

HISTORY AND THE HISTORIAN



A Public Lecture delivered in the Hall of the Faculty on Thursday, March 4, 1948, by Dr. JAMES J. AUCHMUTY, Member of the Royal Irish Academy and Fellow of the Royal Historical Society: Assistant Professor of Modern History at the Faculty.

In a recent issue of the *English Historical Review* a distinguished British historian, in a pleasantly favourable note on my recent biographical and critical essay on LECKY, greatest of Irish historians, so closely connected with my own university of Dublin, somewhat startled me with his comments on my attitude to history and historiography :- "From one side and another, over and over again the reader is sure to find himself in amicable disagreement with opinions implied or expressed in this book. One might conjecture that it would even take a considerable essay or a long debate going to the roots of historiography to decide whether the author is right in disparaging so completely... (a) paradoxical judgement of Acton..." I was the more surprised in that on the judgement referred to I had felt that today there could be no two opinions. Accordingly I was compelled, as every student of history must be compelled at some time or another, to examine the basic principles of historical study. A whole series of correlated and relevant questions had to be passed in review and an attempt made to come to some firm decision on an attitude towards the subject and towards historical research. Such an enquiry has not shaken my opinion on the particular point at issue and it is not my present intention to enter on any detailed defence but rather to outline the results of my personal investigation and then to discuss certain aspects of historiography which have only come to the fore with the present generation.

Man has always held the past in high esteem; otherwise the knowledge of his environment would be limited to the experience of his own generation, and each would have to start anew his voyage of discovery through the complexities of nature. Nothing

in this World can be known or understood intelligently without some ideas as to its origin. Even a new machine is but imperfectly explicable apart from its history. Since man is more important than the machine more time must be devoted to the study of man than to the study of the machine, but it is essential to recognize that the present is, in its entirety, the outcome of the past, and from that recognition should come a more lively and intelligent interest in the world around us. To many it seems clear that for thousands of years civilization has been persistently advancing along certain definite lines, though the rate of advance varies incessantly both from place to place and from time to time. Such an opinion disagrees with that of Fisher, who failed to find any constant rhythm in history but agrees with that of Toynbee who not only asserts a unity of history but argues that any theory of progress in cycles would be an everlasting cosmic joke. History, as we conceive it is the record of the orderly progress of all that makes up our environment; and it is not merely a study in causation or a branch of criticism but also a great time drama possessing all the qualities of a science and of an art. In so far as it is a systematized and organized body of knowledge it is a science and we are in full agreement with Bury that there is such a thing as a Science of History but the terms of his challenge were too extreme: "History is a Science; nothing less and nothing more." History "knowledge gained by a process of enquiry" must be fused into the form of art if it is to meet with any kind of acceptance. Even Bury admitted this in a different context: "History is, in the last resort, somebody's image of the past and the image is conditioned by the mind and experience of the person who forms it." The presentation of this image is an act of artistic creation and of literary composition. Historical narratives can never survive, except as a source of material for experts, unless they are works of art, and no historian has risen to true greatness who is not an artist as well as a scientist, who does not follow in the steps of Gibbon, Macaulay, Buckle or Froude.

It is only in modern times that generations have grown up willing on the one hand to spend whole life-times in the pursuit of historical knowledge or on the other prepared to devote large periods of leisure to the reading of other people's opinions on matters of historical importance. "The reading of Histories only for delight, talk and ostentation, is a prodigal consumption of precious time" wrote George Snell in 1649 only a few years after BACON had declared: "Histories make men wise"; but in our modern western world so many have their lives deadened by rou-

