THE NEW HISTORY

ESSAYS ILLUSTRATING THE MODERN HISTORICAL OUTLOOK

BY

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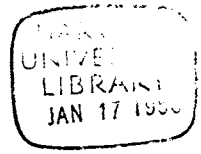

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PREFACE

ALL of the essays in this volume, with the exception of the fourth, have been printed before, as addresses or contributions to periodicals. They have, however, not only been carefully revised, but have been adjusted so as to give as much coherence as possible to the collection. They all illustrate, each in its particular way, the conception of "the new history" developed in the first essay.

In No. I, I borrow portions from an article on "Popular Histories and their Defects" which appeared in the now defunct *International Monthly*, July, 1900, but have made a new use of them. The second paper was originally prepared as one in a series of non-technical lectures delivered at Columbia University in 1908 and published by the Columbia University Press. With it has been combined portions from a paper on "The New History" read before the Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, April 22, 1911. No. III was read before the American Historical Association, December, 1910, and printed in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Method*, March 16, 1911, where No. VIII also appeared on May 11 of the same year.

No. V was read, under the caption "The Significance of History in Industrial Education," before the superintendents of the larger cities at the meeting of the National Educational Association at Indianapolis, March 2, 1910, and was printed in *The Educational Bi-Monthly*, June, 1910. No. VI was read before the New England Teachers Association at Hartford, April 27, 1906. No. VII is a combination of two articles: "The Tennis Court Oath," prepared for the meeting of the American Historical Association in 1894 and published in their proceedings and in the *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. X, No. 3, and "The French Declaration of the Rights of Man," which was printed in the latter journal, Vol. XIV, No. 4; together with borrowings from an article in the *American Historical Review*, April, 1906, on "Some Recent Tendencies in the Study of the French Revolution."

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THE HISTORY OF HISTORY

"HISTORY" is so vague a term at best, and has during the past twenty-five hundred years undergone such considerable changes in character and purpose, that it is well for one to review its somewhat startling vicissitudes if he desires to understand the conflicting notions which prevail to-day in regard to the significance of the past and the proper way of dealing with it. When we look back over the history of history, from Hecatæus of Miletus and Herodotus to the freshest doctor's dissertation, we perceive that its point of view has never been a settled one; that it has been the victim at once of routine and of transient circumstances. Some of its former ambitions it has now been forced to surrender; it has been chastened by a growing consciousness of ignorance; but these humiliations have been far more than offset by the extraordinary extension of its domain, which has taken place very recently and almost insensibly. Half a century ago, man's past was supposed to include less than six thousand years; now the story is seen to stretch back hundreds of thousands of years. But it is not man alone that has a history, — animals, plants, rocks, stars, even atoms, have theirs as well. So the zoölogist, the botanist, the geologist, the as-

tronomer, even the chemist have come to worship at History's shrine.

The growth of historical-mindedness is thus perhaps the chief intellectual trait of our age. It is deeply affecting not only the social sciences but our general conceptions of the whole organic and inorganic world. Yet in its beginnings history had no very serious aims. It was doubtless discovered, in the first instance, by the story-teller, and its purpose has usually been to tell a tale rather than to contribute to a well-considered body of scientific knowledge. Indeed we shall not be far astray, if we view history, as it has existed through the ages, and even down to our own day, as a branch of general literature, the object of which has been to present past events in an artistic manner, in order to gratify a natural curiosity in regard to the achievements and fate of conspicuous persons, the rise and decay of monarchies, and the signal commotions and disasters which have repeatedly afflicted humanity.

Although the persistence of this primitive notion of history is so obvious as scarcely to demand illustration, it is interesting to note that as late as 1820, Daunou, a reputable French historian of his time, in a course of lectures upon the pursuit of history delivered at the Collège de France, declares that the masterpieces of epic poetry should claim the first attention of the would-be historian, since it is the poets who have created the art of narrative. Then, from the modern

novel, Daunou continues, the student may learn "the method of giving an artistic pose to persons and events, of distributing details, of skillfully carrying on the thread of the narrative, of interrupting it, of resuming it, of sustaining the attention and provoking the curiosity of the reader." After the poets and novelists, the works of standard historians should be read with a view to surprising the secrets of their style — Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, and Plutarch; Cæsar, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus; and, among the moderns, Macchiavelli, Guicciardini, Giannone, Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, and Voltaire. When the foundations of an elegant literary style are firmly established, the student may re-read the standard treatises with attention to the *matter* rather than the *form;* for, as even the judicious Daunou concedes, before writing history "it is evidently necessary to know it." Both Daunou's program and his list of names — unquestionably the most distinguished among historians throughout the centuries — testify to the strength of literary traditions among historical writers.

Yet a formal distinction at least has of course always been made between history and other branches of literature. This is emphasized by Polybius, writing in the second century before Christ. "Surely," he says, "an historian's object should be not to amaze his readers by a series of thrilling anecdotes, nor should he aim to produce speeches which *might* have been delivered, nor to study dramatic propriety in detail, like a

writer of tragedy. On the contrary, his function is, above all, to record with fidelity what was actually said or done, no matter how commonplace it may be."

These warnings of Polybius were, however, commonly neglected by the ancient historian, whose object was to interest his readers in the great men and striking events of the past, or to prepare him for public life by describing and analyzing the policy of former statesmen and generals, or to teach him to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of fortune by recalling the calamities of others. It is clear that these ends of amusing, instructing, or edifying were to be attained mainly by literary skill rather than by painful historical research.

To Thucydides, Polybius, and Tacitus, history appeared to be purely human and secular. Its significance was confined to this world. To them any allusion to the influence of the gods or to providence would have seemed quite out of place. But with the establishment of the Christian church the past began to take on a religious and theological meaning.

II

To the early Christians Hebrew history, as narrated in the Old Testament, served as a very important substantiation and illustration of their contention that the Messiah had at last come. By means of allegorical interpretation the most casual episodes of

a remote past could be given a vivid and essential relation to the present. The Christians were perhaps the first to suspect a real grandeur in history, for to them it became a divine epic, stretching back to the creation of man and forward to the final separation of the good and evil in a last magnificent and decisive crisis.

