnation in town populations. At any rate real wages rose in England, Italy, Spain and Germany, and the mid-century saw the formation of effective journeymen's organizations in most western countries.<sup>56</sup> This may not have affected the labour costs of the putting-out industries, as their workers were in a weaker position to benefit from the situation, and their piece-rate wages were more easily cut. However, it is clearly not a negligible factor. Moreover, the slackening of population increase and the stabilization of prices must have depressed manufactures further.

These different aspects of the crisis may be reduced to a single formula: economic expansion took place within a social framework which it was not yet strong enough to burst, and in ways adapted to it rather than to the world of modern capitalism. Specialists in the Jacobean period must determine what actually precipitated the crisis: the decline in American silver, the collapse of the Baltic market or some of many other possible factors. Once the first crack appeared, the whole unstable structure was bound to totter. It did totter, and in the subsequent period of economic crisis and social upheaval the decisive shift from capitalist enterprise adapted to a generally feudal framework to capitalist enterprise transforming the world in its own pattern, took place. The Revolution in England was thus the most dramatic incident in the crisis, and its turning-point. 'This nation', wrote Samuel Fortrey in 1663 in his *England's Interest and Improvement*, 'can expect no less than to become the most great and flourishing of all others.'<sup>57</sup> It could and it did; and the effects on the world were to be portentous.

<sup>56</sup> D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *The Medieval Mason* (Manchester, 1949), pp. 207-12; Cipolla, 'The decline of Italy' (cited n. 9), p. 184; Elsas, op. cit.; E. J. Hamilton, *War and Prices in Spain 1651-1800* (Harvard, 1947), p. 219. G. Unwin, *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1904), chap. viii; G. Des Marez, *Le Compagnonnage des Chapeliers Bruxellois* (Bruxelles, 1909), pp. 17-21; E. Martin St. Léon, *Le Compagnonnage* (Paris, 1901); L. Guéneau, *L'Organisation de travail à Nevers au XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle 1660-1790* (Paris, 1919), pp. 79 ff; J. Gebauer, *Gesch. d. Stadt Hildesheim* (Hildesheim and Leipzig, 1922), pp. 221 ff; etc.

<sup>57</sup> Samuel Fortrey, *England's Interest and Improvement* (London, 1673 edn.) p.8.