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THE NATURE OF  
HISTORY



# THE NATURE OF HISTORY

*By*

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS little book makes no claim to originality, being merely an attempt to give a clear account and definite answers to questions in a matter in which there is a good deal of confusion. The first two chapters are open to the charge of being an inadequate presentation of an enormous subject, but they seemed to be necessary to set the stage for the argument. The later contain some metaphysical statements which, as this is not a book of metaphysics, are inevitably dogmatic statements. Those who disagree with me, will, I hope, see clearly and at once where they think I have gone wrong.

The notes, of which there are a good many, have been put at the end of the book, as it is believed that most readers prefer this arrangement.

**BANSTEAD**  
*May 1933*

HENRY LAMBERT



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## CHAPTER I

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL WRITING

THE oriental monarchs who constructed in clay or stone memorials of their own or their predecessor's achievements were already in some degree historians, since they were attempting to present to their contemporaries and posterity a picture of some portion of the past as they conceived it. But from their proceedings we are unlikely to learn much that is useful to our purpose, and it will be more profitable, after glancing at Graeco-Roman antiquity, when the first historical work that is at all comparable to our own was produced, and at the Middle Ages, to come down to modern times.

Herodotus, 'the Father of History',<sup>1</sup> took for his theme a great subject, the origin and progress of the Persian invasion, and dealt with it in a way that makes it still one of the most attractive histories ever written. He brought to his task, in addition to his great literary gifts, diligence, honesty, an unflagging curiosity, and a considerable measure of impartiality. If he is open to the charge of sometimes being credulous in religious matters, and uncritical, especially in regard to numbers, and to the attribution of great events to trivial causes, it is unreasonable to expect that, writing as he did at the very dawn of historical writing he could have been

exempt from such faults, and certainly few modern European historians writing before the eighteenth century were in fact much his superiors in these respects.

Thucydides approaches nearer to the standard required by modern historical writing than does any ancient writer, but his approach seems due to his own genius, for he belonged to no historical school and left no successors. His cool, sceptical mind is unimpressed by the glamour of legend, and he handled a contemporary theme, the Peloponnesian War, for which he had been steadily collecting material with elaborate care. His explanation of the method which he followed in regard to the speeches in his history is characteristic.<sup>2</sup> He did not, as a modern historian would, discard such speeches, but he did his best to ensure that they should be as near fact as might be. Nor does he fail to make his reader understand the great moral issues which lay behind events which he describes. No other historian of antiquity is the equal of Thucydides, though except in regard to moral issues Polybius is comparable to him.<sup>3</sup> The Roman historians, great as some of them are as literature, did nothing to raise the level of historical writing. Caesar's commentaries are admirable as historical narrative, but they were as much propaganda as history. And though Tacitus claims to be impartial,<sup>4</sup> and seems to have made real efforts to get accurate information, he, like Livy, wrote admittedly with a moral purpose, and he was domi-

nated in his judgements by his political views. Nor was he sufficiently critical of his authorities.

Conditions in the Graeco-Roman world were more favourable to historical writing than in the Middle Ages, but less so than in our own time. Ammianus or Livy, and to a less degree Polybius, had at their disposal a wealth of historical material and political experience, such as Bede or Matthew Paris never had, and even the Father of History could draw, as he did by assiduous travel, on the experience of an earlier world. Nor did the pagan historian suffer from the pressure of any powerful organizations comparable to the Church steadily enforcing certain fixed beliefs. On the other hand his material, unlike that of the historian of to-day, was almost entirely unarranged for him. Even the records of the Roman Empire appear to have been imperfectly kept, nor had he necessarily access to such as were preserved.<sup>5</sup> Although some work was done in the subsidiary departments of history, such as archaeology, the work was spasmodic and unorganized. It tended too to centre on questions of philology and language, and indeed the importance attached in the ancient world to rhetoric was definitely unfavourable to good historical writing. From the days of the Athenian republic, when the audience delighted in the contest of the Just and Unjust Argument, oratory was held in high esteem. And indeed not without reason, when a man's political advancement and even his life might depend on his power of speech. But

when the rule of a single man closed most of the avenues open to the orator, rhetoric dominated education more and more completely,<sup>6</sup> and the delight in verbal subtlety and striking effects tended to divert the historian from his far more important business of ascertaining the exact truth about events.

Historical writing in the Middle Ages never rose above the level of chronicles, though some of these are admirable as narratives. For the medieval historian suffered under great and obvious disabilities. In the first place the restricted sources of information prevented anything like synoptic views. Greek literature being practically unknown, and the vernaculars for long offering little of value beyond certain forms of imaginative writing, the range of the medieval student was confined to Latin, and here he suffered great disadvantage from the disparagement of secular literature by the Church. That the Roman Empire was permitted to grow in order that Rome might serve as a seat for the Papacy, a view held both by Aquinas and Dante,<sup>7</sup> may be a legitimate conclusion from a philosophical or theological argument, but it is a disastrous postulate for a historian of Roman affairs or Roman institutions. Medieval views of Roman history are in fact childish,<sup>8</sup> nor until a critical faculty which could distinguish between the value and importance of evidence was developed was any improvement possible. The writing of later or contemporary history was almost equally defaced by excessive credulity. This is well

shown by the unquestioning acceptance of miracle and forgery. 'Forgery ran rampant all through the Middle Ages. It was largely undetected: still more largely unpunished.'<sup>9</sup> A modern reader rejects with weariness or impatience the long list of miracles of a St. Wulfstan and wonders at the credulity which accepted the donation of Constantine, or the pseudo-Ingulf, but hardly anything can bring home to our minds so vividly the different standard of truthfulness prevalent in the Middle Ages as the simple fact that in England, in the days of the Edwards, forgery except of the King's Seal or his money was not punishable, that exception being itself treated as treason.<sup>10</sup>

There is no reason to suppose that the medieval mind was in any way inferior in acuteness and reasoning power to the Graeco-Roman or our own. Indeed it accepted a system of beliefs which was probably more consistent and more thoroughly thought out than our own.<sup>11</sup> It had a philosophy which 'was an attempt to codify all existing knowledge under laws or formulae analogous to the general principles of justice', and to it we owe our belief in the theoretical supremacy of right, legal and moral.<sup>12</sup> Nor was it apparently inferior in originality in a sphere in which it could work freely, as in architecture. But its virtues, and especially its rationality, working in the case of history on very defective materials, did not enable the historian to achieve that degree of detachment from his subject,

which is necessary, and is comparatively easily achieved now by the humblest researcher, who will read widely enough round his particular subject, and will weigh conflicting views, of which in modern conditions there is little danger of scarcity.

The sixteenth century, except in so far as historical writing shows rather more independence of theological prepossessions, made little advance, and even the seventeenth century, the "century of genius", beginning with Galileo, including Descartes and Huyghens, and ending with Newton, which made such amazing advance in physics,<sup>13</sup> made no comparable advance in historical writing. As late as 1681 Bossuet could publish his *Discours sur rhistoire universelle* drawn up for the use of the Dauphin, since Princes, as he wisely said, must read history. In this much admired book he traced the rise and fall of empires in order to demonstrate that in their varying fortunes they had all worked together for the benefit of religion and the glory of God, as He had declared through His prophets.<sup>14</sup> Bossuet's point of view is still medieval; and, however great the merits of the work in other respects, it began to become evident within a generation of his death (1704) that it had little claim to be accepted as serious historical writing.

But the seventeenth century laid the foundations of certain forms of historical inquiry, which, if less ambitious, are indispensable. Such were the legal antiquarianism of a Selden, the patient criticism of

documents of a Mabillon, and the dictionary «making of a Ducange. The wider outlook of the latter part of the century is clearly shown by the new interest in local history, in which there can be little that relates to those political and military events which had hitherto been regarded as constituting history, and much relating to common men and common things.<sup>15</sup> It has indeed been claimed on high authority that the seventeenth century has to its credit the creation of the modern scientific study of history.<sup>16</sup> It would perhaps be safer to say that it took the first steps towards a more systematic study of certain branches of historical inquiry. For even the eighteenth century was a long way off what we call—with how much justification we must ask later—the 'scientific' study of history. A long step forward was due to Voltaire. A past master of style in the language which as he said, was almost the universal language, himself possessing the ear of the world to a degree which no professional historian has ever attained or can ever hope to attain, and dealing for the most part, when he turned his attention to history, with comparatively recent events which necessarily interested his generation, his influence on opinion must have been enormous. He was bitterly opposed to Bossuet's view of history,<sup>17</sup> and if Bossuet, as Voltaire himself said, found no imitators of his *Universal History*?<sup>18</sup> this was largely due to Voltaire's own criticisms. He was weary, he wrote to Lord Harvey in 1740, of histories which were

only concerned with the adventures of kings, and he intended, he said in the introduction to his *Siecle de Louis XIV*, to try to describe *Tesprit des hommes dans le siecle le plus eclaire qui fut jamais*. It is easy to see the imperfections of Voltaire's execution of this idea, to observe how much ground he failed to cover, and how he failed sometimes to look deep enough to grasp the real interconnexion of events. If we doubt whether the Persians really attacked the Greeks because Democedes inspired Atossa to make the suggestion to Darius, we may also doubt whether English policy and the face of Europe were really changed because the Duchess of Marlborough refused to give some gloves to Queen Anne or spilt water on Mrs. Masham's dress.<sup>19</sup> But he set the standard of a wider conception of history, towards which the increasing belief of the eighteenth century in the doctrine of Progress also tended.<sup>20</sup> The subsidiary studies which had their origin in the seventeenth century made further progress. In our own country Rymer's *Foedera* came out, the Society of Antiquaries was founded, some of the great County histories appeared,<sup>21</sup> and documents such as the Paston letters were printed for the first time. But, of the more ambitious forms of historical writing, very few of the works which had a great contemporary reputation have stood the test of time. In our own country of the three most famous historians in the latter part of the century, Robertson, Hume and Gibbon, the first two are forgotten as historians, though Hume's

name probably still comes up more frequently when philosophers discuss the nature of cause than that of any other thinker except Kant. Gibbon has been saved from oblivion by his massive learning, the obscurity of a subject in which he has had comparatively few followers, and his brilliant style. But he does not go beneath the surface of things, a characteristic defect of his age, which had no real understanding of growth and development, probably at least in part because its thought was dominated by mathematical conceptions inherited from Descartes, to which such an order of ideas is entirely foreign. It is true that Burke, himself a great reader of history, believed that society was a living organism in which the dead, living and posterity were all bound together; and, whatever we may think of some of the things which he said of the French Revolution, he put his finger with unerring accuracy on its fatal weakness when he condemned its complete break with the past. But in this Burke showed the insight of genius. Gibbon and his contemporaries generally had no such understanding, and Gibbon's account of the rise of Christianity, which seems to the modern reader, whatever his religious views, so inadequate, really achieved its devastating success because no one was capable of giving him an effective answer. Gibbon 'regards all creeds, political and religious, from the outside'<sup>22</sup>.

It is to the nineteenth century that the credit belongs of taking wider and deeper views of histori-

cal writing, and of co-ordinating effectively those subsidiary studies on which the historian, if he is to get really near to the past, must depend. Niebuhr, we are told by Dr. Gooch, was 'the first commanding figure in modern historiography, the scholar who raised history from a subordinate place to the dignity of an independent science': Even if we doubt whether it has yet attained that position, we can all see how valuable was his insistence on the need to study institutions in early history, and how his influence acted as an inspiration to Ranke and others who came after him. It is not necessary, however, for our present purpose to attempt to follow in detail the development of nineteenth-century historical writing, which can easily be done in Dr. Gooch's learned and fascinating volume on the subject.

It will be sufficient to try to summarize here the results which have been achieved since the eighteenth century.