But this theological unity and meaning of history was won at the tremendous sacrifice of all secular perspective and accuracy. The Amorites were invested with an importance denied the Carthaginians. Enoch and Lot loomed large in a past which scarcely knew of a Pericles. Allegory rendered all literary or historical criticism irrelevant, if not an impious questioning of God's own revealed truth. Then Augustine came to give an elaborate and plausible form to his theory of two cities, — a City of God which had existed from the first and which could be traced through the Old Testament into the New, and a City of Satan, founded by the fallen angels, exemplified in King Belus and Queen Semiramis, and trailing its obscene existence down through the Roman Empire to his own day. History became sacred and profane. The fantastically interpreted Jewish records, continued in the story of Christian martyrs and miracles, constituted history *par excellence*.

All the achievements of Egypt, Greece, and Rome tended to sink out of sight in the mind of Augustine's disciple, Orosius; only the woes of a devil-worshiping heathendom lingered. At Augustine's

suggestion he prepared his *Seven Books of History directed against the Pagans*. His aim was to refute those heathen detractors of Christianity who maintained that their age was accursed above all others, owing to the desertion of the ancient gods. He boldly maintained that, on the contrary, a veritable carnival of death had preceded the appearance of Christianity. To prove this he brought together, as he tells us, in the compass of a single volume, all the examples he could find in the annals of the past "of the most signal horrors of war, pestilence, and famine, of the fearful devastations of earthquakes and inundations, the destruction wrought by fiery eruptions, by lightning and hail, and the awful misery due to crime." His convenient and edifying treatise became the standard manual of universal history for a thousand years to follow. It was agreeable reading to medieval Christians, and it enjoyed the sanction of the chief among the church fathers. History thus became for Orosius, and for his innumerable readers in succeeding centuries, the story of God's punishment of sin and of the curse which man's original transgression had brought upon the whole earth.

But we need not expose ourselves to the hot and withering blasts of Orosius's rhetoric in order to realize the salient contrast between his conception of history's purpose and usefulness, and that of the classical Greek and Roman writers. In the old days the danger had been that Clio would fall into the way of

aping her sisters, Poetry and the Drama, and of borrowing their finery. Now, she permitted herself to be led away blindfolded by Theology, which was for so long to be the potent rival of literature. The Greek historians and the greatest of the Romans, Tacitus, were forgotten in the Middle Ages; so the polemical pamphlet of Orosius served to distort Europe's vision of the past for a thousand years until Thucydides and Polybius came once more within its ken.

But even the revival of classical learning by no means put an end to the "providential" conception of the past. This finds beautiful expression in Bossuet's *Universal History*. He perceives behind all the great events which he recalls, the secret ordering of Providence: —

> Dieu tient du plus haut des cieux les rênes de tous les royaumes; il a tous les cœurs en sa main; tantôt il retient les passions, tantôt il leur lâche la bride, et par là il remue tout le genre humain. Veut-il faire des conquérants; il fait marcher l'épouvante devant eux, et il inspire à eux et à leurs soldats une hardiesse invincible. Veut-il faire des législateurs; il leur envoie son esprit de sagesse et de prévoyance; il leur fait prévenir les maux qui menacent les états, et poser les fondements de la tranquillité publique. Il connôit la sagesse humaine, toujours courte par quelque endroit; il l'éclaire, il étend ses vues, et puis l'abandonne à ses ignorances; il l'aveugle, il la précipite, il la confond par elle-même; elle s'enveloppe, elle s'embarrasse dans ses propres subtilités, et ses précautions lui sont un piége. Dieu exerce par ce moyen ses redoutables jugements, selon les régles de sa justice toujours infaillible.[1]

[1] *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, concluding chapter.

Unhappily the mysterious character of divine dispensations opened the door to conflicting views of their meaning. All history seemed to Bossuet to exhibit God's constant solicitude for the Catholic Church and his anger against all who swerved from the faith delivered to Peter and handed down by his successors. Luther, on the other hand, believed that History supported him in his attack upon what he called the "Teufels Nest zu Rom." And not long after his death a group of Protestants had compiled a vast history of the church — *The Magdeburg Centuries*, as it was called — in which they sought to prove the diabolical origin of the papacy and of the Roman Catholic Church. Cardinal Baronius replied in twelve folio volumes, written, as he trusted, under the direct auspices of the Virgin Mary, in which he set forth "the calamities divinely sent for the punishment of those who have dared to oppose in their arrogance, or conspire against, the true church of God." For three centuries each party continued to suborn history in its own interest, and one must still, to-day, allow for religious bias in important fields of historical research. Yet in spite of all their bitterness and blindness, religious controversies have stimulated much scholarly investigation in modern times, and we should be much poorer if certain works of a distinctly partisan character had never been written, — such, for example, as Raynaldus' continuation of Baronius and, in our own days, Janssen's *History of the German People*.

To the authors of the *Magdeburg Centuries* and to Cardinal Baronius — to Protestant and Catholic historians alike — the great, obvious, determining historical forces were God and the devil. Our conception of God, as well as our ideas of history, have, however, been changing since the sixteenth century, and it is rare now to find a historian who possesses the old confidence in his ability to penetrate God's counsels and trace his dispensations in detail. As for the devil, few events can longer be ascribed to him with perfect assurance.

III

The reversion to the worldly standards of historical composition, represented by Macchiavelli and Guicciardini in the early sixteenth century, became pronounced in the eighteenth. Gibbon, Voltaire, Hume, Robertson, and others successfully resecularized history and strove to give their narrative of political events the ancient elegance of form.

Lord Bolingbroke, in his *Letters on the Study of History*, written about 1737, says: "An application to any study that tends neither to make us better men and better citizens is at best but a specious and ingenious sort of idleness; . . . and the knowledge we acquire by it is a creditable kind of ignorance, nothing more. This creditable kind of ignorance is, in my opinion, the whole benefit which the generality of men, even the most learned, reap from the study of

history: and yet the study of history seems to me of all others the most proper to train us up to private and public virtue." History, he quite properly says, is read by most people as a form of amusement, as they might play at cards. Some devote themselves to history in order to adorn their conversation with historical allusions, — and the argument is still current that one should know enough of the past to understand literary references to noteworthy events and persons. The less imaginative scholar, Bolingbroke complains, satisfies himself with making fair copies of foul manuscripts and explaining hard words for the benefit of others, or with constructing more or less fantastic chronologies based upon very insecure data. Over against these Bolingbroke places those who have perceived that history is after all only "philosophy teaching by example." For "the examples which we find in history, improved by the lively descriptions and the just explanations or censures of historians," will, he believes, have a much better and more permanent effect than declamation, or the "dry ethics of mere philosophy." Moreover, to summarize his argument, we can by the study of history enjoy in a short time a wide range of experience at the expense of other men and without risk to ourselves. History enables us "to live with the men who lived before us, and we inhabit countries that we never saw. Place is enlarged, and time prolonged in this manner: so that the man who applies himself early to the study of

history may acquire in a few years, and before he sets foot in the world, not only a more extended knowledge of mankind, but the experience of more centuries than any of the patriarchs saw." Our own personal experience is doubly defective; we are born too late to see the beginning, and we die too soon to see the end of many things. History supplies in a large measure these defects.