tine occupations that some turn to history as others to detective stories for a literature of escape and of imagination. Obviously it is not the prime function of the historian or of the university school of history to provide a literature of escape but we do not sneer at gas the bye-product of coal so long as our supply of coal is not interfered with. So long as historical novels and biographies turn the attention of some to the pursuit of historical truth so long do they have a value even in the circle of the expert. It is the general opinion that the novels of Sir Walter Scott gave a wholly new direction to English historiography, and they certainly inspired many to their first interest in a branch of learning deserving of study for its own sake which is also a kind of knowledge useful in daily life. Nevertheless for most of us gifted with a mind for historical enquiry the "temperate curiosity" recommended by Lord Bolingbroke remains sound advice: "Some (histories) are to be read, some are to be studied, and some may be neglected entirely not only without detriment, but with advantage. Some are the proper object of one man's curiosity, some of another's, and some of all men's; but all history is not an object of curiosity for any man. He who improperly, wantonly and absurdly makes it so indulges in a kind of canine appetite; the curiosity of the one like the hunger of the other devours ravenously and without distinction whatever falls in its way." It is not given to mankind to produce a Toynbee, any more than a Gibbon, in every generation, and increasing specialization makes it progressively more improbable.

"The end and scope of all history being to teach us by example of times past such wisdom as may guide our desires and actions" wrote Sir Walter Raleigh in his prison cell as he attempted a History of the World. He had but little improved on the great definition of Thucydides, hopefully propounded centuries before our era, "History is philosophy teaching by example." How much nobler is this outlook than that of Gibbon! "History is little more than the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind"; or of Oscar Wilde "That dreadful record of crime known as history". But both Gibbon and Wilde lived at a period when the study of history still meant the study of the distant past, and the notion of recent history as a school for statesmen or as supplying a general background of culture for the many had not yet arisen. History as a subject of other than dilettante research has but recently come to the fore. No one but the expert feels called upon to read much that was written more than two centuries ago, and the nineteenth century saw a complete transformation in the

purpose and outlook of influential historians. Historical enquiry must always be undertaken in accordance with the ideas and interests dominant at the moment of investigation and no historian can abstract himself from his environment. He must therefore strive to understand both his environment and himself, and this generally requires more than mere passive acquaintance. Professor Brogan has well said: "It is a man's right not as a Professor but as a citizen, to have views, to get them expressed as best he can and to convert his fellow-citizens, learned and unlearned, not merely to assent but to action. A Professor who is a socialist in his chair but never from a soap box is merely a more sophisticated form of an idiot." It is certainly no essential part of a teacher's duty to influence the pupils under his care by a one-sided presentation of the facts and he is an unworthy teacher who does not present as best he can the various sides of every question not merely because of one's duty in the pursuit of truth but also, at the lower level since in any democratic state all types and classes of political opinion may be represented among the pupils, and all are equally deserving of consideration. Still it is no accident that all the great historians before the present day were persons whose full-time activity was not devoted to the study and teaching of any kind of history. The "academic historian", the "professor of history" is a recent figure. The noble line which stems from the Greek writers Thucydides, Herodotus and Xenophon and ends in English with Gibbon and Macaulay, Buckle, Lecky, Acton and Froude is a line of great men who brought to their historical outlook the wisdom acquired in military, political or even commercial life. The precision and accuracy of modern research workers is superior to that of their predecessors but no one can claim for them the same breadth of learning and imaginative sweep. It is no historical accident that Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* appeared in the eighteenth century, or that the same epic story would today be comprised in a dozen or so special studies, each authoritative but few readable. Specialization is essential in face of the tremendous expansion of human knowledge but it exacts a heavy price in destroying the essential unity of the human mind.

"It is given only to God and to angels to be lookers on" wrote Francis Bacon, possessor of one of the most remarkable intellects in the whole of British history, essayist, scientist, historian but also statesman and Lord Chancellor. The Victorian liberal believed neutrality in thought to be possible and yet it was of those same liberal historians that Emerson, the American philosopher, could write: "the history of Rome and of Greece when written by their

scholars degenerated into English party pamphlets". We knowing more about the emotions and also about human failings realise that it is not. But the reader who fails to grasp a historian's bias is generally lacking in intelligence and even the lecturer will soon be queried by the variegated members of his class. The Whig school of historians have dominated English historiography not because they were always right but because they were always readable. And just as the reader must note the author's bias he must also examine closely his choice of subject. In modern western historical research as in modern western industry, Toynbee has pointed out that, the quantity and location of raw materials is threatening to govern the activities and lives of human beings; the potter is becoming the slave of his clay. To the preservative qualities of the Egyptian desert we owe our great knowledge of the Ancient Egyptian Empire, how little do we know of the Seleucid which was probably of equal importance!