I. The most fundamental gain is probably the greatly improved criticism of our sources. Ranke, Dr. Gooch tells us, when he examined the reports of the Venetian Ambassadors in the sixteenth century saw in a flash that the history of modern Europe must be rewritten in the light of fresh and contemporary material,<sup>24</sup> and the historian, whether of modern or medieval Europe or of any other part of the world or period of its history, is no longer allowed to rely on secondary sources, if contemporary evidence is available. 'The central idea of that great advance

which the present generation has witnessed in the domain of history has been the rebuilding of the historical fabric on the relatively sure foundation of original and contemporary authorities, studied in the purest texts.<sup>25</sup> But the historian is not justified in relying even on the best documents, if better evidence from topography, or the spade, or from any other source may be available.<sup>26</sup> His duty is simply to use the best. The greater part of his evidence must indeed always be human testimony in some form, and he must therefore never forget that its credibility varies with the truthfulness, or the interests, the opportunities of knowing, with a hundred other circumstances which affect each witness. 'The paraphrasing of evidence is the work of a reporter: from the historian we have a right to expect the skilled summing up of a judge.'<sup>27</sup> A corollary to our increased reliance on original sources is the better technical equipment now required of the historian, who, for instance, is not now allowed to write about the Middle Ages without being able to read a medieval document in the original. The historian must have 'a certain equipment of technical notions, the place of which cannot be supplied by natural ability or even method'<sup>28</sup>.

II. We now fully recognize, what indeed the eighteenth century had begun to see, that the study of institutions is as essential a part of history as that of great men or states. This new point of view may be stated in the words of Stubbs, who tells us

in the preface to his *Constitutional History of England* that 'the History of Institutions . . . presents in every branch a regularly developed series of causes and consequences, and abounds in examples of that continuity of life, the realization of which is necessary to give the reader a personal hold on the past and a right judgement of the present. For the roots of the present lie deep in the past, and nothing in the past is dead to the man who would learn how the present comes to be what it is. It is true, constitutional history has a point of view, an insight, and a language of its own; it reads the exploits and characters of men by a different light from that shed by the false glare of arms, and interprets positions and facts in words that are voiceless to those who have only listened to the trumpet of fame/ Stubbs was an enthusiast for his subject, and it may be that he forgot when he wrote these words that the study of institutions, being but the study of an abstraction from a living whole, may in the hands of lesser historians throw the whole picture out of focus, but there can be no question of the value of the results achieved in the last hundred years by the study of institutions, or of its fruitfulness in the future.

III. Stubbs's insistence that the roots of the present lie deep in the past points to what is perhaps the most characteristic change in our outlook, namely our increased sense of the continuity of history. This is partly due to the labours of historians themselves, since it is no more possible to study the

past in detail and face to face, as the historian who constantly handles original documents must do, without acquiring this sense of continuity, than it is to handle practical questions which are not entirely matters of to-day without having it. But it is also in part due to a change in the intellectual climate. Our thought is much less dominated than that of the eighteenth century by mathematical conceptions; and the evolutionary hypothesis, little as its direct bearing may have been on the writing of history, has emphasized the all-pervading importance of the conception of growth. In this connexion it should be noted that some of the natural sciences themselves, e.g. geology, rely largely on what are really historical arguments. The rise of the historical method with its innumerable applications, e.g. to law by Savigny or Maine, or to New Testament criticism by Baur and others, is likely to prove as important in the history of the world as the publication of the *Origin of Species*.

IV. Nothing in the past is now outside the historian's scope, and these changes have tended to do away with the 'dignity of history'. Hence the study has had to be increasingly departmentalized, a process which has been accelerated by the enormous increase in the mass of historical material available, including that which the spade is continually giving us, and which has revolutionized our views of the history of Mesopotamia or Roman Britain, and has made the older view of Greek civilization, springing like Minerva from Jove's head fully armed, to be no

longer tenable. Specialization has enabled us to acquire a far more detailed knowledge of particular aspects of the past; and, though it sometimes blinds writers and readers to wider aspects, it is obviously indispensable. It has enabled the co-operative principle to be applied to history, and such organized collaboration as Lord Acton planned, and the *Cambridge Modern History* was designed to carry out, would clearly have been impossible at any time before the last century.

V. The aids to historical inquiry have been improved beyond the dreams of earlier investigators. Not only do masses of historical documents continue to be printed, but at the Record offices of every civilized State, and at innumerable other repositories, the documents are classified and listed to make them accessible to students, while historical societies exist in every country to promote the interests of history. It is probably true to say that in no period has so much interest been taken in history, and so much been done to promote its study, as in our own time.

VI. Lastly we have set up a higher ideal of impartiality. No serious historian of the sixteenth century would now speak so contemptuously of the Middle Ages as did Robertson in his introduction to the history of Charles V, nor should we now, as Hallam did in the preface to his Middle Ages, deem 'many considerable portions of time especially before the twelfth century... so barren of events worthy of remembrance that a single sentence or paragraph'

would be 'sufficient to give the character of entire generations and of long dynasties of obscure Kings'. Such judgements imply the rigid imposition on the past of the writer's own standards without any regard to what may be said on the other side, and they were as a matter of fact as much the result of defective knowledge as of defective sympathy. This kind of prejudice has dissolved as we have studied the past more intensively. And in minor matters fuller knowledge has tended generally to better understanding, and therefore to a fairer attitude. Thus a minute and detailed knowledge of the circumstances leading up to a decision has often enabled the modern historian to reject or avoid mistaken attribution of motive. It cannot be doubted that extended knowledge should tend to form an impartial attitude in historical writers, but whether it in fact has to any considerable extent done so when controversial issues are involved is less certain. The question of the possibility and limits of historical impartiality will be dealt with later.

Such briefly summarized appears to be what has been accomplished for history since the eighteenth century. We may say in short that a higher standard of accuracy and a deeper understanding of the interconnexion of events are now demanded of the historian than ever before.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORIANS' VIEWS OF HISTORY

PHILOSOPHERS have from time to time offered to historians philosophies of history. Of these the most notable in the last hundred years were those of Hegel, with his Spirit coming to consciousness in history and his sequence of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and Comte with his law of the three stages, theological, metaphysical and positive. Such philosophers have stimulated and influenced historians as they have all other thinking men of their generation, but historians have not often been willing to accept the laws which have been formulated for them, nor have the results when the laws formulated have been accepted as a guide, been encouraging.<sup>1</sup> Nor is the reason for the historian's suspicion of such laws far to seek. They have in the first place been formulated by men who can have had no very profound knowledge of history, and still less experience and understanding of the historian's technique. They seem therefore to the historian to be imposed on his subject from without. And worse than that, they appear to him to be over-simplifications, and over-simplification, as the conscientious historian knows, is one of his own besetting sins, as it is, and must be, that of the politician, the economist, the journalist, in short of every one, who tries to explain some department of human affairs to his fellow men. The

historian knows from experience that 'Nothing is simple in history: too often we put into things that logic which exists in our own thought'<sup>52</sup>.

Stubbs, who thought that the historian must be a judge, said that it was an advantage if he was also somewhat of a philosopher,<sup>3</sup> and Professor Ernest Barker has declared that the historian with all his historical values must come before the bar of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Occasionally a historian has been himself a philosopher, as was Taine, who said that virtue and vice are products like vitriol and sugar, that civilization was the result of three factors, 'la race, le milieu et le moment', and that moral like physical problems were merely the result of conflicting forces, the amount and direction of which are however in history more difficult to evaluate than their physical analogues.<sup>5</sup> Few historians would disagree with the opinion that these views were a hindrance and not a help to Taine, when he wrote his great history of the Revolution, and that the time spent in trying to apply them would have been better spent in further study of his huge mass of original documents. He was not a professional historian, and his intellectual training made him look for general and *a priori* ideas to devise a framework into which the individual facts could be fitted, a dangerous tendency in dealing with a mass of very imperfectly sifted material.<sup>6</sup> Some living historians are also philosophers, but their philosophical views do not seem to have altered their practice as historians.<sup>7</sup>

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It would seem then that except indirectly, or directly only in a few cases, the views of modern historians as to the nature of history have not been much affected by the views of philosophers. Have they in the course of their work evolved views of their own?

It is quite clear that many of them have never troubled to consider anything that lies beyond their immediate task, and that as far as the writing of a good deal of history is concerned it has not suffered much from the omission. Macaulay had not a philosophical mind, though he was familiar with some of the great metaphysical philosophers, ancient and modern. He read them indeed for their style and not from any sympathy with their subject matter.<sup>8</sup> He sets out his purpose and outlook quite clearly at the opening of his *History*. He intended, he says, to give a narrative of events from the accession of James II, tracing the national triumphs and failures, the growth of liberty and prosperity leading up to what he frankly regarded as a very satisfactory present. He desired in short, he tells us, to place before the English of the nineteenth century a true picture of the life of their ancestors. He has been much abused for inaccuracy, for his Whig bias, and for his reference of everything to the standard of his own day, and it may be conceded that, had he had the judicial temper of an Acton, he would have avoided some of these faults.<sup>9</sup> But it must also be conceded that no Acton could possibly have written such a history.

Macaulay succeeded in drawing the picture at which he aimed, and is the type of the historian of which Herodotus and Matthew Paris and an occasional modern historian are examples, the historian who can really make the past live again, and for that purpose he has not much more need of a philosophical outlook than the artist who paints a landscape. He may not indeed penetrate very deeply into the nature of things, but he must see them, as far as he sees them at all, very vividly. He must be closer to what was once the superficial aspect of reality than the historian of any abstraction such as Constitutional Law can be. But he does not feel bound to try to answer fundamental questions.

Some historians have however expressed opinions on fundamental questions, and it will be interesting to review some of these. Let us first ask whether history is a science. Dr. Gooch, as we have already seen, holds that Niebuhr raised history 'to the dignity of an independent science', repeating in this the opinion of Lord Acton, who said that the first edition of the *Roman History* 'began the evolution of historic science'<sup>10</sup>. Dr. Gooch also tells us that Gukot, in his *History of Civilisation in France*, was the first to dissect a society as the anatomist dissects a body, and that his lectures 'convinced the most sceptical of the possibility of a scientific treatment of history'<sup>11</sup>. Fustel de Coulanges said that history is a science which does not imagine but merely sees,<sup>1\*</sup> and Bury in his inaugural lecture (1902) declared that

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the historian must not, at least in the first instance, consider anything beyond the facts themselves. In other words history is, he said, a science. 'Though history may supply material for literary art or philosophical speculation she is herself simply a science, no less and no more/ But despite this definite statement Bury wavered. 'I know for myself', he wrote, 'that on the days when I am a determinist I look on history in one way, and on the days when I am an indeterminist in quite another'<sup>13</sup>.

