

CHAPTER XII

THE HEAVY IRON AND STEEL TRADES OF DURHAM

THE development of the iron and steel trades of the North-east Coast provides one of the most remarkable chapters in the recent history of British enterprise. While in 1740 the total make of pig iron in the United Kingdom was a little over 17,000 tons, in 1913 the quantity made on the North-east Coast alone, by which is meant the county of Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire, reached the total of 3,869,000 tons, together with steel ingots and castings to the amount of 2,031,000 tons. In 1925, in the depth of the recent trade depression, the respective figures were 1,905,000 and 1,468,000 tons, while the output of local ore, which in 1913 was 6,010,800 tons, fell in 1925 to 2,284,200 tons. But foreign and Midland ores have to a large extent replaced the Cleveland stone for steel-making purposes.

The course of this manufacture has not, however, been a smooth one. From small beginnings it has risen slowly, and often in the face of circumstances of the utmost difficulty. Indeed, it is doubtful whether any other staple trade of the country has had to face so many changes, amounting almost to revolutions, or has been obliged to adapt itself—at great expenditure of capital—to such entirely altered conditions. But these changes have worked uniformly for the good of the trade, inasmuch as their trend has been towards the reduction of costs. The result is that the cheapness of the product has created new uses, and has not only been largely the cause of the expansion