There is, of course, little originality in Bolingbroke's plea for history's usefulness in making wiser and better men and citizens. Polybius had seen in history a guide for statesmen and military commanders; and the hope that the striking moral victories and defeats of the past would serve to arouse virtue and discourage vice has been urged by innumerable chroniclers as the main justification of their enterprises. To-day, however, one rarely finds a historical student who would venture to recommend statesmen, warriors, and moralists to place any confidence whatsoever in historical analogies and warnings, for the supposed analogies usually prove illusive on inspection, and the warnings, impertinent. Whether or no Napoleon was ever able to make any practical use in his own campaigns of the accounts he had read of those of Alexander and Cæsar, it is quite certain that Admiral Togo would have derived no useful hints from Nelson's tactics at Alexandria or Trafalgar. Our situation is so novel that it would seem as if political and military precedents of even a century ago could have no possible value. As

for our present "anxious morality," as Maeterlinck calls it, it seems equally clear that the sinful extravagances of Sardanapalus and Nero, and the conspicuous public virtue of Aristides and the Horatii, are alike impotent to promote it.

In the eighteenth century a considerable number of "philosophies of history" appeared and enjoyed great popularity. They were the outcome of a desire to seize and explain the general trend of man's past. Of course this had been also the purpose of Augustine and Bossuet, but Voltaire devoted his *Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765) mainly to discrediting religion as commonly accepted; and instead of offering any particular theory of the past he satisfied himself with picking out what he calls "les vérités utiles." He addresses Madame du Châtelet in the opening of his *Essai sur les Mœurs et l'esprit des nations* as follows:—

Vous ne cherchez dans cette immensité que ce qui mérite d'être connu de vous; l'esprit, les mœurs, les usages des nations principales, appuyés des faits qu'il n'est pas permis d'ignorer. Le but de ce travail n'est pas de savoir en quelle année un prince indigne d'être connu succéda à un prince barbare chez une nation grossière. Si l'on pouvait avoir le malheur de mettre dans sa tête la suite chronologique de toutes les dynasties, on ne saurait que des mots. Autant il faut connaître les grandes actions des souverains qui ont rendu leurs peuples meilleurs et plus heureux, autant on peut ignorer le vulgaire des rois, qui ne pourrait que charger la mémoire. . . . Dans tous ces recueils immenses qu'on ne peut embrasser, il faut se borner et choisir. C'est un vaste magazin où vous prendrez ce qui est à votre usage.

Voltaire's reactions on the past were naturally just what might have been expected from his attitude toward his own times. He drew from "le vaste magazin" those things that he needed for his great campaign, and in this he did well, however uncritical his criticism may seem at times to a modern historical student.

Herder in his little work, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit. Beitrag zur vielen Beitragen des Jahrhunderts* (1774), condemns the general light-heartedness and superficiality of Voltaire and other contemporary writers who were, he thought, vainly attempting to squeeze the story of the universe and man into their puny philosophic categories. Ten years later he wrote his larger work, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, in which he strove to give some ideal unity and order to the vast historic process, beginning with a consideration of the place of the earth among the other heavenly bodies, and of man's relations to the vegetable and animal kingdoms. "If," he says, "there be a god in nature, there is in history too; for man is himself a part of creation, and in his wildest extravagances and passions must obey laws not less excellent and beautiful than those by which all the celestial bodies move. Now, as I am persuaded that man is capable of knowing, and destined to attain the knowledge of, everything that he ought to know, I step freely and confidently from the tumultuous scenes through which we have been wander-

ing, to inspect the beautiful and sublime laws of nature by which they have been governed." Humanity is the end of human nature, he held, and the human race is destined to proceed through various degrees of civilization in various mutations; but the permanency of its welfare is founded solely and essentially on reason and justice. It is, moreover, a natural law that "if a being or system of beings be forced out of the permanent position of its truth, goodness, and beauty, it will again approach it by its internal powers, either in vibrations or in an asymptote, since out of this state it finds no stability." Herder formulates from time to time a considerable number of other "laws" which he believes emerge from the confusion of the past. Whatever we may think of these "laws," he constantly astonishes the modern reader not only by his penetrating criticism of the prevailing philosophy of his time, but by flashes of deep historical insight. He is clearly enough the forerunner of the "Romantic" tendency that culminated in Hegel's celebrated *Philosophy of History*.

IV

Since the middle of the eighteenth century, new interests other than the more primitive literary, political, military, moral, and theological, have been developing. These have exercised a remarkable influence upon historical research, radically altering

its spirit and aims and broadening its scope. To take a single example, Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* — first published in 1748 — reviews the past with the purpose of establishing a purely scientific proposition, namely, the relativity of all human institutions, social, political, educational, economic, legal, and military. The discussions attending the drafting of the first French Constitution (1789–1791) served to provoke a study of constitutional history which has never since flagged.