The view that history is a science has been accepted by MM. Langlois and Seignobos in their *Introduction aux études historiques* (reference to their views, which must carry great weight, will be made later), and indeed has been more or less officially adopted, for an International Committee of Historical Sciences has been set up. But historians are very far from being unanimous. M. See thinks that history can be considered as a science, but an imperfect science, since it cannot formulate laws.<sup>14</sup> Canon Streeter, to take an instance from an ecclesiastical historian, who is also a philosopher, holds that history is a 'mixed Science' occupying a position intermediate between the 'pure' sciences of Physics and Chemistry on the one side and Art and Religion on the other.<sup>15</sup> Many historians have entirely denied that history is a science. 'I shall continue to believe', said Goldwin Smith, 'that humanity advances by free effort, but that it is not developed according to invariable laws, such as, when discovered, would give

birth to a new Science'<sup>16</sup>. And Stubbs pointed out the great objections to the very idea of reducing history to the lines and rules of exact science owing to the fact that generalizations become obscurer and more useless as they grow wider, and as they grow narrower and more special cease to have any value as generalizations at all. 'The dealings of human wills in countless combinations and circumstances which no theory can ever exhaustively calculate, are not the field for dogmatic assumption or for speculative classification/<sup>17</sup> H. W. C. Davis failed to see 'how the scientific conceptions of cause and effect can be usefully employed when we are dealing with the co-operation or clash of human wills'<sup>18</sup>. And Mr. J. W. Fortescue speaking of the complexities of human nature and the imperfections of documentary evidence asks 'Can one use the word science at all in such a connexion? A document is a scrap of human nature or it is naught. The study of history is a study of human nature or it is naught, but the science of human nature is a thing which the best human brains have struggled for centuries to found in vain. I have grave doubts whether we have yet rightly defined the functions of a historian.'<sup>19</sup>

Closely akin to this question is the question what part personality plays in history. Carlyle in his *Hero and Hero-worship* (1841) proclaimed that 'Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of

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men, these great ones: the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain/ This is a strong statement, which hardly any historian would now accept as it stands. It emphasizes a point of view which is the antithesis of that proclaimed later with at least equal exaggeration by Buckle, who thought that it was the business of the historian to show that 'the movements of nations are perfectly regular, and that like all other movements they are solely determined by their antecedents. If he cannot do this, he is no historian.' Only thus could he help to put history in its proper rank, as the head and chief of all the sciences.<sup>20</sup> Logically carried out this theory would seem to reduce the action of personality to an illusion, to a kind of shadow flickering on the surface of the tide. But the President of the American Historical Association in 1908 declared his conviction that 'the events with which it (History) is concerned have been determined by forces which act according to fixed law, and that most of the objections which have been urged against this view are due to misapprehensions, or incomplete reflection', and his successor in 1923 conceived that the laws which govern human affairs were comparable to those of gravitation or chemical affinity.<sup>21</sup>

Historians seem to incline towards one side or the other as they direct their attention to the political and military side of history or to the institutional. Stubbs in a passage already quoted has insisted on

the regular development of institutional history, though he was far from accepting Buckle's view. "I don't believe in the philosophy of history, so I don't believe in Buckle" he said.<sup>22</sup> It is, however, it has been pointed out, easy to ascribe to purpose what is little better than accident. 'Policy in the sense of a deliberate consistent and far-sighted scheme . . . is more often an illusion of the scholarly mind than a fact of history. Policy as actually found in history, is a set of devices into which a Government drifts under the pressure of practical problems and which gradually acquire the conscious uniformity of a type and begin at last to defend themselves as such,'<sup>23</sup> and no one who knows from practical experience how Government works can deny that there is force in this view. Professor Pollard on the other hand insists that 'History deals with what man has done and how he has done it: and that knowledge is at least some guide to what he can do in the future, and how he should seek to do it. It is from the study of physical science rather than from that of history that men have deduced the paralysing dogma of the helplessness of mankind.'<sup>24</sup> And H. W. C. Davis urged that there is so much of truth in Carlyle's view that 'our common humanity is best studied in the most eminent examples that it has produced of every type of human excellence'<sup>25</sup>.

Modern historians seem to agree that historical statement cannot reach so high a level of certainty as their predecessors used to believe. Stubbs in the

concluding words of the *Constitutional History* begs his readers to rest content with nothing less than 'the attainable maximum of truth', and that, as he pointed out elsewhere, often falls far short of being complete. In his lecture on the reign of Henry VII he speaks of the difficulties offered by the subject, and remarks that the more we study them the more ground we have for questioning our own judgements and the extent and character of our knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Imbart de la Tour in writing of Catholicism and the Renaissance suggests that the progress of knowledge consists after all not so much in the answers given as in the questions raised.<sup>27</sup> Bury insists that there can be nothing final about the historian's judgements, and that their permanent interest lies in the fact that they are judgements pronounced at a given epoch and are characteristic of the tendencies and ideas of that epoch.<sup>28</sup> He believed in short that all historical judgements are merely relative. M. M. Langlois and Seignobos have elaborately analysed the obstacles to attaining historical certainty, pointing out the lack of material resting on direct observation, the anonymity of most of the evidence, and the endless chances of error. History in fact, they tell us, accepts unchecked facts which no other science could accept.

How far it is possible to write impartial history, or how far it is even desirable to try to do so, is a question to which very varying answers are given. Some historians, like Michelet in France and Treitschke in Germany, have written history with a frankly

nationalistic bias. Probably, said Lord Acton, there was in his day 'no considerable group (of historians) less in harmony with our sentiments in approaching history than that of Sybel, Droysen, and Treitschke'. Their view, he conceded, was not the mere plea of a partisan. 'It is not partiality but renunciation of party feeling and personal preference, to hold that the world works well, that what lives permanently in the light and strife of civilization lives rightfully, that whatever perished has earned its fate.'<sup>29</sup> This kind of view, which in its extreme form really amounts to holding that might is right, is represented in masterly fashion in Mommsen's Roman history with its magnification of Julius Caesar and its undisguised contempt for the beaten side.

If we take the view that whatever perishes has earned its fate, the difficulties involved in an attempt to write impartial history are largely removed, and the historian's efforts to be impartial can be confined to subordinate issues. Such a view is the antithesis of that held by Acton himself or by Stubbs, who to quote the concluding words of his *Constitutional History* again, desired that his readers should learn 'to base their arguments on nothing less sacred than that highest justice which is found in the deepest sympathy with erring and straying men'. Nor would it be acceptable to an historian like Albert Sorel who held that history must take long views, and the moral issues would then become clear. 'Toute erreur se paye, tout excès se compense, tout crime s'expie.

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Les annales des nations sont les comptes seculaires d'une rangon.<sup>30</sup> Other historians again object equally to the methods of Treitschke or Mommsen and to those of Acton or Stubbs, saying, as Bury at one time declared (but he was not always consistent), 'that the business of an historian is to ascertain facts'<sup>31</sup>. Professor McIlwain speaking of bias in historical writing tells us that the idea that good history cannot be written without bias is a remnant or misunderstanding of the old classical idea that the purpose of history is primarily ethical, and he urges us, while not giving up our general moral ideal, to repress our own views and adhere strictly to actual fact, while Professor J. L. Morison on the other side says that history dealing with great political, social, and religious issues, and addressed to an educated general public, cannot be what the cant of the present day calls impartial. Like poetry and the drama it claims to deal with life as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Professor Turberville insists that no mere capacity to state the facts correctly will make a great historian, for truth is not simply a matter of accuracy: there is such a thing as fullness, richness of truth, and the historian must use his imagination. And he further tells us that for the genuine historian the motive of his work is intellectual curiosity,<sup>33</sup> and we seem thus to reach the antithesis of the view that the historian must above all be preoccupied with moral considerations. 'If we lower our standard in History we cannot uphold it in Church and State'<sup>5</sup> said Acton.<sup>34</sup>

But indeed it would probably be possible to find supporters of any reasonable view whatsoever among reputable historians, and it may be said with confidence that the opinions of historians on the nature of history are like the opinions of men generally on life. In both cases the opinions reflect the infinite variety and confusion of the subject-matter.

## CHAPTER III

### IS HISTORY A SCIENCE? I. NARRATIVE HISTORY

THE answer to this question must, at least in part, depend on what view we take of the nature not only of history but of science. Science, it is said, is ordered knowledge, nor need we doubt this. But we must not forget that there are great collections of ordered knowledge in the world, which cannot claim, or can only make a very doubtful claim, to being science. The kind of knowledge of ceremonial which a Court Chamberlain possesses, or that which the telephone directory imparts, can hardly be called scientific, and much profound and often painfully acquired knowledge which issues in some form of manual skill is quite unscientific, for, like Mill's dyer, the man who has it, frequently cannot formulate or communicate his knowledge. The English real-property lawyer at the end of the eighteenth century possessed a great store of ordered knowledge of the most valuable kind, since the security of his clients' tides depended on his knowledge, but few would call the English law at that time a scientific system. There are in fact vast accumulations of ordered facts of every sort, made for pleasure or other purely practical purposes, which have little or no claim to be science. To these we should perhaps add all that part of science itself, which has been discarded in

favour of better explanations, the astronomy, for instance, of the Ptolemaic epicycles, or the phlogisticians' chemistry. It will be more profitable to consider for a moment the other end of the scale, science in its most perfect form, which is of course mathematical science.

Numerical precision is the soul of science, Herschel told us,<sup>1</sup> and 'all science as it grows towards perfection becomes mathematical in its ideas'<sup>2</sup>. This view is in fact confirmed by the history of science, which shows us, for instance, physics discarding qualitative ideas and chemistry going far to substitute mathematical ideas, and it seems to be beyond question that it is to our power of accurate measurement that the command over nature which distinguishes us from earlier generations is to be mainly ascribed.

What then are the outstanding characteristics of this form of knowledge and to what extent does history share them? They seem, as far as our purpose is concerned, to be briefly as follows:

I. The certainty of its method and inevitability of its conclusions. AH thought which has any claim to be scientific seeks necessary connexions, but the necessity of the links with which we try to connect ideas or things is often questionable. In mathematical reasoning however you can find conclusions which quite inevitably follow from the premisses, conclusions from which there is no escape. **Nor is the chance of error in the calculations of so great importance as it is in other reasoning, since the**

mathematician's sums can be done over again and again till the error is detected and eliminated. A correct calculation must in fact bring conviction to any one who understands it.

II. It follows from this that when the factors of a problem can be successfully isolated and their action calculated we acquire the power of forecasting the course of events, e.g. in the case of the path of a comet.

III. The certainty and success of the method appears to be due to two characteristics, first its completely abstract nature. It operates not with nature as a whole, but with a single aspect of it. It steadily declines to regard things as possessing any other attribute but quantity, and the simplified, though wholly unreal world, of measurable things reveals secrets to us, and enables us to effect results, which were unattainable before.

IV. A method which thus creates its own world is obviously not without danger. The mathematician can deal in worlds of three, or four or five or more dimensions, but he cannot expect us to believe in them all equally. For most purposes, however, mathematical science runs little risk of straying dangerously far from reality, since its applications permit of continual verification in the world of things, a verification which the physicist can often obtain artificially by experiment. It is the highly abstract nature of mathematical science, united to its continual recall to the real world, which appears

to account for the dazzling successes which it has produced in our dealings with inorganic nature.

Now it is only necessary to state these characteristics to see that historical science, if indeed it is a science, shares none of them. No advocate of the view that history is a science has indeed suggested any approximation to mathematics, but it is nevertheless instructive to observe how deep and impassable is the gap. To take the four points in order:

I. History possesses no similar claim to certainty in its conclusions, which are usually disputed in proportion to their breadth and importance, and are indeed constantly revised. Even the certainty of historical evidence, as will be made clear later, is different from scientific certainty.

II. No forecasting is possible in history. Some cases of pretty accurate prediction can be cited, e.g. d'Argenson's prediction a generation before the tea was flung into Boston harbour that the English colonies in America would one day rise against the Mother Country, form themselves into a Republic, and astonish the world by their prosperity,<sup>3</sup> and Mme de Stael's prophecy soon after Waterloo that Louis XVIII would die on the throne, that his heir, Charles X, would suffer the fate of James II, and that the son of Philippe Egalite would succeed to the throne,<sup>4</sup> or Gibbon Wakefield's forecast in 1844 of an empire in which colonies gifted with our free institutions would remain united to the parent state as far as peace, good understanding, freedom of

commerce, and identity of foreign policy can unite an empire.<sup>5</sup> But all these predictions are clearly of the kind which practical sagacity, not scientific reasoning, is accustomed to make, and they merely differ in superior insight from similar forecasts which we often see made in practical affairs.

III. There is no similar abstraction in history. Political or military history deals with men as they are, and for the historian, Edward I or Napoleon are just as much concrete individuals as they were to their contemporaries. The abstraction which history practices when it studies (say) constitutional history is a radically different abstraction, for in studying English constitutional history it is still studying Englishmen, though it prefers to neglect them when not acting constitutionally or unconstitutionally. It is not studying something which does not, never has, and never can exist, as arithmetic does when it treats things as merely numerable. And woe betide the historian who forgets this, for as soon as he begins to hypostatic his abstractions, he begins to drift away from that real world of men which is the subject of history.

IV. Lastly there are, speaking broadly, no verifications possible in history, and experiment has no application. The discovery of an inscription may indeed verify a date for which the historian had already on other grounds contended, but such verification is rare and confined to matters of detail. No one can verify Grote's view of the Athenian

democracy or Froude's view of Elizabeth. Nor is the reason for this obscure, for Grote and Froude applied the test of good and evil, and for such standards there is, and can be, no place in a purely scientific view of the world, which is *ex hypothesi* concerned not with what ought to be, but only with what is.