Since every author is the child of his time all historical works have to be understood in their context and a dead author's context has to be discovered historically. From the informed writings of HERODOTUS, the father of history, THUCYDIDES and XENOPHON it is a sad declension to the chroniclers of mediaeval Europe whose pages are filled with facts, often fanciful, presented without any pretensions to literary charm, perhaps destined for edification rather than the service of truth. A new spirit is dawning in the thirteenth century when Mathew Paris could write: "The way of the historical writers is hard for if they tell the truth they provoke men and if they write what is false they offend God." In the history of European thought there have been few greater sensations than that caused during the renaissance when Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457) demonstrated the Donation of Constantine to be a clumsy forgery, made some five centuries later than its presumed date. In their context the original forgers had not felt themselves dishonest. They probably believed in their grant, they felt the proof would be useful. They can be compared with the English monk, who, on being asked to write the biography of the Patron Saint of a neighbouring foundation, asked for materials, and when told there were none replied: "So much the better! I shall prepare you a story after the manner of St. Thomas a Beckett". That monk felt no moral compunction. He was like a modern novelist writing for his public. This is a far cry from the notion, slowly gaining strength since the time of the Renaissance, that history should be studied for its own sake, for the mere purpose of getting

at the truth respecting the causes, the facts and the consequences of the great movements of the past.

In the medieval world it was an Arabic historian who set out the highest ideals of historical research; though like so many westerners of later date he proved a voice crying in the wilderness. The weakness of the great majority of Arab historians is the compilation of vast quantities of undigested material. Every source is tapped, every reference quoted, but too often there is neither synthesis nor evaluation. Their general inferiority to the best of the west is shown by the comparisons that are made. AT-TABARI who died in 923 was by Gibbon called the Arab Livy; AL-MASOUDI who died in 956 has been called the Herodotus of the Arabs; but IBN-KHALDUN (1332-1406) stands on his own feet incomparably alone, the greatest historian to write in Arabic at any period in the history of the language, with a scientific attitude far in advance of the western world of his day. In his Prologomena, which would be better called Introduction, to History, of which a good English translation is much to be desired, he sets out at length his principles of historical study and research. "...history includes reflection and examination and the subtle tracing of causes and origins. And it is worthy to be considered one of the sciences of wisdom." Ibn-Khaldun identified the Science of History with the Science of Civilisation — "a vast and infinite science in which all particular arts and sciences may be included." In history he recognized an endless cycle of progress and retrogression analogous to the phenomena of human life. Kingdoms are born, attain maturity and die, and, since he was chiefly thinking of the shifting kingdoms of the desert, their brief life he estimated at not more than three generations or 120 years, reminding the English-speaking of the Lancashire proverb about success in commerce: Clogs to clogs, three generations.

Ibn-Khaldun was very severe on the errors and the non-scientific attitude of his predecessors. Pointing out that even in the fourteenth century the historically minded public was growing he deprecated the over-emphasis on political history and recommended less genealogical and legal detail since others than ministers and members of ruling families were now prepared to read historical works. He enunciated seven causes of error in the writing of history:- i. Prejudice; ii. Undue confidence in authorities; iii. Ignorance of the aim of those who took part in historical events; iv. Readiness to believe that truth has already been obtained; v. Ignorance of the circumstances surrounding events;

vi. Desire to win the favour of great personages; vii. Ignorance of the nature of things from which civilization arises. Unfortunately Ibn-Khaldun is a great light shining in a sea of darkness. No other historian of comparable talents followed in his footsteps and he is a lone figure in the intellectual world of his day. He had a strangely chequered career, in turn civil-servant, diplomat, lawyer, judge, theologian — he was at all times a prolific writer — on philosophy, logic, arithmetic and law as well as history. Four times he was Secretary or Prime Minister to one of the petty Sultans of North Africa; three times he was dismissed or imprisoned. Three times he was Grand Cadi of the Malakite Rite at Cairo and twice dismissed. Yet in all his misadventures he was treated with the respect due to his remarkable learning even when captured by the great Tamurlane during the Sultan of Egypt's invasion of Syria in 1400. He certainly belongs to that noble line already referred to who brought to their historical outlook the wisdom acquired in military and political life.