Early in the nineteenth century the cosmopolitan sentiments so conspicuous at the opening of the French Revolution began to give way to the spirit of nationality which was awaking in the various European states, especially in Germany. This almost immediately showed itself in a new and highly characteristic interpretation of the philosophy of history. Although the writer makes no pretensions to understanding Hegel, it may be worth while to repeat a few things he said in his lectures on the philosophy of history, first delivered in Berlin in the winter of 1822–1823, for many people have thought they did understand him and were deeply affected by his teachings. As he looked back over the restless mutations of individuals and peoples, existing for a time and then vanishing, he was confident that he could trace the World-Spirit striving for consciousness and then for freedom, its essential nature. This spirit assumes successive forms which it successively transcends. These forms are

exhibited in the peculiar natural genius of historic peoples. The spirit of a particular people, having strictly defined characteristics, "erects itself," Hegel explains, "into an objective world that exists and persists in a particular form of religious worship, customs, constitution and political laws,—in short, in the whole complex of its institutions, and in the events and transactions that make up its history." The Persians, Hegel held, were the first world-historical people, for was it not in Persia that the World-Spirit first began to attain an "unlimited immanence of subjectivity"? The Greek character was "individuality conditioned by beauty." "Subjective inwardness" was the general principle of the Roman world. Ingenious as this theory may be, it would hardly have formed the basis of a new gospel of national freedom and deeply affected historical interpretation, had it not been for Hegel's extraordinary discovery that it was his own dear German nation in which it had pleased the "Weltgeist" to assume its highest form. "The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new world," Hegel proclaims; "its aim is the realization of absolute truth, as the unlimited self-determination of Freedom. . . . The destiny of the German peoples is to be the bearers of the Christian principle."

The supreme rôle assigned by Hegel to his own countrymen filled them with justifiable pride. And was not this assumption amply borne out by the glories of "Deutschthum" in the Middle Ages, which

the Romanticists were singing: and, much more recently, by the successful expulsion of the French tyrant? That all this should combine to give a distinct national and patriotic trend to historic research and writing was inevitable. The great collection of the sources for the German Middle Ages,—the "Monumenta Germaniæ Historica"—which was to become a model for other nations, began to be issued in 1826, and for the first time the Germans became leaders in the historical field as in so many others. Ranke, Dahn, Giesebrecht, Waitz, Droysen, and dozens of others who began to devote themselves to German history, were all filled with a warm patriotism and enthusiasm very different from the cosmopolitan spirit of the preceding century. Throughout Europe, history tended to become distinctly national, and an extraordinary impetus was given to the publication of vast collections of material.

It was natural that this national spirit and the political and constitutional questions of the nineteenth century should serve to perpetuate the older interest in political history. This is the most ancient, most obvious, and easiest kind of history, for the policy of kings, the laws they issued and the wars they fought, have always been the matters which were likeliest to be recorded. Then the State is the most imposing and important of man's social creations, and historians have commonly felt that what was best worth knowing in the past could be directly or indirectly

associated with its history. Ranke, Droysen, Maurenbrecher, Freeman, and many others deemed political history to be history in its most unmistakable form.

V

We have now reviewed the chief motives which appear to have influenced the greater number of historical writers from Thucydides to Macaulay and Ranke. They all agreed in examining more or less conscientiously and critically the records of past events and conditions with a view to amusing, edifying, or comforting the reader. But none of the main interests of which I have so far spoken can be regarded as scientific. To scan the past with the hope of discovering recipes for the making of statesmen and warriors, of discrediting the pagan gods, of showing that Catholic or Protestant is right, of exhibiting the stages of self-realization of the *Weltgeist*, or demonstrating that Liberty emerged from the forests of Germany never to return thither, — none of these motives are scientific, although they may go hand in hand with much sound scholarship. But by the middle of the nineteenth century the Muse of History — *semper mutabile* — began to fall under the potent spell of natural science. She was no longer satisfied to celebrate the deeds of heroes and nations with the lyre and shrill flute on the breeze-swept slopes of Helicon; she no longer durst attempt to vindicate

the ways of God to man. She came to recognize that she was ill-prepared for her undertakings, and began to spend her mornings in the library, collating manuscripts and making out lists of variant readings. She aspired to do even more, and began to talk of raising her chaotic mass of information to the rank of a science.

The results of history's new ambition to become scientific are of the greatest importance. In the first place the sources of information in regard to the past began to be viewed with critical suspicion. So long as historians continued to present to the reader such conspicuous events as they thought might enlist his interest, and commented on these with a view of fortifying his virtue or patriotism or staying his faith in God, it made little difference whether they took pains to verify the facts or not. Indeed, the exact truth, when we are lucky enough to get a glimpse of it, is rarely so picturesque or so edifying as "what might have been." But to-day a large part of the historian's attention is directed to the character, reliability, or defects of his sources. The data upon which history rests have been subjected to the most searching scrutiny. Much that was formerly relied upon has either been partially rejected or thrown out altogether; but much has also been added by scrupulous search and systematic cataloguing.

Moreover, the historian now realizes clearly that all his sources of information are inferior, in their very

nature, to data available in the various fields of natural science. He can almost never have any direct experience of the phenomena which he describes. He only knows the facts of the past by the imperfect traces they have left, whether in books, documents, inscriptions, or in the remains of buildings and other archæological survivals. The traces he finds in books — upon which he has been wont to rely chiefly — are usually only the reports of some one who commonly did not himself have any direct experience of the facts and who did not even take the trouble to tell us where he got his alleged information. This is true of almost all the ancient and medieval historians and annalists. So it comes about that "the immense majority of the sources of information which furnish the historian with startling points for his reasoning are nothing else than traces of psychological operations" rather than direct traces of facts. As a French scholar has remarked, the historian is in the position of a chemist who should be forced to rely for his knowledge of a series of experiments upon what his laboratory boy tells him.

To take a single example from among thousands which might be cited: Gibbon tells us that after the death of Alaric in 410 "the ferocious character of the Barbarians was displayed in the funeral of the hero, whose valor and fortune they celebrated with mournful applause. By the labor of a captive multitude they forcibly diverted the course of the Busen-

tinus, a small river that washes the walls of Consentia. The royal sepulcher, adorned with the splendid spoils and trophies of Rome, was constructed in the vacant bed; the waters were then restored to their natural channel, and the secret spot where the remains of Alaric had been deposited, was forever concealed by the inhuman massacre of the prisoners who had been employed to execute the work." The basis of this account is the illiterate *History of the Goths* written by an ignorant person, Jordanes, about a hundred and forty years after the occurrence of the supposed events. We know that Jordanes copied freely from a work of his better-instructed contemporary, Cassiodorus, which has been lost. This is absolutely all we know about the sources of our information.