To this it will no doubt be objected 'You are trying history too high. Leaving for the moment the social sciences, it is at least clearly nearer to the descriptive or classificatory sciences like zoology or botany than to mathematics.'

M. Seignobos, who believes that history is a science, in writing on the conditions of historical construction has some interesting remarks on zoology. Descriptive zoology is, he remarks, that science of direct observation which in its subject-matter comes nearest to history. But it operates by examining real complete animals, or it can dissect them and put the parts together again to study their structure. It can watch the real animals in movement, and classify their real resemblances. But in history says M. Seignobos we get nothing of the kind—the only real things are written paper, and sometimes monuments or manufactured articles, and the historian can only perform an intellectual operation upon them. By the nature of its materials history is necessarily a subjective science. History must resist the temptation to imitate the method of the biological sciences. 'Historical facts', he insists, "are so different from

those of other sciences that to study them we require a method different from all the rest<sup>6</sup>. History is put together, he had just explained, out of an incoherent mass of little facts, a dust of details, and these heterogeneous materials vary in purpose, situation, generality, and certainty. Historians have no method for classing them. History, which derives from literature, 'has remained the least methodical of the sciences'<sup>7</sup>. Later he tells us that the methodical search for the causes of a fact requires an analysis of the conditions in which the fact was produced so as to isolate the necessary condition which is the cause; it assumes then the complete knowledge of these conditions. But this, he insists, is just what is wanting in history. We must give up, he says, hoping to reach causes in history by a direct method, as is done in the other sciences.<sup>8</sup> History is not a science of observation at all—it is a science of reasoning.<sup>9</sup>

These opinions are particularly interesting coming from a high authority, who is convinced that history is a science. Let us now consider more closely the nature of historical narrative in its oldest and simplest form, that of political or military events, leaving aside for the moment the more elaborate form which the history of institutions presents. It should be clear when we consider any actual case, say the career of Napoleon, that, in addition to the special difficulties of approach to this subject, which, as M. Seignobos points out, differentiate the historian's

task from that of the zoologist, there is still a gap dividing history from the other sciences, which is hardly, if at all, less than that which divides history from mathematics. For science is concerned with the universal, with the type, but history is not. To the zoologist the individual animal is only of interest because it conforms to and helps to establish a type, or because its divergence may give ground for doubts whether the type has been correctly described. Science is, as Aristotle long ago told us, of the universal. For this purpose the zoologist cuts off—abstracts—a section of nature, and studies animals only to the exclusion of everything else which does not help him in his study. And the same is true of the botanist with his plants, and with all the other sciences. They are all essentially abstracted, partial, incomplete, departmental views of the world. No science can either view the world as a whole, or view the whole of any part of it.

But when we sit down to write a narrative of the career of Napoleon we have taken for our subject a fragment of the whole, in which are to be found the endless variety and confusion which are characteristic of reality. We make no effort, because in fact we can do nothing, to abstract. We may indeed limit the extent of our task by refusing to spend much time on South American affairs on the ground that Napoleon was not much concerned with them, or we may entirely neglect Central Africa on the ground

that his interests cannot have been affected by it, but the fact remains that what we have before us is a fragment of reality, and that as we do not know, and cannot know, more than a little of it, we cannot be sure what may or may not prove to have a bearing on our narrative. We have indeed a practical certainty that we need not trouble about Central Africa, but nothing more, and there have been in fact plenty of cases in which evidence, long supposed to be of no interest, has turned out to be of great value to historians.<sup>10</sup>

The historian of Napoleon has therefore a subject-matter which is essentially different from anything that is, or can be, the subject-matter of any of the undoubted sciences. Further it comes before him by a process which is unique and unintelligible, though very familiar to us, which is in fact simply given. For the past is absolutely continuous with the present, and whatever the real nature of Time may be, it appears to us like a thin line of moving light that is for ever rolling up the past and unrolling the future. There is no break, nor except for the imperfection of the record and our knowledge that we cannot alter the past, does the past present any different qualities from the present. As we know from our own memories it presents exactly the same movement and endless variety. Viewing this picture the historian cannot help seeing it with the eyes of the man of action, who has for ever to be dealing with particular issues, and not with that of the man

of science, who hopes to discover general laws. Science is indeed sometimes, e.g. in the case of the geologist, concerned with the past, but the geologist like other scientific inquirers is still concerned only with a small and deliberately limited section of reality.

Nor does the fundamental difference in the historian's outlook end here, for he deals with a world in which all of us assume contingency. We cannot avoid believing that the course of the world's history must have been different if one of Nelson's frigates had captured Napoleon on the way home from Egypt. We feel certain that Napoleon's personal charm and clear understanding of what he wanted exercised an influence over Alexander at Tilsit, which profoundly affected European affairs, an influence which no one else could have exercised, and the degree of success of which no one could possibly have guessed beforehand.

The historian cannot indeed be allowed to doubt the freedom of the human will any more than he may doubt the reality of time, or of the external world, for these things are part of that system of metaphysics, which though it may not be a profound or correct system, is implicit in common sense, and we cannot expect to understand human action, unless we place ourselves at the standpoint which all men occupy when they act. The historian is not required to subscribe to any doctrine of Free Will such as might satisfy a philosopher, but he cannot avoid

accepting that belief in the reality of choice which the ordinary man holds unhesitatingly, and on which we all of us, even those of us who are in theory resolute determinists, invariably act, and without which all basis for a bargain, all praise and blame, nay, the justification for the criminal law itself would simply disappear. For, as Blackstone tells us, it is the malice aforethought that distinguishes murder from other killing.

It seems idle therefore to hope in relating events, which is after all the primary function of history, to find any general laws which will guide us in our task. We can only follow the rules according to which we act when we are dealing with practical affairs. And these rules, it must be remembered, whether implicit in common sense, or explicit in custom or law, represent a vast experience, which is of much greater weight and trustworthiness, in so far as action is concerned, than any laws which science is able to formulate for our guidance. They are partly due to the emotional side of our nature, and embody moral and aesthetic elements, of which science can take no heed, but which the historian cannot disregard. The most impartial historian must have some standards of value, and it is impossible that he should ever attain to the scientific attitude of the chemist, who, in so far as he is a scientific man, must be absolutely indifferent whether his chemicals unite or separate. All the chemist wants is to understand *what* they do. But the historian, could he *per*

*impossibile* write history of this kind, would have written a narrative which had lost all meaning. All our judgements of practical affairs, and therefore all our judgements of history, are shot through and through with judgements of value.

## CHAPTER IV

### IS HISTORY A SCIENCE? II. INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

**T**HE many capable historians who have believed that history is a science (a belief which, as we have seen, appears, when we consider the history of institutions, to have more justification) had, we may be sure, some solid ground for their belief, and it would be absurd to suppose that they had no better reason than a desire to assert for their own study that position of authority which science now holds in the popular estimation. What then is the real basis for the belief?

The truth is that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to say where common sense ends and science begins. For they are both attempts to explain reality based on a deep belief in the rationality or explicability of things, and fundamentally their methods are the same, science differing only from common sense in that it is more thorough and more patient, and that it stores knowledge far more effectively and has evolved a number of specialized techniques, all of them, however, ultimately based on ordinary experience.<sup>1</sup>

Some people indeed write and speak as if there existed a scientific method, which must give us the key to truth if we would only apply it. Lord Acton said that men of science 'can show us how to test

proof, how to secure fullness and soundness in induction, how to restrain and to employ with safety hypothesis and analogy. It is they who hold the secret of the mysterious property of the mind by which error ministers to truth, and truth slowly but irrevocably prevails. Theirs is the logic of discovery, the demonstration of the advance of knowledge and the development of ideas which, as the earthly wants and passions of men remain almost unchanged, are the charter of progress and the vital spark in History.<sup>12</sup>

But this surely is a delusion. The sciences follow indeed the general rules (such as the law of contradiction), which lie at the basis of all our reasoning, and they have emphasized various maxims, such as that we must verify our conclusions, which have long been apparent to common sense. But every science as soon as it gets beyond the simplest stages develops its own method and its own complicated technique. And this method and technique are not applied by it to the facts, until they have been drawn from facts, and by fresh facts they are continually being modified. The readiness to throw away accepted facts and methods is indeed of the very essence of the scientific attitude. The astronomer's method is then imposed on him by the facts of astronomy and the botanist's by the facts of botany. They are both highly technical, and the botanist's methods are useless if applied to the stars, or the astronomer's if applied to plants. There is in truth nothing in

existence which corresponds to this ideal of a scientific method. If the methods of one science are valuable when applied to another, it will be because they are dealing with the same problems and are merely looking at them from a different angle.

It is indeed easy to see how wrong is Acton's view, if we consider the case, to which he specially refers, of analogy. The value of analogy depends on the amount of similarity between the cases compared, and to judge of this a knowledge of the particular circumstances of both is required. No knowledge which the mathematician or zoologist has, no rule which he can deduce from his knowledge of his or other sciences, can make him as good a judge of an historical analogy as the historian, whose mind is steeped in the facts and in constant touch through his reading with the minds of the men who made them. Indeed such a man sometimes acquires a special skill, akin to that of the artist, in judging documents, not reducible to any rule, and not possessed even by the ordinary historical investigator.<sup>3</sup>

Nor can Acton's view of discovery be accepted without question. Some scientific discoveries are no doubt made by careful adherence to the prescribed technique of the science. But it seems doubtful whether the great discoveries are so made, and it is clear from Faraday's own account that his procedure was very different. In such cases the method which is so convincing to the learner is

worked out after the conclusion has been found to be true.<sup>4</sup> Acton was on this point probably swayed by Mill's view, who, like Bacon, vainly hoped to find a method which would help in the discovery of truth.<sup>5</sup>

If then history is, or is to be, a science, it is clear that its method and its technique can only be derived from its own subject-matter. They cannot be applied to it from without. Acton's view, it may be added, is particularly interesting because he was not a drum-and-trumpet historian, but was interested in ideas, and, as is well known, planned, though he never wrote, a History of Liberty.

The question then which we must face is at what point we are to say that the co-ordination of the accumulated wisdom of ordinary observation and a mass of valuable information, often mathematical in character but collected for limited practical purposes, becomes scientific. It has sometimes been held that the scientific level is only reached when we can discard considerations of quality and deal only with quantity. On this showing physics became a science when the Renaissance had discarded the Peripatetic views of motion, and chemistry began to be truly scientific when Lavoisier defeated the phlogistians. This level can never be attained by history. Many people however would hold that this view limits the range of science unduly. In this case the only criterion left to us seems to be the existence of a large body of doctrine which compels belief,

and this we notoriously do not possess in history, nor indeed in any of the studies which concern mankind, as may be seen in the case of economics, where a very large amount of valuable and interesting material, especially of a historical kind, has been collected, but the most important principles are still the subject of dispute, so that what was axiomatic to Ricardo or Mill is questioned by their successors, and what seem valid scientific conclusions to one exponent are unhesitatingly rejected by another. Although therefore in economics and in sociology there are particular conclusions which seem to be established, there is no large body of doctrine embracing these conclusions which can compel consent, or has in fact ever generally received it. If it is no longer true that sociology 'consists of nothing more than a collection of unverified guesses and vague generalities, disguised under a more or less pretentious apparatus of quasi-scientific terminology', as Leslie Stephen declared,<sup>6</sup> it remains true that its claim to be a real science is, like that of all the so-called human sciences, still open to question. Indeed it would appear from Professor Park that sociologists are still not agreed as to what precisely the relation is which they call 'social'<sup>7</sup>.

But, since the point at which any inquiry becomes entitled to the name of science is necessarily uncertain, and accumulation of information, and persistent efforts to systematize that information, are constantly encouraging the hope that that point has been

reached, it is easy to understand why so many historians think that history must be a science.