Ibn-Khaldun left no school. He was a genius born out of due time, and Professor Flint can hardly be justified in calling him the founder of the Science of History. That Science is the child of the eighteenth century, for History as an exact science is a late invention. In the sense parallel to that in which Euclid, Aristotle and Archimedes were scientists the ancients had no historians. In the social sciences Aristotle, as a writer on Politics, is the first scientific thinker. As the Babylonians and the Egyptians seem to have collected observations and made measurements without really achieving a scientific outlook upon astronomy and mathematics, so Thucydides and Tacitus recorded with industry and imagination what they had seen and heard; but observation and measurement are not science, and memoirs and legends are only of the stuff of history. Observation and measurement become science when they are synthesised or generalized or when the notion of the concept emerges and this first happened with the Greeks. Memoir and legend become history when they are lifted out of the region of authority by the birth of historical criticism; and this is the discovery of our modern world, its contribution to the advancement of human knowledge. Critical history, foreshadowed by Ibn-Khaldun, began in the hands of men like Vico and Hume; Gibbon and Montesquieu; Niebuhr and Herder; and ripened into the nineteenth century when in the words of Collingwood: "history stood forth the unmistakable Queen of the Sciences and biologists like Darwin and Huxley, philosophers like Hegel, theologians like Baur and Newman, and economists like Marx ex-

PLICITLY resolved the problems of their special sciences into historical problems, and all the waters of religion and science went to swell the great river of historical thought. - So gigantic has been the effect of this revolution that as yet people hardly appreciate it. They talk of evolution, of progress, of the metaphysical reality of time, as if those were notions of the first importance and grand discoveries of modern science. - But they are the only half understood and mythological expressions of the concept of history”.

Throughout this paper you will note that the word *History* is being used in what the philosophers might call its common-sense meaning, and that, of course, is the way most of us personally use it. The word, however, possesses certain ambiguities. The majority use it improperly, as I have used it, to denote the actual course of events, whereas the true definition makes of history merely a mode of enquiry, or of learning by enquiry. I am not, however, approaching the subject as a philosopher, in the technical sense, and I merely want you to realize that if we refer to Alexander and to Mussolini as Makers of History we should, were we exact, be asserting that these leaders were distinguished writers of historical narratives. To call Julius Caesar a Maker of History would be, in every sense, correct. Accepting the common usage there is one further point which modern philosophers are always calling to our attention. What is the actual course of events we aim at describing? History is not a science of direct observation, or of experiment but of criticism. The object of the historian, according to such philosophers as Croce and Collingwood, is to relive the experiences of the past, to concern himself not so much with action which is the result of thought as with the act of thinking itself. As Collingwood has asserted:- “Historical knowledge is the knowledge of what mind has done in the past, and at the same time it is the redoing of this, the perpetuation of past acts in the present.” In contradistinction to the Marxian interpretation of history the predominant western school of historiography stresses the domination of the human mind in its relation with the external world. Pressed to extremes the doctrine of the supremacy of thought over action can be nonsensical. Prior to the 1945 British general election someone invited G.M. Trevelyan, the most distinguished living British historian, to express a political forecast as to the result. He replied that he took no part in politics but that he hoped Mr. Churchill would be defeated because: “He is a great historian.” This opinion can, of course, be looked at from several points of view. If Trevelyan meant that Churchill had reached an age when he must have leisure to continue the histo-

rical work which would give him one type of lasting fame he was giving a sound judgement. On the other hand Churchill's genius as a historian has been, in great measure, due to his participation in great events, and if therefore Trevelyan's remark was in any sense a criticism of the value of Churchill's eventful career it was, from my point of view, wrong. The dichotomy which these philosophical historians set up between thought and action seems to me too sharp, one is impossible without the other, the interpenetration is so close for me as to make them inseparable. I therefore query the extreme interpretation of COLLINGWOOD's line of argument that anybody can shape events only a great man can write about them. "There is no mode of action, no form of emotion, that we do not share with the lower animals. It is only in language that we rise above them, by language which is the parent and not the child of thought." Elsewhere he writes: "the cause (of a historical event) for (the historian) means the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about: and this is not something other than the event, it is the inside of the event.. By an effort of active critical thinking the historian re-thinks these thoughts in his own mind. He constructs a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. He aims at making his picture a coherent whole, whose every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that the character in this situation cannot but act in this way."