Shall we believe this story, which has found its way into so many of our textbooks? Gibbon did not witness the burial of Alaric, nor did Jordanes, upon whose tale Gibbon greatly improves, nor did Cassiodorus, who was not born until some eighty years after the death of the Gothic king. We can control the "psychological operation" represented in Gibbon's text, for he says he got the tale from Jordanes, but, aside from our suspicion that Jordanes took the story from the lost book by Cassiodorus, we have no means of controlling the various psychological operations which separate the tale as we have it from the real circumstances. We have other reasons than Jordanes' authority for supposing that Alaric is dead; as for the

circumstances of his burial we can only say they may have been as described but we have only the slightest reason for supposing that they were.

VI

A second general result of the scientific spirit may be detected in Ranke's proud boast that he proposed to tell the truth, — *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. This modest ambition appears to have needed some apology in the middle of the nineteenth century. Previous historians, as has been explained, often had other dominating motives, and history was expected to support, or at least not run counter to, prevailing patriotic and religious prejudices. A conscious resolve, therefore, to state the facts as he found them has certainly placed the historian on a far higher plane than he formerly occupied, and has been revolutionary in its effects. For example, a wide range of religious phenomena has been subjected to really scientific examination during the past fifty years, with the most startling results.

But to resolve to test one's sources carefully and to state only what seems to be supported by adequate evidence are, after all, only the bare preliminaries of scientific historiography. The quantity of facts about the past of man which are susceptible of satisfactory verification not only far exceeds the compass of any possible single presentation, but they are so

heterogeneous in their character as to invite a great variety of interpretations. In what ways, we may accordingly ask next, has the potent influence of natural science affected historical writers in the choice of facts to put before the reader and in the explanations and interpretations which they tender him?

First, what are the most striking traits of modern scientific method? It may be confidently replied that an appreciation of the overwhelming significance of the small, the common, and the obscure, and an unhesitating rejection of all theological, supernatural, and anthropocentric explanations, establish the brotherhood of all scientific workers, whatever their fields of research. Then there is the search for natural laws and their multiform applications which has proved fruitful beyond the wildest expectations of the most sanguine. Minute and patient investigation, the discovery of natural explanations and of natural laws, constitute, then, the most salient features of modern scientific research.

History has so long been concealed behind a mask which served either to enhance the charm of her homely features beyond all recognition, or to render her familiar and commonplace form monstrous and repulsive, that it is little wonder that historians only slowly adjust themselves to the scientific point of view. The older historians had little inclination to describe familiar conditions and the common rou-

tine of daily life. It was the startling and exceptional that caught their attention and which they found recorded in the sources on which they depended. They were like a geologist who should deal only with earthquakes and volcanoes, or, better still, a zoölogist who should have no use for anything smaller than an elephant or less romantic in its habits than a phœnix or a basilisk. The modernizing of history has taken place much more slowly and much more recently than the disentangling of chemistry from alchemy and of astronomy from the dreams of the astrologer. Perhaps Buckle was right when he declared that the historians have been, on the whole, inferior in point of intellect to thinkers in other fields, but it should not be forgotten that their task is beset with peculiar and well-nigh insurmountable difficulties, when compared with the problems of chemistry or geology. It is no wonder that the historian's gradual escape from ancient misapprehensions is largely attributable not to his own efforts, but to the general influence of natural science and to the specific influence of the various social sciences which have made their appearance from time to time.[1]

The first social science greatly to affect the selection of historical facts and their interpretation was, not unnaturally, Political Economy, which developed during the eighteenth century. It was not a pro-

[1] The relation of history to these newer social sciences is the subject of the essay which follows this.

fessional student of history, but an economist, who first suggested a new and wonderful series of questions which the historian might properly ask about the past, and, moreover, furnished him with a scientific explanation of many matters hitherto ill-understood.

As early as 1845, Karl Marx denounced those who discover the birthplace of history in the shifting clouds of heaven instead of in the hard, daily work on earth. He maintained that the only sound and ever valid explanation of the past must be economic. The history of society depends, he held, upon the methods by which its members produce their means of support and exchange the products of industry among themselves. The methods of production and transportation determine the methods of exchange, the distribution of products, the division of society into classes, the relations of the several classes, the existence of the State, the character of its laws, and all that it means for mankind.

We are not concerned here with the complicated genesis of this idea, nor with the precise degree of originality to be attributed to Marx's presentation of it. Nor is there time to explain the manner in which Marx's theory was misused by himself and his followers. Few, if any, historians would agree that everything can be explained economically, as many of the socialists and some economists of good standing would have us believe. But in the sobered and chastened form in which most economists now accept

the doctrine, it serves to explain far more of the phenomena of the past than any other single explanation ever offered. In any case, it is the economist who has opened up the most fruitful new fields of research by emphasizing the importance of those enduring but often inconspicuous factors which almost entirely escaped historians before the middle of the nineteenth century. The essential interest and importance of the normal and homely elements in human life have become apparent. The scientific historian no longer dwells by preference on the heroic, spectacular, and romantic episodes, but strives to reconstruct past conditions. This last point is so significant that we must stop over it a moment.

History is not infrequently still defined as a record of past events, and the public still expect from the historian a story of the past. But the conscientious historian has come to realize that he cannot aspire to be a good story-teller for the simple reason that, if he tells no more than he has good reason for believing to be true, his tale is usually very fragmentary and vague. Fiction and drama are perfectly free to conceive and adjust detail so as to meet the demands of art, but the historian should always be conscious of the rigid limitations placed upon him. If he confines himself to an honest and critical statement of a series of events as described in his sources, it is usually too deficient in vivid authentic detail to make a satisfactory story.

The historian is coming to see that his task is essentially different from that of the man of letters, and that his place is rather among the scientists. He is at liberty to use only his scientific imagination, which is quite different from a literary imagination. It is his business to make those contributions to our general understanding of mankind in the past which his training in the investigation of the records of past human events especially fit him to make. He esteems the events he finds recorded, not for their dramatic interest, but for the light that they cast on the normal and generally prevalent conditions which gave rise to them. It makes no difference how dry a chronicle may be if the occurrences that it reports can be brought into some assignable relation with the more or less permanent habits and environment of a particular people or person. If it be the chief function of history to show how things come about, — and something has already been said of this matter,[1] — then events become for the historian, first and foremost, evidence of general conditions and of changes affecting considerable numbers of people. In this respect history is only following the example set by the older natural sciences: Zoölogy, for instance, dwells on general principles, not on exceptional and startling creatures or on the lessons which their habits suggest for man; Mathematics no longer lingers over the mystic qualities of numbers, nor

[1] See above, pp. 18 *sqq.*

does the astronomer seek to read our individual fate in the positions of the planets. But scientific truth has shown itself able to compete with fiction, and there is endless fascination for the modern mind in the contemplation of what former ages would have regarded as the most vulgar and tiresome commonplace.