If their view is right, it must clearly find its justification in institutional history, or some other form of history such as economic history, which is concerned with something more permanent than the events related in ordinary historical narrative. In this connexion the views of M. Henri See are of special interest, for he has not only himself studied deeply and written much on French economic history, but he has reflected much on the real nature of history, and in a book entitled *Science et philosophie de l'histoire* (1928) has argued that history is a science, though an imperfect one, and he further thinks that there is much to hope from a purely critical and scientific philosophy of history.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing the profound difference between history and the mathematical sciences, he fully admits that history cannot formulate laws, and he also points out that history cannot use experiment, or employ direct observation, that it records individual events which are unrepeatable, that individuals play a part, the range of which it is difficult to define, and that the element of accident cannot be excluded. It must not, he insists, be identified with sociology, which, unlike history, is not continually tied to time and space, but regards social facts and organization of society *in abstracto* of sociology and economics on his-  
J save writers on these subjects from  
late laws in the same sense as they

can be formulated for the natural sciences. History never studies any society statically, it considers every society dynamically in its evolution in time. The effort to establish historical laws is really vain.<sup>10</sup>

Still, says M. See, history like the sciences, must try to explain the phenomena which it describes. It possesses in the comparative method the best means of giving to the facts of history 'an explanation satisfactory to our minds, that is of making history really a science'. This method helps us effectively to distinguish what in evolution is the effect of particular fortuitous events and what of permanent phenomena of a general kind. There is scope in history as in all other sciences for hypothesis—in historical research there is plenty of room for the scientific imagination.<sup>11</sup>

Causes however in M. See's view escape the grasp of the historian. Historical phenomena are so complex that the only explanation possible is to be found in looking for the conditions, and the circumstances in which they are produced.<sup>12</sup> And though the historian is not concerned with the ultimate destiny of humanity, he cannot escape looking at the past from the standpoint of the present—from that he starts, and he cannot help thinking of the result to which he knows his history to have led.<sup>13</sup>

Historical explanation then rests essentially on the comparative method.<sup>14</sup> And ,  
 sion that, using all its resoi  
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succeeds with great difficulty in discerning some tendencies, some conditions of the development. Contrary to the view of many writers it is not possible to determine the laws of evolution/ And sociology and economics despite their more abstract methods suffer more and more under the influence of history and its methods the impact of the real, the concrete, of Becoming, and tend to give up their rigid formulas so as to be in touch with reality.

M. See's conclusion is that the historian's duty is to seek the explanation of the facts and of the changes which have occurred. History, he says 'explicative avant tout, merite bien le nom de science'<sup>15</sup>.

The views of M. See have been set out at some length, partly for the reasons already given, and partly because, whichever way we answer the question whether history is a science, it must be obvious to any one considering them that they contain a good deal which is not open to dispute. They are not, like the views of a Hegel or a Comte, remote from the actual facts.

But they do in truth present a weak case for the thesis that history, even the history of institutions, is a science. For what does the explanation do for us?

It can\* ~\*al explanation, such as we expect in<sup>c</sup> V, we are told, give us some of f<sup>l</sup> editions. It will, if it succeeds, be able to us, it will in fact inter-y iigibility of an explanation is d '<sup><</sup>.^ . iid of the learner as well as on

that of the teacher, and we are often content with explanations which are perfectly satisfactory to us only because our own level of knowledge or understanding is low. Or to put the point slightly differently, there is nothing that need amount to truth in a satisfactory explanation, nothing that must compel assent. And this of course we see continually in ordinary life, and there are many examples in history, or the explanations of important historical events given by one generation would not—almost normally—be superseded by the explanations of another.

Nor is the comparative method, invaluable as it is, and revolutionary as have been the effects of its use upon our whole outlook, capable of giving us proof. M. See points out that you may use the method either in space or time. You may for instance compare the systems of agriculture prevalent in Europe in the Middle Ages, setting the English Manor by the side of the French Seigneurie, considering the customary dues payable, and so on, or you may make your comparison in time, and compare ancient capitalism with our own, and consider the effect of the absence of free labour in the Roman world and the divorce between capital and labour to-day, &c. The latter method is evidently <sup>e<sup>h</sup></sup> difficult than the former, if we are to <sup>arr\*</sup> v in our results, since the further world's history the more defe are apt to be, but the former is vc For, to quote Fustel de Coulanges, *ive*

method does not consist in seeking among fifteen little peoples fifteen little facts which interpreted in a certain way agree to form a system. It consists in studying several peoples in their law, their ideas, in all their social circumstances, and in bringing out what they have in common or in what they differ.<sup>16</sup> This is a great undertaking, which it is difficult to bring to any binding conclusion, since the evidence will unavoidably leave wide scope for difference of opinion.

It is not in fact possible to point to any great body of doctrine regarding institutions which compels assent. We have in the last hundred years learnt a great deal about many of them, and we have so far made advance that many hasty and ill-founded views have been permanently discarded. There is therefore a larger body of enlightened opinion in negative agreement. But beyond this there is not much agreement. English constitutional history is a well-tilled field, but it is nevertheless clear that our judgements about it cannot have the compelling power which scientific demonstration has, for the reason that we ourselves keep shifting our point of view. The next generation will think differently from ourselves, as we do from the contemporaries of Hallam or Stubbs, about Parliament and taxation and liberty and authority, and all those dominant ideas which have moulded constitutional growth. It is clear that the political aspects of the struggle between the Crown and Parliament must occupy the first

place in the mind of a generation whose ideal is liberty, but tend to fall to a lower place in the mind of one which cares less about liberty than about the material well-being of the people. Nor can there ever be a history of Enclosure which will be accepted as final as long as different views are taken of its social and economic advantages and drawbacks.

Those indeed who claim that history is a science ought, if they are to be consistent, to believe, as Mill did, that there is or may be a science of human nature. But of this there is at present no sign, unless we are to dignify the fluctuating probabilities of statistical averages and a number of tentative hypotheses as science. Nor indeed does there appear to be any probability of the establishment of such a science, since the scientific understanding which operates freely in the world of Nature cannot free itself, in that sphere of practical action to which all scientific knowledge is merely subordinate, from intermixture with emotional and aesthetic elements. It is the judgement formed from this intermixture called by varying names—Wisdom, Common Sense, *φρόνησις*, & c, which determines action and makes history, not the scientific judgement, nor indeed anything which seems to be completely analysable, since it insists on the paradoxical claim to freedom in a world which, if it is capable of complete scientific description, must be determined.

The answer therefore to the question whether history is a science seems to be No. It is clearly not

so in its original form of chronicle or narrative, and though on its institutional side it comes nearer to justifying a claim to be scientific, it fails to do so, because its conclusions inevitably lack the certainty which compels assent. Nor, since there is in human affairs an element of contingency which cannot be eliminated in the present, and therefore remains embedded in the past, does there seem any hope of it ever becoming a science. Our belief in the rationality of the world is a postulate of both science and common sense, and our minds, at least when we are in the scientific mood, revolt against contingency, and demand its elimination. But though our postulate is justified always and everywhere where we can apply it—or science would be impossible—it does not at all follow that we can always apply it, and that there is no inexplicable remainder. The historian of all men should be least ready to deny this. For history is a pattern on moving Time which runs on for ever and cannot be reversed. And this process, though familiar to us from the cradle to the grave, is wholly inexplicable.<sup>17</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### IS CERTAINTY ATTAINABLE IN HISTORY?

To illustrate the nature of historical certainty it may be permissible to take some instances of historical statements which appear to the writer to be certain, with the reasons why they so appear.

I. That Dr. Jameson crossed the Transvaal border with an armed force in 1895.

It is not within my own knowledge that this occurred, for I was in England not in South Africa then, but all the circumstances following it, the receipt of the news, the questions in Parliament, the return of the raiders to this country, with many of whom I talked, the trial for a breach of the Foreign Enlistment Act of Dr. Jameson and others (at which I myself gave some unimportant formal evidence), and a number of other similar facts are within my own memory. In addition to this there is a great mass of documentary evidence tending to establish the truth of the statement. It is incredible to me that the statement can be untrue, for it is impossible to imagine any reason why both my own memory and the great mass of concordant documentary evidence should be at fault.

II. That Napoleon was defeated at the battle of Waterloo.

I was brought up among people, all of whom believed this, and I was so much impressed while

still a small boy by a picture in the *Illustrated London News* or *Graphic* of the battle that for many years I made a practice of asking old people what they could remember about it. I never succeeded in talking to an actual combatant, but I did collect some second-hand information. This was no doubt of little value, but it was probably sufficient, had no documentary evidence survived, to establish the truth of the statement, at least with such certainty as attaches to a large number of similar statements in medieval or ancient writers. The main reason why I now believe that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo is of course the mass of concordant documentary evidence, which cannot be greatly inferior to that which establishes the truth of the Jameson raid, though at present inferior to it in quality, because it is unsupported by living testimony. In a few years, however, the evidence for both events will be on the same plane.

III. That in 1325 John le Longe held one virgate in the Manor of Banstead and owed for rent 5s. 9d., for tallage 9d., for average 8½d., for picking nuts and apples *id.*, and was also required to do certain specified services.

This statement rests on a single document, which is a survey made at Banstead at the time on oath, Banstead then being a Royal Manor.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that the certainty which attaches to the statement is inferior to that which belongs to the first two examples. But the document is one of a number of

others, which also show that John Long held a virgate in Banstead, the statements about him fall into their place in the picture of the manor which those documents, careful and elaborate records, mostly preserved continuously in the Record Office, present, and even if we suppose that the statements of the jurors were not always trustworthy, that under pressure from the steward they put up some rents, or put others down for favour, there is no reason to suppose that the figure entered on the survey was not a true statement of what in the eye of the manorial court were Long's position and obligations. The only reason why the document should be open to doubt in this respect would be some suspicion that it had been altered or forged. But for such a suspicion there is no ground. Indeed, were the successor in title to the Crown to sue me for the rent, on the ground that I was Long's successor in title, I should carefully abstain from challenging the claim on the ground that Long was not liable, and it would probably be easy to convince the Court that he was liable. I should resist the claim on the ground of events which have happened since 1325.

In all three cases we seem to get as near certainty as we can get in history. The first case is immensely strong, because it is buttressed by living evidence; the second is only slightly less so; the last is definitely weaker, but is quite as good evidence as we get, or require, in many of the ordinary transactions of life.

But the great majority of statements found in

ancient or medieval histories, and many in more recent histories, rest on much weaker evidence than this. Any one looking through the volumes of Grote's *History of Greece* dealing with the Peloponnesian War will at once see from the footnotes that it is for the most part based on the statements of Thucydides, which statements, though other authorities are from time to time quoted, are frequently uncorroborated. And any general historian, even a Thucydides, must be a more doubtful witness for complicated transactions in which passions ran high than the Extent of 1325 is for the very limited facts which it attests. The events of the Peloponnesian War are however infinitely better attested than a great deal of history, and there are periods such as that in our own history which followed the withdrawal of the Roman legions, in which the defectiveness and obscurity of the records are so baffling as to leave us to rely for much of our information on what the spade can supply. Nor is this the only difficulty, for sometimes we suffer not from lack of records, but from their inconsistency, and the question to be solved is, as, e.g., in the case of the question whether Mary Queen of Scots conspired to murder Darnley, whom we should, or what we can, believe. Such questions take us very far. We must of course first examine the direct evidence, and if we are satisfied with the genuineness of the Casket letters we may not feel bound to look much further. But very likely we may not be. If we are npt<sup>^</sup>certain that the letters

are forgeries, we may still doubt whether the letters and poems are exactly what they purport to be. In our doubt we are driven to consider the surrounding circumstances, above all Mary's own conduct. Why did she bring Darnley to Kirk o'Field, why did she try to shield Bothwell, why did she allow him to fill with soldiers the Court-Room in which the charge against him was to be investigated? Was her seizure by Bothwell arranged, and why did she persist in marrying him? Why did nearly every one assume her guilt? But on the other hand such assumptions are often quite unjust. Was she the kind of person who would have done such a crime? Different historians give different answers. The one thing that is quite clear is that we cannot answer with certainty.