It is, of course, necessary that we should enquire at times into the validity of our modes of thought and experience but most of us will go on in the old way expressing perhaps the countryman's pleasure when he learned that he had been talking prose all his life. In any case in our generation philosophy has stepped down from its former pedestal on which it attempted to explain the universe and has now reduced itself to the much humbler task of analysing the structure within its reach. It has become concerned with the skeleton rather than with the spirit just when historical enquiry has widened its scope from a study of purely political history to a situation in which the sphere of history is as wide as the sphere of human interest.

We have come to realise that political history is but an infinitesimal portion of the great panorama which true history lays before us. In all ages and in all generations the life of the common man has pursued the even tenour of its way unheeding of and unhindered by the changes and chances of the political situation.

An over emphasis on political history, such as still obtains in France, is what this generation must attempt to avoid at the same time also escaping the error of falling into the other extreme and explaining all history in terms of economics. The historians to whom I am personally most attracted are those who associate historical progress with the evolution of human thought. They were dominant for a short period in the nineteenth century but they accomplished a lasting work among the most distinguished of our historians even if they had little effect on school text-books. In that century, for a moment in our intellectual history, great minds attempted not merely to synthesise knowledge but also to lay new foundations for our systems of thought. The vulgar notion of the English Victorian age as one of unqualified commercial expansion dominated by rigorous conceptions of middle-class morality is a democratic conception in the sense that it is obtained by the mere counting of heads but it takes no account of the intellectual ferment going on in the educated classes of society as the result of the outpourings of scholars and scientists of very divergent opinions. The representative Victorian writers may have been coloured by the spirit of their age but they were setting light to revolutionary fires which undermined all prevailing systems of thought.

With the possible exceptions of G.M. Trevelyan or of Arnold Toynbee, no modern historian possesses or deserves, among the English-speaking public, that influence which was attained with such masterly success by Macaulay, Buckle, Carlyle, Lecky, Froude, to a lesser degree Acton, and by the Americans, Prescott, Motley and Lea. Not only did these men have something to say, but, in a manner different from the vast majority of historians, that had each a philosophy to express, and these philosophies deliberately sapped the foundations of much current belief. In effect these authors laid down the intellectual foundations of our time, and the varied attempts to overthrow their philosophic edifices have so far produced no critic of equal influence with the original writers. It is the modern fashion to sneer at Buckle and his vast design of a History of Civilization, of which he was only permitted to lay the groundwork, but much of our modern change of emphasis in historical research is either explicit or implicit in his work. Attention is turned from action to thought, from rulers to the common-people, from Acts of God to scientific phenomena. The present vogue, which he envisaged, is for a climatological approach to history. The influence of climate and the influence of disease are the two factors which have most usefully been brought to the

fore in recent years, and neither of them has any close affinity for that domination of thought over event which seems to be asserted by COLLINGWOOD.

We now see that progress and civilization are closely related to the distribution of disease. It is many centuries since the Latin poet HORACE asserted that all men could be wise save when they had a cold in the head. No great civilization has been established in those areas of the world where malaria is endemic or where the climate is well outside the optimum for human comfort. Two thousand years ago Aristotle, Hippocrates and Herodotus thought that the rise of Greece and the fate of the mighty empires of Asia Minor confirmed the excellence of the climate of Greece, yet, despite the influence of Montesquieu and of Buckle, it is only in this century that serious study of the effect of climate on history has been undertaken. The subject has been particularly brought to the attention of American scholars because of the effect on the way of life of a section of the American people of the denudation of some of the middle western states owing to excessive felling of forests and uneconomic usage of soil resources. In large areas of the United States and Canada human greed has produced a regression of civilization. It is obvious that what is going on under our own eyes today must have occurred frequently in history and we now realise that those invasions of Europe led by Alaric and Attila were not so much the result of inspiring leadership as of the necessity for following the line of least resistance. These barbarian tribes were forced out of Asia by the failure of their feeding grounds.