It was inevitable that attempts would be made to reduce history to a science by seeking for its laws and by reconstructing it upon the lines suggested by the natural sciences. The most celebrated instance of this is Buckle's uncompleted *History of Civilization*, the first volume of which appeared in 1857. It seemed to him that while the historical material which had been collected, when looked at in the aggregate, had "a rich and imposing appearance," the real problem of the historian had hardly been suspected, let alone solved. "For all the higher purposes of human thought," he declares, "history is still miserably deficient, and presents that confused and anarchical appearance natural to a subject of which the laws are unknown and even the foundations unsettled." He accordingly hoped, he tells us, to "accomplish for the history of man something equivalent, or at all events analogous, to what has been effected by other inquirers for the different branches of natural science. In regard to nature, events apparently the most irregular and capricious have been explained, and have been shown to be in accordance with certain fixed and universal laws. This has been done because men

of ability, and, above all, men of patient, untiring thought, have studied natural events with the view of discovering their regularity; and if human events were subjected to a similar treatment, we have every right to expect similar results." Buckle proposed to discover the laws, physical and mental, which govern the workings of mankind, and then trace their operations in the general development of civilization. Unlike Marx, Buckle believed that physical laws tended to become well-nigh inoperative in so highly developed a civilization as that of Europe, and that, consequently, moral and intellectual laws should constitute the main object of the historian's search.

Fifty years have elapsed since Buckle's book appeared, and I know of no historian who would venture to maintain that we had made any considerable advance toward the goal he set for himself. A systematic prosecution of the various branches of social science, especially political economy, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, is succeeding in explaining many things; but history must always remain, from the standpoint of the astronomer, physicist, or chemist, a highly inexact and fragmentary body of knowledge. This is due mainly to the fact that it concerns itself with man, his devious ways and wandering desires, which it seems hopeless at present to bring within the compass of clearly defined laws of any kind. Then our historical knowledge, as we have seen, must forever rest upon scattered and highly precarious data,

the truth of which we have often no means of testing. History can no doubt be pursued in a strictly scientific spirit, but the data we possess in regard to the past of mankind are not of a nature to lend themselves to organization into an exact science, although, as we shall see, they may yield truths of vital importance.

The modern historical student is well aware of the treacherous nature of his materials and their woeful inadequacy, but even conscientious scholars have been accustomed, in writing for the public, to disguise their doubts and uncertainties. The exigencies of effective literary presentation have forced them to conceal their pitiful ignorance and yield to the temptation to ignore yawning chasms of nescience at whose brink heavy-footed History is forced to halt, although Literature is able to transcend them at a leap. It is largely an exaggerated and altogether false notion of the extent of our knowledge that has encouraged the reckless ventures of those who, like Buckle and Draper, have dreamed of reducing history to an exact science.

Fifty years ago it was generally believed that we knew something about man from the very beginning. Of his abrupt appearance on the freshly created earth and his early conduct, there appeared to be a brief but exceptionally authoritative account. To-day we are beginning to recognize the immense antiquity of man. There are paleolithic implements which there is some reason for supposing may have been

made a hundred or two hundred thousand years ago; the eolithic remains recently discovered may perhaps antedate the paleolithic by an equally long period. These are mere guesses and impressions, of course,— this assignment of millenniums, which appear to have been preceded by some hundreds of thousands of years during which an animal was developing with "a relatively enormous brain case, a skillful hand, and an inveterate tendency to throw stones, flourish sticks," and in general, as Ray Lankester expresses it, "to defeat aggression and satisfy his natural appetites by the use of his wits rather than by strength alone." There may still be historians who would argue that all this has nothing to do with history, — that it is "prehistoric." But "prehistoric" is a word that must go the way of "preadamite," which we used to hear. They both indicate a suspicion that we are in some way gaining illicit information about what happened before the footlights were turned on and the curtain rose on the great human drama. Of the so-called "prehistoric" period we, of course, know as yet very little indeed, but the bare fact that there was such a period constitutes in itself the most momentous of historical discoveries. The earliest traces of an elaborate and advanced stage of human civilization — found in the Nile valley — can hardly be placed earlier than six thousand years ago. It is quite gratuitous, however, to assume that this was the first time that man had risen to such a stage of culture.

Let us suppose that there has been something worth saying about the deeds and progress of mankind during the past three hundred thousand years at least; let us suppose that we were fortunate enough to have the merest outline of such changes as have overtaken our race during that period, and that a single page were devoted to each thousand years. Of the three hundred pages of our little manual the closing six or seven only would be allotted to the whole period for which records, in the ordinary sense of the word, exist, even in the scantiest and most fragmentary form. Or, to take another illustration, let us imagine history under the semblance of a vast lake into whose rather turbid depths we eagerly peer. We have reason to think it at least twenty-five feet deep, perhaps fifty or a hundred. We detect the very scantiest indications of life, *rara et disjecta*, four or five feet beneath the surface; six or seven inches down, these are abundant, but at that depth we can detect, so to speak, no movements of animate things, which are scarcely perceptible below three or four inches. If we are frank with ourselves, we shall have to admit that we can have no clear and adequate notion of anything happening more than an inch — indeed, scarce more than half an inch — below the surface.

From this point of view the historian's gaze, instead of sweeping back into remote ages when the earth was young, seems to be confined to his own epoch; Rameses II, Tiglath-Pileser, and Solomon appear

practically coeval with Cæsar, Constantine, Charlemagne, St. Louis, Charles V, and Victoria; Bacon, Newton, and Darwin are but the younger contemporaries of Thales, Plato, and Aristotle. Let those pause who would attempt to determine the laws of human progress or decay. It is like trying to determine, by observing the conduct of a man of forty for a week, whether he be developing or not. Anything approaching an adequate record of events does not reach back for more than three thousand years, and even this remains distressingly imperfect and unreliable for more than two millenniums. We have a few, often highly fragmentary, literary histories covering Greek and Roman times, also a good many inscriptions and some important archæological remains; but these leave us in the dark upon many vital matters. The sources for the Roman Empire are so very bad that Mommsen refused to attempt to write its history. Only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries do the medieval annals and chronicles begin to be supplemented by miscellaneous documents which bring us more directly into contact with the life of the time.