And indeed there is little need to wonder at the uncertainty of historical evidence when we remember that very little of it represents direct observation—it is largely hearsay—and the very name of the real witness is generally not known to us. Even to Thucydides it did not occur to cite his authorities in footnotes, and the ordinary memoir writer often did not even trouble to check his memory of the events which he describes sometimes half a century after they occurred. But even if the author wrote up his notes without delay, as Saint-Simon did,<sup>2</sup> there is still plenty of room for the inaccuracy of prejudice and exaggeration. History indeed, we are told by M M. Langlois and Seignobos, is reduced to making

use of documents that no other science would accept, unchecked and with incalculable chances of error. History in fact can only use them, because it does not need facts which are in themselves difficult to observe. And the same authorities remark that, speaking historically, the Devil is much more solidly proved than is Pisistratus, for we have no evidence from an eyewitness for Pisistratus, and any number of witnesses say that they have seen the Devil.

These considerations seem to show that there is very little that can be called trustworthy, not to say certain, in history. But do not let us be too much depressed by them, for their force depends on what measure we use. Let us consider the case of the Devil and Pisistratus.

We are, say MM. Langlois and Seignobos, justified in rejecting the evidence for the Devil and admitting that for Pisistratus because the evidence of historical documents is never so good as that of contemporary science. 'History accepts the laws established by the sciences which have direct contact with reality/<sup>3</sup>

But this seems equivalent to saying that these sciences lay down the impossibility of such statements being true, and such an impossibility is a universal negative which, whatever the postulates on which these sciences work, cannot be proved. The argument is in fact much what Hume used with regard to miracle, and, as Huxley pointed out, his argument is not good.<sup>4</sup> The real reason why we

reject the evidence for the Devil in historical documents appears to be exactly the same as that for which we should, as Huxley said, reject the evidence of some one who told us that he had seen a Centaur trotting down Piccadilly. Even if the witness were ready to suffer martyrdom in support of his belief, and there were no reason to doubt his good faith, 'his competency, which has unfortunately very little to do with good faith, or intensity of conviction', would still, says Huxley, be open to question. The truth is that we have certain standards of probability, which are based on wide experience of the difficulty of ever attaining certainty and of the fallibility of testimony, standards which are continually being tested. The stories of the Devil at once offend against those standards. But they did not offend the standards accepted in, say the thirteenth century, which unhesitatingly accepted the Devil. With us the stories start weighted with a huge load of antecedent improbability, which the positive evidence is much too weak to overcome. The affirmation of the witness, who has seen a Centaur in Piccadilly or the Devil with horns and hoofs, will never outweigh in our minds the probability that he was suffering from an optical delusion, or mania, or perhaps merely seeing what he had been told to expect to see.

And all historical evidence is in this respect on exactly the same basis as ordinary experience, that is, it rests on probability, which is, as Bishop Butler tells us, 'the very guide of life'<sup>5</sup>. In both some of the

evidence is so probable as to amount to moral certainty, but that certainty is always moral not scientific certainty. It is the same kind of certainty which we have when in an English Criminal Court presided over by a learned and impartial judge, assisted by capable counsel, and with a fair-minded and intelligent jury, a man has been tried for murder and convicted. Such circumstances enable us to be morally certain that he is guilty. But our certainty is not a scientific certainty, for we cannot be absolutely sure that he must have been guilty, as we are sure that five plus seven must make twelve.

The reasons for the fundamental difference in the quality of our certainty in the two cases seem to be as follows:

My certainty that five added to seven make twelve will be shared by every one, whether he is an Englishman or a Patagonian, who has mastered enough arithmetic to understand the case. It does not matter in the least what his background of beliefs and prejudices may be.

My certainty that the prisoner was rightly convicted may not however be shared by others, who set the question for consideration against a different background of knowledge and feeling. It may be countered by the certainty of some one who believes in trial by newspaper, and is completely convinced that the touching kindness shown by the prisoner to his dog or to his bedridden aunt makes it impossible that he should have committed the murder, or by the

certainty of some intelligent foreigner who on the ground of much practical experience knows that it is absurd to suppose that judges do not take bribes, or juries yield to various forms of illegitimate pressure.

My certainty that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo is evidently a certainty of the same kind as my certainty in the murder case, for it rests ultimately on human testimony, and to attain it I have set the evidence for it against a complicated background of knowledge and opinions in my own mind, which are briefly my view of the state of the world before and after the 18 th of June 1815. What I have reached is moral certainty, but I cannot contend that Napoleon *must* have been defeated at Waterloo on the 18th of June 1815.

Moral certainties, it may be observed, not scientific certainty of any kind, provide a framework for human society. They enable a community the members of which agree in being morally certain about certain facts or values, to resist the disintegrating effect of criticism, and also, it should be added, of reform. And it is to be noted that they seldom in fact seem to yield to criticism or to the advance of scientific knowledge, for criticism or the advance of scientific knowledge (which as it becomes incorporated in the knowledge and consciousness of a society itself in fact becomes moral certainty, since very few believe it because they have examined the scientific proof) as a rule works on a younger genera-

tion, which has not itself acquired the moral certainty which is attacked. This according to Lecky was the case with the decline in the belief in witchcraft,<sup>6</sup> and it can indeed be seen in innumerable instances. Thus a generation which has fought a great war, has a moral certainty that war is evil, which wanes when a new generation looks at the evidence with the indifference of ignorance and a disposition to reject a view on which they are weary of hearing their fathers insist.

It is indeed curious to be told that even in mathematics, a sphere in which the layman would have supposed that such a thing was not possible, innovations accepted later without question are often at first unhesitatingly rejected.<sup>7</sup> This seems to show that even in the mind of the mathematician there grows up a background of moral, not scientific, certainty—thin and colourless indeed compared to that in the minds of ordinary men—but real enough to interfere with the undisturbed operation of the scientific intellect.

If history shows less certainty than we secure in ordinary life, as is undoubtedly the case in most of its details, and increasingly so as we work backwards, this is merely due to the imperfection of its materials. Both in real life and in history we apply the same measure, probability, which in both sometimes attains moral certainty, but in both generally falls short of it. What makes us expect so much more certainty than we get is partly the fundamental

desire of the human mind in a world of change for what is fixed, unchanging, certain, and partly the analogy of the natural sciences, whose success dazzles us. But analogy is never proof, and it only approaches proof in proportion as the circumstances of the things compared resemble each other. Here the resemblances are small and the differences many, for science, though sometimes itself reduced to historical methods, delights in the universal, the static, and the reversible, while it is the multitudinous variety of Becoming, ever moving in one direction, which makes History.

## CHAPTER VI

### IS IMPARTIALITY POSSIBLE IN HISTORY?

A GERMAN writer on events in Germany at the close of the Great War, in explaining that he had not blamed the Officers' Corps and others, declared recently that the historian 'may only think in facts, and must connect facts. The phenomena, which the moralist or politician calls good or evil, stand for the historian ranked together as categories of facts. Every question of guilt is alien to him: he only knows questions of causality'<sup>1</sup>

The statement is interesting as an extreme form of the claim to historical impartiality. Against it may be put Mommsen's declaration that "Those who have lived through historical events as I have, begin to see that history is neither written nor made without love or hate"<sup>2</sup>.

No one, who has accepted the argument of this book that history and the present being continuous are essentially similar, will doubt that Mommsen's view is the truer.

Historians have no doubt always been accustomed to claim that they are impartial, as for instance Tacitus did when he expressly declared that he was not to be swayed by anger or partisanship, but a statement such as that quoted at the beginning of this chapter could hardly have been put forward before the great scientific movement of the last

century, and like the claim to certainty it appears to be based on a false analogy from the sciences.

For science is essentially impersonal, and the scientific investigator is and must be entirely detached from the objects which he is investigating. To the chemist the only interest in the behaviour of the chemical materials which he is examining is the law under which that behaviour falls, or the class in which the materials should be placed. As far as the materials themselves are concerned it matters nothing to him whether they coalesce or separate. And to the zoologist the animal is a representative of a type or kind, and if he feels affection for any particular animal, the scientific side of him has for the moment given way to the emotional.

But the idea that even a simple narrative can be drawn up without bringing in any personal element is a delusion. Even description involves interpretation of what is seen or felt, and our minds tend to rationalize a narrative by supplying not what we actually saw, but what we are convinced we must have seen.<sup>3</sup> If to this it is objected that the same difficulty must occur in scientific observation the answer is that that is so. But the scientific observer can as a rule go on repeating the experiment, or waiting till Nature has reproduced the circumstances, until he has so many observations as to eliminate error, and further he possesses instruments which do not suffer from the vagaries of our senses.

The point indeed is obvious to any one who has

followed the conflicting evidence given in a court of law. And we must not forget that the historian can never, like the scientific man, stand outside his problem. You cannot write of the French Revolution or the Roman Empire without some views of the value of the Republican or Imperial forms of government, and even if you are in\* complete doubt which form is the better, each of them attracts and repels you on certain sides. The historian, who is himself a citizen of a state with some form of government, which he likes or dislikes, is interested in his problem in a quite different sense from that in which chemists or zoologists are interested in their problems.

Nor can there be any justification for the view that the historian can abstain from moral judgements, for it is judgements of value, of which moral judgements are an important category, which give meaning to human action. It does not of course follow that the historian should hasten to express his moral judgements, for there are generally good reasons (often quite unconnected with historical writing) why we should be chary in freely expressing our moral judgements. But if the historian has formed none, his narrative is little better than a register. And of course much historical writing is very properly on this level, for if no one undertook the drudgery of compiling calendars, and editing texts with brief introductions summarizing the contents in a colourless way, historical knowledge would be

immensely poorer. But no one should imagine that this work is writing history—it is really only smoothing the way of the historian. The real historian must have a full view of his period or subject, and any such synoptic view of human action involves at every stage judgements of a moral nature. Without such judgements it would be impossible to evaluate the relations of King and Parliament, of landowner and labourer, of Charles and Cromwell or Caesar and Pompey.

For this reason the historian requires a wide knowledge of human life. Gibbon's remark in his *Autobiography* that the Captain of Hampshire Grenadiers was not useless to the historian of the Roman Empire was unquestionably true, and Grote's account of the Athenian democracy would have shown far less understanding had he not known the House of Commons. The ideal historian would be like the ideal statesman, one who knew and understood the motives, aspirations, and prejudices of every class. It has even been contended that the chief danger to attaining truth in history lies less now in political or ecclesiastical bias than in the misinterpretation of the materials by persons defective in humanity, imagination, and general understanding.<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastical bias may have weakened, but political and national bias remain extremely strong, and the recent history of the world does not encourage the idea that they are weakening, while the poverty of the results produced by persons who write history

without a sound general education and knowledge of the world generally becomes obvious as soon as they leave their documents. A more serious disadvantage to history than their feeble generalizations is the failure sometimes shown by writers, otherwise extremely competent, to understand the practical exigencies of a situation. This kind of failure is not at all uncommon with professional historians who have had little personal contact with affairs, but it is not confined to them. The historian whose mind "is essentially unpolitical . . . who shows no perception of necessities and practical limitations, makes no allowances for inveterate antecedent circumstances, is conscious of no responsibility for showing a way out of difficulties, treats the problem as neither capable of solution nor requiring a solution"<sup>5</sup>, cannot write good history, because he has made no attempt in imagination to face the difficulties, which troubled the men whose actions he is judging. He is as useless, and for the same reason, as the contemporary critic who condemns the action of the Government without considering its financial or diplomatic or parliamentary difficulties. Indeed it may be said broadly that all those faults of bad judgement and insufficient (or exaggerated) sympathies, which we condemn in practical life, are apt to reappear, and should be condemned, when we write history.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to insist that the historian must not despise earlier generations for their ignorance, as the eighteenth century despised

the Middle Ages, The accumulation of knowledge which has marked the last three centuries has placed instruments of enormous power in our hands, which have revolutionized the world, and that process once started must apparently continue indefinitely, unless civilization itself breaks down. For scientific knowledge once acquired is easily recorded, and in science therefore every generation starts where the last left off. But there is something more important even than knowledge, and that is wisdom, that is to say the power to make a good use of knowledge. Wisdom is hard to store, and the world is indeed so constructed that there are permanent obstacles to its increase. Those of us who live to what the Psalmist fixed as the allotted span, spend the first quarter of our lives in merely growing up and preparing ourselves for active life. During that active life some of us (for it would be unduly flattering to say that we all do) accumulate wisdom by experience. But it is difficult to impart much of it, and the example of the foolish is often as attractive as that of the wise, and when we die no one inherits our wisdom. It is very difficult to show that there is any increase in the wisdom of the world. There is quite certainly none in the least comparable to the increase in our knowledge. If there were, we could be sure that Foch and Ludendorff were as superior as generals to Turenne or the Black Prince as we know them to have been in their knowledge of the methods of handling much greater masses of troops.<sup>6</sup> But

since it is better to make a wise use of limited knowledge than an unwise use of greater knowledge, the impartial historian will never despise earlier generations for their ignorance, but will make careful inquiry—how they used such knowledge as they had. The thorough and honest study of history cannot indeed fail to make us tolerant, and tolerance, though it is not the same thing as impartiality, is a long step towards it.