It is now realised that there has been a great recession of water in the Near East. The Syrian desert is covered with the ruins of mighty cities where today it is almost impossible to support human life, but how few of our historians explain military defeats or even the fall of mighty civilizations in terms of exhausted resources caused by events outside human control. Of course humanity can contribute to the physical causes of its own destruction. The American farmer in the middle west certainly has. When the Arabs conquered Alexandria it was the second city of the Roman empire with a population of over a million, with four thousand public baths and four thousand theatres; all through the Roman empire the Roman army spread the use of public warm water baths, the ruins of many of which we can still see, but the fall of the empire resulted in the destruction of the baths and, more seriously, the complete loss of the knowledge of how they were

heated. In 950 A.D. under the rule of Abd-el-Rahman ii the population of Spain was calculated at thirty million; in 1594 under Philip ii, at the beginning of what some call Spain's Golden Age it had dropped to a little over eight million as a result of incessant warfare, the expulsion of the Jews and the Moors, the influence of the Inquisition and emigration to America. Spain has never recovered from that blood-letting. In this Spanish case we have a collection of general causes only recognizable over centuries and so like climate and disease too often overlooked. They produced that exhausted type of Spanish intellect exemplified in the famous address of the university of Cervera — the only university in Catalonia — to Ferdinand VII: "Far be from us the dangerous novelty of thinking."

The leading climatological historian, Ellsworth Huntington, explains American predominance in the world today by reference to its optimum temperature for human life and work, and the prevalence in the northern United States of stormy conditions which he contends are provocative of human thought and energy. Like all pioneers his tendency is to claim too much but his contributions to historical thought are undoubtedly significant and it is essential today that historians should look at mankind as a whole since all present civilizations take most of their new characteristics from western Europe. As cities all over the world become increasingly alike so also do the lives of intelligent people. Save for its natural beauty the corniche of Alexandria might be the skyline of any American city. Politically Egypt has had few relations with the United States in the past and present contacts are very uneasy yet consider the profound influence exercised on Egyptian civilization by the cinema, the motor car, the aeroplane and so much else of largely American provenance. How many Arabic historians have measured or estimated these influences? So far agricultural workers are not equally standardized with those in towns but perhaps in a thousand years all humanity may have evolved to a standard type, though since change is at an uneven pace it is also possible that the divergencies may increase.

Huntington regards the march of civilization as a great tide which moves steadily forward in a wide flat wave. On the top of the wave one can recognize huge swells due to a storm far out at sea. These cause the water to rise and fall so much that the tide is not noticed till some time has elapsed. The swells correspond to the rise and fall of nations due to the broad interplay of biological inheritance, psychical environment and cultural endowment. The

small waves are due to local winds which represent wars, new treaties, parliamentary debates, the influence of great personalities or of outstanding books.

Thus Huntington, though stressing climatological factors, recognizes many others including that of personality which is so completely overlooked by the Marxian interpretation of history and to which even Buckle, in revolt against the dominant tendencies of his time, gave too little value. The Russian revolution would have been something very different without Lenin; its development would have been considerably altered had Trotsky been substituted for Stalin. But personality can dominate history it cannot make it. There are too many other factors. When we study the Crusades we all know the names of the leaders but how much do we know of the influences which determined their success or lack of it. In 1098 300,000 men besieged Antioch; in 1099 the 60,000 who were left captured Jerusalem; by 1100 only 20,000 remained. In 1190 100,000 arrived on a new crusade at Antioch. Famine, plague and desertion — the last caused chiefly by terror — reduced the force to 500. General Leclerc, a first class French general was sent in 1801 to Haiti to overcome the negro revolt under that greatest negro statesman of history — Toussaint l'Ouverture. 22,000 out of 25,000 men died of yellow fever. In such case what is the use of generalship? Quite recently a paper contributed to a medical periodical proved that a prime cause of Montgomery's desert victories was the superior health enjoyed by his men compared with the condition of the German army. A General to be successful must learn from history! There is much work still to be done in order to study the general causes of historical events, to discern underlying trends which alter the course of history.