Yet the reader of history must often get the impression that the sources of our knowledge are, so to speak, of a uniform volume and depth, at least for the last two or three thousand years. When he beholds a voluminous account of the early Church, or of the Roman Empire, or observes Dahn's or Hodgkin's many stately volumes on the Barbarian invasions,

he is to be pardoned for assuming that the writers have spent years in painfully condensing and giving literary form to the abundant material which they have turned up in the course of their prolonged researches. Too few suspect that it has been the business of the historian in the past not to condense but, on the contrary, skillfully to inflate his thin film of knowledge until the bubble should reach such proportions that its bright hues would attract the attention and elicit the admiration of even the most careless observer. One volume of Hodgkin's rather old-fashioned *Italy and her Invaders*, had the scanty material been judiciously compressed, might have held all that we can be said to even half know about the matters to which the author has seen fit to devote eight volumes.

But one should not jump to the conclusion that the historical writer is a sinner above all men. In the first place, it should never be forgotten that he is by long tradition a man of letters, and that that is not, after all, such a bad thing to be. In the second place, he experiences the same strong temptation that every one else does to accept at their face value the plausible statements which he finds, unless they conflict with other accounts of the same events, or appear to be inherently improbable. Lastly, he is, like his fellow primates, the victim of what Nietzsche has called "dream logic." I am sure that we do not reckon constantly enough with this inveterate tendency of even a highly cultivated mind instinctively to elaborate

and amplify mere hints and suggestions into complete and vivid pictures.

To take an illustration of Nietzsche's, the vague feeling, as we lie in bed, that the soles of our feet are free from the usual pressure to which we are accustomed in our waking hours demands an explanation. Our dream explanation is that we are flying. Not satisfied to leave its work half done, dream logic fabricates a room or landscape in which we make our aërial experiments. Moreover, just as we are going to sleep or awaking we can often actually observe how a flash of light, such as sometimes appears on the retina of our closed eyes, will be involuntarily interpreted as a vision of some human figure or other object, clear as a stereopticon slide. Now any one can demonstrate to himself that neither dream logic nor the "mind's-eye faculty," as it has been called, deserts us when we are awake. Indeed they may well be, as Nietzsche suspects, a portion of the inheritance bequeathed to us, along with some other inconveniences, by our brutish forebears. At any rate they are forms of aberration against which the historian, with his literary traditions, needs specially to be on his guard. There are rumors that even the student of natural science sometimes keeps his "mind's eye" too wide open, but he is by no means so likely as the historian to be misled by dream logic. This is not to be ascribed necessarily to the superior self-restraint of the scientist, but rather to the greater simplicity of

his task and the palpableness of much of his knowledge.

It is essential, as has been pointed out, for every one dealing with the past of mankind to understand that history can never become a science in the sense that physics, chemistry, physiology, or even anthropology, is a science. The complexity of the phenomena is appalling, and we have no way of observing them directly, to say nothing of artificially analyzing and experimenting with our facts. We know absolutely nothing of the occurrences in the history of mankind during a great part of his existence on the earth, and only since the invention of printing do our sources become in any sense abundant. Writers trained in the natural sciences, who have attempted to show historians how to use their material, have commonly quite misunderstood the situation and the conditions under which the historian has necessarily to work.[1]

[1] For example, Dr. Draper, in his well-known *Intellectual Development of Europe*, undertook to prove two great truths which he believed had escaped the historians: that "social advancement is as completely under the control of natural law as is bodily growth," and that "the life of an individual is a miniature of the life of a nation." Nowhere does he suggest that he exercised the least care in collecting the evidence for these hazardous propositions; nowhere in his volumes does he allude to any sources of information in regard to a past which he claims to interpret in its scientific relations. Not long ago a Boston physician published a work on heredity in which he denounces the utter superficiality of historians and then proceeds to build up a theory of royal heredity based on the data found in that ancient household convenience, Thomas's *Biographical Dictionary*.

VII

But history, in order to become scientific, had first to become historical. Singularly enough, what we now regard as the strictly historical interest was almost missed by historians before the nineteenth century. They narrated such past events as they believed would interest the reader; they commented on these with a view of instructing him. They took some pains to find out how things really were — *wie es eigentlich gewesen.* To this extent they were scientific, although their motives were mainly literary, moral, or religious. They did not, however, in general try to determine how things had come about — *wie es eigentlich geworden.* History has remained for two or three thousand years mainly a record of past events, and this definition satisfies the thoughtless still. But it is one thing to describe what once was; it is still another to attempt to determine how it came about.

It is impossible here to trace the causes and gradual development of this genetic interest. The main reason for its present strength lies probably in our modern lively consciousness of the reality and inevitability of change, examples of which are continually forcing themselves upon our attention. The Greek historians had little or no background for their narratives. It is amazing to note the contemptuous manner in which Thucydides rejects all accounts of even the immediately preceding generations, as mere uncertain tradi-

tions. Polybius set himself the task of tracing the gradual extension of the Roman dominion, but there is no indication that he had any clear idea of the continuity of history. In the Middle Ages there was undoubtedly a notion that the earth was the scene of a divine drama which was to have its dénouement in the definitive separation of the wheat from the tares; but this supernatural unity of history was not scientific but theological. In earthly matters the medieval man could hardly have understood the meaning of the word "anachronism"; the painters of the Renaissance did not hesitate to place a crucifix over the manger of the divine infant, and there appears to have been nothing incongruous in this to their contemporaries.

Not until the eighteenth century did the possibility of indefinite human progress become the exhilarating doctrine of reformers, a class which had previously attacked existing abuses in the name of the "good old times." No discovery could be more momentous and fundamental than that reform should seek its sanction in the future, not in the past; in advance, not in reaction.[1] It became clearer and clearer that the world *did* change, and by the middle of the nineteenth century the continuity of history began to be accepted by the more thoughtful students of the past, and began to affect, as never before, their motives and methods of research.