Though the ideal of scientific impartiality is a will o' the wisp, the kind of impartiality which belongs to the judge is still attainable by the historian, and in some respects he has an advantage over the judge, who only sees the prisoner or the parties for a short time to try a limited issue, and who in consequence knows little of the facts except those which are more or less directly relevant to that issue. S. R. Gardiner spent his life in close contact with the minds of Englishmen in the seventeenth century, and it has been said of him that his complete knowledge and catholicity of temper enabled him to understand men who could not understand one another, and that he never forgot how much each side contributed to the making of England.<sup>7</sup> This kind of impartiality, of which Lecky's account of the circumstances leading to the loss of the American colonies is another good example, the impartiality which arises from a full understanding of the available facts—in some respects fuller when secret documents see the light than are available to contemporaries—and from a scrupulous anxiety to be fair to both sides in a

controversy, is what every historian should possess. Being human he will not always hold the balance quite even, but he can always try to be fair.

In this connexion it is very interesting to recall the tribute paid after his death to Stubbs, who himself always maintained that the historian must be a judge, by Maitland, the tribute to one who was probably the greatest English historian of his time by one who was certainly one of the greatest and most brilliant of his successors, and who was himself a lawyer as well as a historian. After referring to Stubbs's Introductions to the Rolls Series as 'lessons of patient industry, accurate statement, and acute but wary reasoning, which can be applied at all times and to every kind of evidence', he says 'It has often seemed to me that if he had changed his profession, he might have been a very great judge'<sup>8</sup>.

And since the historian's position resembles that of the judge, it is a mistake to imagine that the historian must not take sides, for if it is his deliberate and carefully considered judgement that one side was right, it is his duty to say so. What he must never do is, while presenting the case for one side, to suppress or distort that of the other, and above all, bearing always in mind the defectiveness of his materials and the necessary ignorance of his readers, never on any account to present that as ascertained fact which is merely his own, or another's, inference. And this latter is perhaps the most dangerous pitfall of all. But provided that the reader is frankly and

fully warned where the documents end and the inference begins, there is no legitimate reason for objecting to a historian taking a side.<sup>9</sup>

If then the historian is in the position of a judge, we must ask what law he applies, and the answer can only be the best moral and intellectual rules current in his own day. And this gives us the reason why the judgements of history can rarely, if ever, be final. Even the courts of law, bound by statute and by precedent, and administering a law which though varying continually is more or less fixed at any given moment, from time to time reinterpret old law so as to give it a meaning, which it had never been originally intended to bear. But the historian applies rules which have far less definiteness and fixity than law, for they are rules which the changing every-day requirements of men have worked out, and are for ever modifying. Surely nothing but the glamour which words exercise over men's minds can have made any one suppose that the judgements of the most impartial historian are entitled to be called either scientific or final.

Few subjects present greater difficulties to the impartial historian, especially if he is French, than the Revolution, and it will be interesting to conclude this chapter with a quotation from a French historian of the Revolution. This is what M. Madelin, the author of a book on the subject which has been described as 'among the few absolutely impartial books in French historical literature'<sup>10</sup>, has to say. He writes, he tells us, mainly political history,

but diplomatic, military, political, economic, social, and literary history cannot without danger be treated *in abstracto*. Less than any one can the historian of the Revolution avoid studying concurrently facts which throw light on one another. "I have tried to be fair. No one is so completely. But at the moment when I give this work to the public I honestly cannot say in whose favour or at whose expense I can have been partial. I approached my delicate task without any preconceived ideas. Nine times out of ten my opinions on the Revolution have altered greatly as I pursued my studies. Not that I ever refused the right to make clear my opinion of certain facts and certain men. Indignation, pity or admiration are sometimes a part of fairness. But I think I have done justice to all, even to some individual whom thorough investigation pointed out to me in the last analysis as a criminal, intentional or unintentional. But I found it easy to retain my freedom of observation and judgement. I never felt that I had sufficient authority, even in my own mind, to pass a categorical judgement on so complex an event as the Revolution. I find it still more difficult to formulate a very brief judgement to-day—causes, facts and consequences seem to be still very much open to dispute." In short, he says, like Montaigne, 'battered on every side, to the Guelphs I shall be a Ghibeline, and to the Ghibelines a Guelph\

But the impartial historian will be above fearing the abuse of partisans.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON THE VALUE OF HISTORY

PHILOSOPHERS, Dr. Tennant tells us, have evinced a general tendency to disparage the historical on the grounds that it is a medley of contingent and particular facts known by perception and memory rather than by reason, and that it is not amenable as such to science which deals with the common and repeatable, or to philosophy which would connect ideas and propositions by ratiocination or according to logical implication.<sup>1</sup> His own view is indeed very different, for he holds that history in its widest sense is on the contrary the source and determinant of philosophy.

It is difficult for those of us, who have followed the great advances made both in historical knowledge itself, and in all those studies which have used historical methods, to sympathize with this tendency to depreciate history. It must seem to us rather strange that Aristotle, whose sound common sense gave him a grip of the realities of human intercourse and ways of thinking which has conferred on his ethics and logic a quasi-immortality, should have held that poetry is more philosophical and serious than history,<sup>2</sup> for in respect of matter (to use Bacon's phrase) Poesy is nothing else but Feigned History.<sup>3</sup> But his reason is that history immersed in the endless detail of particular action—'what Alcibiades did or

suffered\*—is less capable of generalizing than poetry, which can present general types, and his view was no doubt to a large extent based on the rather poor chroniclers of his own day. That Descartes should have thought poorly of history<sup>4</sup> is more intelligible, for the historical writing of his own day was little, if at all, better than that of Aristotle's, and his own mind, perhaps the most powerful of his brilliant century, moved on abstract and especially on mathematical lines, which were very remote from historical studies. How little he was fitted to understand them, and how truly he was the precursor of that unhistorical standpoint which was dominant throughout the eighteenth century, but which Burke opposed, must be evident to any one reading the early part of the *Discours sur la methode*, in which among other things he tells us that he supposed that nations which had advanced to civilization by slow degrees, and whose legislation was the result of experience, must have less perfect institutions than those which had followed the directions of a wise legislator. But in 1637 the world had not seen, as we have seen, an endless number of elaborately drafted constitutions reduced in a few years to waste paper.

It is undoubtedly a defect in Kant's great treatise *on the moral law* that he shows no interest in history. Though he insists on our common nature as rational beings and the duty which belongs to us as such, he takes little account of the different standards characteristic of different stages of historical nation-

alities, or of the historical process through which men have been brought to a realization of their common humanity, and through which the conscience has been matured to the point at which it would respond to his teaching about the categorical imperative.<sup>5</sup> But Kant, like Descartes, was dominated by mathematical conceptions.

To-day we are no longer so blind to the value of history, and the question which we need to ask is, In what does the value of history precisely consist?

'History is past politics and politics present history' was Seeley's view (but the phrase was Freeman's, not Seeley's), and political science he regarded as the outcome of historical generalization. 'The indispensable thing', he said, 'for a politician is a knowledge of political economy and history'. Cambridge was to be a great seminary of politicians, and history was for him pre-eminently the history of the State.<sup>6</sup>

These opinions of Seeley contain some very dangerous doctrine, but they are nevertheless in great part true. Interpreted literally they open the door to the writing of history on narrow nationalistic lines, to that 'propaganda-history', which has given Treitschke so evil a name in this country. And indeed propaganda-history is probably one of the most permanent factors threatening the peace of the world. For it is idle to blink the fact that the wide diffusion of false historical views is far more dangerous than false views of even such important matters as hygiene. The latter may affect the death-rate or

the incidence of disease, but the former may threaten the existence of civilization. Yet in a democracy it is indispensable that the voter should understand the issues, and it is impossible for the most part to understand political questions at all without knowing something of their history. And if this is necessary for the ordinary voter it is far more so for the statesman. Indeed excluding such practical knowledge as concerns the actual machinery of government and the men and women with whom he has to work, there is probably nothing which is more valuable to the statesman than historical knowledge, and (since knowledge is useless by itself) reflection on history. The most striking instance in our own country must be that of Edmund Burke, who in an age little inclined to such considerations saw and insisted on the continuity of history, and applied his thought effectively to such problems as the revolt of the American Colonies and the French Revolution. It is not necessary—it would clearly be impossible—to contend that Burke's denunciation of the French Revolution is the judgement of history, for he failed both to appreciate the defects of the old regime, and the vigour and hope inherent in the new. But he did lay his finger with unerring accuracy on the weakness of the Revolution, its break with the past and disregard of history, its reliance on shallow generalizations untested by experience, and he rightly foresaw that it entailed the disappearance of the old, still partly feudal, world, which he had known.

Rousseau's *Contrat Social* has probably swayed and inspired infinitely more men than ever did Burke's speeches, and Rousseau ignored or despised history. But how poor and thin his pseudo-scientific generalizations seem to the modern reader compared with Burke's view that the State is no temporary partnership, but, since its ends cannot be obtained in many generations, must be one which is made not only between those who are living, but between them and those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born.<sup>7</sup>

Nor, to come down to our own time, can we doubt that if the statesmen who made the Treaty of Versailles had known more history—but they or their advisers must have known it, so we must say—if they had reflected more fully on the history of the last great settlement, mainly made by Wellington and Castlereagh, the world would have avoided many of the evils from which it is now suffering, and will no doubt long continue to suffer.

The value and limitations of the use of history for the statesman are well stated by Bryce.

'There are two substantial services which the study of history may render to politics. The one is to correct the use, which is generally the abuse, of the deductive or *a priori* method in politics. The other is to save the politician from being misled by superficial historical analogies. . . . The better trained any historical inquirer is, so much the more cautious will he be in the employment of what are called historical arguments in politics. . . . The value of

history for students of politics or practical statesmen lies rather in its power of quickening their insight, in its giving them a larger knowledge of the phenomena of man's nature as a political being and of the tendencies which move groups and communities of men, and thus teaching them how to observe the facts that come under their own eyes, and what to expect from the men with whom they have to deal.<sup>18</sup>

It is obvious to any one listening to the opinions expressed around him, and reading the press, how much of the intolerance and bitterness of the world is due to ignorance of history or to the uncritical acceptance of false or narrow views of history; and it is difficult to see how any man of education who desires to understand the world in which he lives can fail to take interest in history. Some men indeed of great ability are so absorbed in their specialist studies as to seem to be indifferent to anything outside of them, but if the philosopher is, as Plato insisted, the lover of all wisdom, not of this or that only, any one who has any tincture of philosophy in him will surely find in history, as it is to-day, a wider and more fruitful field—one practically inaccessible to Plato—than exists anywhere else. For it covers the whole of human action. Its study cannot fail to teach the lesson of the short range and fallibility of human judgement—*Videsne quantilla sapientia mundus regatur?*

And Philosophy herself is under a deep obligation to History. The facts with which a philosophy of

religion has to deal are supplied by the history of religion, in the most comprehensive sense of that term', said Pringle Pattison,<sup>9</sup> and whether we look backwards, as Spencer did, on the development of man from simpler forms as furnishing the explanation of what he is, or agree with Pringle Pattison that all ultimate or philosophical explanation must look, as Aristotle insisted, to the end,<sup>10</sup> it is clear that the stages through which man has passed must be full of interest for the philosopher. If Pringle Pattison's view is right, the later stages of man's career, during which he has become conscious of his own position and capacities, are of supreme interest. Certainly no one to-day, who thought of constructing a new philosophical system, could afford to neglect history.

