

Harper's International Commerce Series

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Harper's International Commerce Series

EDITED BY
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION.

THE object of this series is double. In the first place it is to supply in a compact form to managers, clerks, and agents of commercial firms in all parts of the globe accurate information about the commerce, resources, and needs of the principal countries of the world; the second, and equally important, purpose of the series is to supply to teachers and students in technical schools, colleges, and commercial Universities throughout the British Empire and the United States of America what we may perhaps call guide-books to the wealth of modern nations. No intelligent observer of commercial progress in Germany during the last decade can have failed to mark an equally rapid and simultaneous progress in the descriptive literature of industry and commerce. Every University seems to have entered into the competition, and in Germany, at any rate, a teacher of practical economics is seldom at a loss for a book; he is more likely to be embarrassed by profusion than by scarcity. In America the production of monographs upon commercial subjects has been enormous, but these monographs, whatever their scientific merits—and they often exhibit a most laborious research—are not often suited to the uses of commercial instruction. Still less are they likely to deserve or win a place on the miserable bookshelf which too often satisfies a great mercantile or manufacturing house.

It is no doubt a mistake for the manufacturer of books to preach to the manufacturer of things; but the best writers on economic questions are those who combine with practical instincts a broad and scientific grasp of commerce and a power of exposition. Such writers do not lecture a business man on the conduct of his business. But is it not also a mistake for the captains of industry to shut themselves up in their offices, assume pontifical airs, and refuse to

listen to the stories of the progress made in other countries and to descriptions of other methods than their own? The shrewdness of the average English commercial traveller does not always make up for his ignorance. His knowledge of men does not always make up for his contempt of books. His readiness to appreciate concrete economies and inventions is admirable, but he would do still better had he the will and the opportunity to study descriptive economics, and to draw lessons from the abstract precepts and principles of the writers and thinkers who have devoted themselves to discovering the mechanism of the production and distribution of wealth.

After all, as Mr. John Morley once told the Midland Institute at Birmingham, long before the establishment of a commercial University (with a Chair of Commerce) in that city, the best thing that can happen to a young man of average abilities is that, after following the elementary and higher education in his own town, he should, 'at the earliest convenient moment, be taught to earn his own living.' To earn a living by honest work should be the elementary aim of every good citizen; but let the wage-earning and the profit-seeking be preceded by a training which will make his daily work an intelligible part of an intelligible whole, and help him to continue his education through life, to unravel bit by bit the baffling mysteries of Nature's laws and man's disobedience.

There is probably no form of literature more generally read than biography. The success of others is an incentive to action. We love to read the lives of great men. We learn from their failures and successes. The budding politician follows the career of the statesman. The young man entering a business or profession is encouraged by 'men of invention and industry.' The spirit of rivalry and emulation is strong and honourable, and it exists between communities and nations as well as between individuals. Happily, nations as well as individuals gain by the inventions, the industry, and the wealth, of their competitors; but the benefit would be far greater if there were more willingness to learn. 'Made in Germany' should be not a bogie, but a stimulus. Nations of invention and industry should be vehicles of instruction. Their successes are worthy of study and emulation. We must watch the developments of commercial policy, says Lord Rosebery. We must study commerce, says Mr. Chamberlain, in Universities founded for that purpose. Mr. Bryce, who knows as much of higher education