Unfortunately historians are no quicker than any other class in learning their lessons. Long after the heat of battle and argument the embers that remain are fanned by the limited and the ignorant. This in European history is particularly true of the Reformation period. The English reformation is still by many attributed to the unworthy desire of an English king, Henry viii. to take a new wife, thus overlooking not merely the past history of English revolt from Roman claims but also the similar divorce cases on which the king based his case. How many know that two months prior to Henry's case his sister Margaret had obtained a divorce in Rome on far flimsier grounds; that a previous pope had granted Henry iv of Castile permission to have two wives but

that Henry VIII refused such a suggestion with conscientious horror. Too many look to history to substantiate their own opinions. It can do that but its destiny is much higher. The philosopher who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes was asserting an eternal truth when he wrote: "He who increaseth wisdom increaseth sorrow" or as it has been said in modern times: "God has given to every man a choice between truth and repose."

Committing oneself to any philosophy of history is accordingly an act of faith and that faith will receive many blows from this side and from that. The nineteenth century was proudly convinced of the certainty of human progress. We are much less certain. Yet we can take heart from the deep pessimism of so many leaders of the past: Wellington in the last year of his life thanked God that he would not live to see the ruin which was coming upon England; in 1790 Burke asserted: "France does not exist politically, it is expunged out of the Map of Europe", in 1847 Disraeli felt: "In industry, commerce and agriculture there is no hope". Just as great minds do not necessarily recognize the trends of their own day neither are they sound judges of the future. How long did it not take the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people to become an accepted historical idea. To quote from RANKE the greatest of German historians: "There is no political idea which has had so profound an influence in the course of the last few centuries as that of the sovereignty of the people. At times repressed and acting only on opinion, then breaking out again, openly confessed, never realised and perpetually intervening, it is the eternal ferment of the modern world." The strength of feeling behind the nineteenth century growth of the idea of nationality was also long unrecognized. As late as 1862 the Czar, Alexander II, invited Bismarck to enter the Russian service. Only in a communist state could such an offer be possible today and even there it would be unpopular! Historians like Buckle and Lecky allowed much too little for the strength of human emotions. It has taken the influence of Freud and of the modern school of psychology to explain much previously overlooked in the history of human personality and activity.

Burckhardt, in many ways perhaps the most influential of nineteenth century historians, with his deep insight into human affairs was certainly a most accurate prophet: "The most ominous thing is not the present era, but the era of wars upon which we have entered, and that is what the new spirit will have to adapt itself to. How much, how very much that men of culture have

loved will they have to throw overboard as spiritual luxury!... To me, as a teacher of history, a very peculiar phenomenon has taken place namely the sudden devaluation of all mere 'events' of the past. From now on, my lectures will stress the history of ideas, retaining only an indispensable scaffolding of events." Burckhardt hated those very things which he foresaw would inevitably mark the twentieth century — standardization, vulgarization, mere size but, most of all, he dreaded the worship of power. And yet even Burckhardt was very uncertain of his own historical aims. In 1874 he wrote to Nietzsche, then a great intellectual force now everywhere recognized his inferior: "My poor head was never capable, as yours is, of reflecting upon the ultimate reasons, aims and disabilities of historical science... My task was to put people into possession of that solid foundation which is indispensable to their further work if it is not to become aimless. I have done what I could to bring them to take personal possession of the past — in any shape or form — and at any rate not to sicken them of it."

This must be the aim of every historian, the obtaining of personal possession of the past, scattering one's net as widely as possible, keeping the mind open to every wind that blows and yet pursuing a journey on an even keel. Remembering that history is a school of political method, a storehouse of political precedent and a basis for political progress, but it is much more, it provides the substance for the studies of sociology, anthropology and archaeology, it enlightens much of our study of geography; there is no science which does not benefit from the historical approach. The means of civilization should never be mistaken for the ends. Modern inventions depend entirely for their value on the use to which they are put. The study of this use must be the method of historical enquiry. The work of the historian, in the widest sense, is therefore essential to an understanding of and mastery over our present civilization. His true function is the discovery of those universal patterns which bring order into what would otherwise be a chaos of individual facts and statements.

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