[1] See the final essay in this volume, on "The Spirit of Conservatism in the Light of History."

The doctrine of the continuity of history is based upon the observed fact that every human institution, every generally accepted idea, every important invention, is but the summation of long lines of progress, reaching back as far as we have the patience or means to follow them. The jury, the drama, the Gatling gun, the papacy, the letter *S*, the doctrine of *stare decisis*, each owes its present form to antecedents which can be scientifically traced. But no human interest is isolated from innumerable concurrent interests and conditioning circumstances. This brings us to the broader conception of the continuity of change which is attributable to the complexity of men's affairs. A somewhat abrupt change may take place in some single institution or habit, but a sudden general change is almost inconceivable. An individual may, through some modification of his environment, through bereavement or malignant disease, be quickly and fundamentally metamorphosed, but even such cases are rare. If all the habits and interests of the individual are considered, it will be found that only in the most exceptional cases are any great number of these altered in the twinkling of an eye. And society for obvious reasons is infinitely more conservative than the individual. Now — and this cannot be too strongly emphasized — the continuity of history is a scientific truth, the attempt to trace the slow process of change is a scientific problem, and one of the most fascinating in its

nature. It is the discovery and application of this law which has served to differentiate history from literature and morals, and which has raised it, in one sense, to the dignity of a science.

VIII

The rapidly developing specialization in history, which is the result of more exacting scientific standards, forces upon the historical student a new and fundamental question. If all departments of knowledge have now become historical, what need is there of history in general? If politics, war, art, law, religion, science, literature, be dealt with genetically, will not history tend inevitably to disintegrate into its organic elements? Professor Seeley of the University of Cambridge believed that it would. Twenty years ago he declared that history was after all but the name of "a residuum which has been left when one group of facts after another has been taken possession of by some science; that residuum which now exists must go the way of the rest, and that time is not very distant when a science will take possession of the facts which are still the undisputed property of the historian."

Now the last question that I have to discuss is whether history, after gaining the whole world, is destined to lose her own soul. Let us assume that historical specialization has done its perfect work,

that every distinct phase of man's past, every institution, sentiment, conception, discovery, achievement, or defeat which is recorded has found its place in the historical treatment of the particular branch of research to which it has been assigned according to the prevailing classification of the sciences. This process of specialization would serve to rectify history in a thousand ways, and to broaden and deepen its operations, but, instead of destroying it, it would rather tend, on the contrary, to demonstrate with perfect clearness its absolute indispensability. Human affairs and human changes do not lend themselves to an exhaustive treatment through a series of monographs upon the ecclesiastical or military organization of particular societies, their legal procedure, agrarian system, their art, domestic habits, or views on higher education. Many vital matters would prove highly recalcitrant when one attempted to force them into a neat, scientific cubby-hole. Physical, moral, and intellectual phenomena are mysteriously interacting in that process of life and change which it falls to the historian to study and describe.

Man is far more than the sum of his scientifically classifiable operations. Water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen, but it is not like either of them. Nothing could be more artificial than the scientific separation of man's religious, æsthetic, economic, political, intellectual, and bellicose properties. These may be studied, each by itself, with advantage, but

specialization would lead to the most absurd results if there were not some one to study the process as a whole; and that some one is the historian. Imagine the devotees of the various social sciences each engaged in describing his particular interest in the Crusades, or the Protestant Revolt, or the French Revolution. When they had finished, would not the historian have to retell the story, utilizing all that they had accomplished, including what they had all omitted, and rectifying the errors into which each of the specialists had fallen on account of his ignorance of the general situation?

It would seem at first sight as if those most familiar with each special subject of research — such as constitutional law, botany, theology, philology, painting, chemistry, economics, medicine — would be the only properly qualified persons to trace its history; but the scientific specialist is likely to suffer from two disadvantages. In the first place, his very familiarity with the principles of his particular branch of knowledge makes it difficult for him to conceive remote and unfamiliar conditions which historically lie back of the conceptions which he entertains. In the second place, the discovery, use, and interpretation of historical material seem to require a somewhat prolonged and special training, which only the professional historical student is likely to possess. He is constantly shocked by a certain awkwardness which those inexperienced in historical research are almost sure to

betray. They make mistakes which he would not make, in spite of their greater knowledge of the subject with which they are dealing. This doubtless accounts for the fact that we have as yet no tolerably satisfactory history of natural science, or even of its special branches. There are, moreover, certain important phases of human thought and endeavor where the trained historian will have no particular difficulty in mastering the technical detail sufficiently to deal satisfactorily with them. Indeed, even the most subtle of the modern sciences, not excluding mathematics, were sufficiently simple two hundred years ago to enable a well-equipped historical student, with some taste for a particular human interest, to trace its development down until very recent times. So it may fall out, as time goes on, that historical students will tend to specialize more and more, and will supply the deficiency which students of contemporary branches of science are not ordinarily in a position to satisfy, — but more will be said on this subject, especially in regard to intellectual history, in a later essay.

I have frankly revealed the historian's ignorance; he recognizes this in all humility, and is making every effort to remedy it by the application of highly scientific methods. He shares it, moreover, with the representatives of all the social sciences who attempt to carry their work back into the past. The historian will become more and more interested, I believe, in explaining the immediate present, and fortunately

his sources for the last two or three centuries are infinitely more abundant and satisfactory than for the whole earlier history of the world. He is criticizing and indexing his sources and rendering them available to an extent which would astonish a layman unfamiliar with the tremendous amount that has been accomplished in this respect during the past fifty years.

We have now seethed the kid in its mother's milk. We have explained history by means of history. The historian, from a narrow, scientific point of view, is a little higher than a man of letters and a good deal lower than an astronomer or a biologist. He need not, however, repudiate his literary associations, for they are eminently respectable, but he will aspire hereafter to find out, not only exactly how things have been, but how they have come about. He will remain the critic and guide of the social sciences whose results he must synthesize and test by the actual life of mankind as it appears in the past. His task is so fascinating and so comprehensive that it will doubtless gradually absorb his whole energies and wean him in time from literature, for no poet or dramatist ever set before himself a nobler or a more inspiring ideal, or one making more demands upon the imagination and resources of expression, than the destiny which is becoming clearer and clearer to the historian.