Nor must we forget the dramatic interest of history. The pageant of history attracts the child, but it must continue to attract grown people with any spark of imagination, and it possesses an impressiveness which no work of fiction can have. Hamlet may hold us spell-bound for a time, but when we leave the theatre or put the book down, and begin to reflect upon it, we are aware that Hamlet was either a young undergraduate or a man of thirty, and he cannot have been both. Similar problems as *to* a man's age often puzzle the historian, but he knows that there is a solution, if the right document has been preserved and he can only find it. But we are haunted in Hamlet's case by the fear that perhaps

after all there is no solution, for two inconsistent versions may have been carelessly put together, or Shakespeare perhaps did not trouble to correct slips which would not attract notice on the stage. If we push our inquiry far enough, the limitations of the author sooner or later must shatter the illusion of reality. But when we stand at Versailles and call to mind Louis XIV and Saint-Simon and Marie Antoinette, and all the rest, when we see the gardens and the corridors and rooms which they trod, and think of their hopes and fears and intrigues, we know that we are in touch with that strange thing, a dead Reality, out of which we somehow came and into which we shall certainly go. And to that and to its endless variety and complexity there is no end, no limitation whatever, except our own ignorance.

And here a word may be added on the value of local history. It is a very humble corner of the great field. But it is a fascinating corner, for it brings us as close (perhaps closer) to the past as any form of history. It is deeply interesting in an English agricultural parish which you know to consider the changes which have occurred in the face of the country—a field which was ploughed in the Middle Ages and on which a quarter and a half of wheat was regarded as an excellent crop, you may know went down to grass in Tudor times, when sheep-farming paid, to be ploughed up in Napoleon's time—perhaps in 1801, when wheat touched 156s a quarter. In the agricultural depression of the

seventies it was laid down to grass, but ploughed up during the late war, when it yielded not 1½ quarters but 4 quarters of wheat or more. And now under the influence of farming depression it is again grass. This may not be a particularly useful form of knowledge, but to look at the familiar ground and see all this behind it is fascinating. And the houses, and the people who lived in them, are nearer to you and more familiar than can be those kings and statesmen, whose names fill the history books. And the local records are truer and more trustworthy. For the case drawn up for counsel to advise whether that farm could safely be purchased and counsel's reply, or the churchwardens', or merchants' accounts were not drawn up, as speeches and memoirs are, to impress posterity, but for a severely practical purpose for which it was necessary to be careful and accurate.

The variety of information required for understanding local history is surprising, for the reason that it is not like economic or constitutional history, merely one aspect of history. Agriculture and architecture, ecclesiastical and legal questions, especially that strange field of learning which would be quite incredible if it were not unquestionably true, the English Law of Real Property, economics and the Poor Law, roads and transport, are some of the branches of knowledge with which the local historian should have at least some general acquaintance, if he is to understand his documents. But the list is

hopelessly inadequate, because the documents are from their nature more or less disjointed, and since they originated in the varying needs of different people at different times, the local historian is liable to be faced at any moment by a document raising any sort or kind of question. And thus he has an unending variety of questions to pursue, each of which leads on to others, and his difficulty is really not the poverty or restriction of his materials, but rather how to reduce to order and proper proportion and to due relationship to each other the results of such diffuse inquiry.

And so, if the range of the local historian's information is limited, it is very near to the old Reality, and very much more easily understood than many of the facts of more important history. And this too is true of much of the work of the antiquary, whom Horace Walpole described as holding everything as worth preserving merely because it had been preserved. But in these days, when the face of England is changing with very great rapidity, these words should imply commendation rather than criticism. It would indeed be unwise now to despise either the *Essay on the mail shirt of the Great Earl*, or that on the left-hand gauntlet of *Hell-in-Harness*, should Monkbarns ever succeed in getting them published.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

**W**HAT then is the conclusion of the whole matter ? It is that history is simply that part of human experience which is no longer actual. Recent history is linked up directly with actual experience by memory. Older history gives us innumerable indications that the connexion is unbroken, but the available material gets rapidly poorer as we go back. Since rules of the same kind evidently apply to all our experience, the idea that<sup>^</sup> history is a science is a delusion, unless we are to assume that there is, or can be, a science of our actual life. Of this, though it has been postulated by some philosophers, there is in fact, no trace, since outside the metaphysician's library not Certainty, which is the mark of science, but Probability is the guide of our lives. And Probability invariably reckons with the Contingent, with which science can do nothing. Hence the historian's judgements have only the moral certainty which attaches to practical judgements, and he can only exercise the kind of impartiality which a good court of law shows. His judgements, like theirs, apply the moral and intellectual standards of his own day, and there is nothing of scientific finality about them.

Some philosophers and men of science have despised history, because it is immersed in the

concrete particular and cannot formulate conclusive generalizations. Those who think thus fail to see that history shares this defect, if indeed it is a defect, with most of the accumulated wisdom which guides the action of men. History, as reproducing for us the past experience of our race, is one of the most valuable, the most humanizing, the fullest of wisdom, of all our studies.

# NOTES

## CHAPTER I

i, ἱστορίη, which means properly inquiry, is said not to be found in the sense of History before the passage in Bk. vii. 96, in which Herodotus says that for the purpose of his history it is not necessary to give a list of certain names.

2. i. 22.

3. For Mommsen's view see *History of Rome* (Eng. trans.) iii. 466.

4. *Ann.* iii. 65. 1.

5. See the remarks on Tacitus' sources of information in Furneaux, *Annals of Tacitus* vol. i, Introduction (1884). But the materials for economic history were probably much better kept. See Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* p. 174. (1926.)

6. See the remarks of Lecky, *History of European Morals* i. 310 (edit. 1888).

7. See Comparetti's *Virgil* (English translation) p. 176.

8. See Oman, *Royal Historical Society's Proceedings* iv. 3, who gives some amusing instances.

9. Tout, *Medieval Forgers and Forgeries* (1920).

10. Holdsworth, *History of English Law* ii. 366.

11. See the remarks in Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World* ch. i (1926).

12. Holdsworth, *op. cit.* ii. 131, quoting Stubbs.

13. See Whitehead, *op. cit.* chap. iii.

14. See e.g. pp. 445, 446, vol. xxxv of his works (1818). See also Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, p. 73 (1920).

15. See e.g. Aubrey's address to the Reader in his *Perambulation*

of *Surrey* written 1673 to 1692 and Evelyn's letter. Aubrey had no claim whatever to be a great historian, but his enthusiasm and interest in a variety of small matters are the sign of a new outlook.

16. Clark, *The Seventeenth Century* p. 274.

17. See for a concentrated example of Voltaire's comments on the Jews and Old Testament history the article 'Histoire des rois juifs' in the *Dictionnairephilosophise*.

18. *Louis XIV* chap. xxxii.

19. See Herodotus iii. 134 and *Louis XIV* chap. xxii.

20. See Bury, *The Idea of Progress*.

21. The diligence and patience of these old antiquaries are amazing, as shown e.g. in Manning and Bray's *History of Surrey*, the first volume of which was published in 1804 after Manning's death. They had practically none of the lists and indexes and calendars which exist now to help the modern student.

22. Leslie Stephen's phrase—*English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* 1. 447.

23. *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* p. 14.

24. *Op. cit.* p. 80.

25. Round, *Feudal England* p. 539.

26. For a case where a great historian, Fustel de Coulanges, was completely misled by trusting entirely to his texts see Bloch, *Les Caracteres originaux de l'histoire rurale franfaise* p. xi (1931).

27. Round, attacking Freeman—*Feudal England* p. 455. There are some admirable remarks on the difference between the criticism of documents and the writing of history in the wider sense, and on the dangers of specialization in chapter v ('La critique d'erudition et les Audits') of Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction aux etudes historiques* (1897).

28. Langlois et Seignobos, *op. cit.* p. 26.

## CHAPTER II

1. See for instance, Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, for the unfortunate results on the Tubingen School of their adoption of Hegelian watchwords.
2. *Les Origines de la reforme*, by Imbart de la Tour (1905), p. xii,
3. Inaugural lecture (1867) in *Seventeen Lectures on the Study of Medieval and Modern History* p. 17.
4. *History* vii (1922) p. 82 on 'History and Philosophy', quoting Croce. 'Past history if it is really history, that is if it means something and is not an empty echo, is also contemporary.' The article was criticized by Professor Pollard. See 'An Apology for Historical Research', p. 162 of the same volume.
5. See the Introduction to the *Histoire de la litterature anglaise* (1864) pp. xv, xxiii, and xxxii (edit. 1892).
6. See 'Taine historien' by H. See in *Science et philosophie de l'histoire*.
7. Mr. R. G. Collingwood, author of *Speculum Mentis* (1924) (chapter vi of which deals with history) has written on Roman Britain, and M. Henri See, the author of a number of books on French economic history, has written *Science et philosophie de l'histoire* (1928) and *Science et philosophie d'apres la doctrine de M. timile Meyer son* (1932). Canon Streeter, a philosopher and theologian, has written on the Primitive Church (1929).
8. Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Macaulay* ii. 462.
9. Not that the charges are by any means all true. See Sir Charles Firth's article on 'Macaulay's Third Chapter' in *History* for October 1932.
10. *English Historical Review* i. 10(1886).
11. *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* p. 189.
12. Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction aux Etudes historiques* p. 185.

13. *Bibliography and Memoir of J. B. Bury* by Norman H. Baynes (1929) p. 104.
14. *Science et philosophie de l'histoire* (1928) p. 235.
15. Streeter, *Reality* p. 27.
16. Quoted in the first of two articles which appeared in the *Cornhill* for 1861, and were specially singled out by Mill for commendation (*Logic* p. 615, People's Edition 1884).
17. *Seventeen Lectures*. This was said in 1877.
18. Quoted in *Selected Epigraphs* by L. S. Wood (1930) p. 20.
19. Presidential Address, Royal Historical Society, 1925 (vol. viii).
20. *History of Civilisation in England* (1857) iii. 186 (ed. 1885).
21. Professor G. B. Adams and Professor E. P. Cheyney quoted in *Research on the Social Sciences* p. 226 (New York 1929).
22. Quoted in Gooch, *op. cit.* p. 345.
23. Unwin quoted by Prof. G. N. Clark in his inaugural lecture. See *History* xvii p. 105.
24. *History* 1(1916) p. 35.
25. Quoted in *Selected Epigraphs* p. 22.
26. Lecture (1883) in *Seventeen Lectures* p. 371.
27. *Les Origines de la réforme* ii. p. viii (1909).
28. *Memoir* by Norman Baynes p. 113. This view is not far from that of Faust when he says to Wagner:
 

Mein Freund, die Zeiten der Vergangenheit  
 Sind uns ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln;  
 Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst,  
 Das ist im Grund der Herren eigener Geist,  
 In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.
29. *English Historical Review* i. 10 (1886). See also 'History Objective and Subjective\*' by Professor Turbeville in

*History* xvii (1933), p. 289. But the Germans were far above Michelet as historians, for he 'had never learnt the job' of a historian. See 'Michelet et l'Histoire-Resurrection' in *Science et philosophie de l'histoire* by H. See.

30. *Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire* (1910) p. 41.

31. *Memoir* by Norman Baynes p. 104.

32. *Sec History* vol. xi (1926) p. 193.

33. 'History Objective and Subjective\*' in *History* vol. xvii. (1933) p. 289.

34. Inaugural Lecture (1895) reprinted in *Lectures on Modern History* p. 28.

### CHAPTER III

1. Quoted by Jevons, *Principles of Science* p. 273 (edit. 1887).

2. Whitehead, *Introduction to Mathematics* p. 14.

3. Lecky, *Eighteenth Century* iii. 268. Bancroft, *American Revolution*, quotes other similar forecasts, i. 524 (1852).

4. L. Dubreton, *Le Comte d'Artois* p. 117.

5. Harrop, *Wakefield* p. 137.

6. *Introduction aux itudes historiques* pp. 185-7.

7. p. 184.

8. p. 252.

9. p. 276.

10. Any one who has had to consider what records can be safely destroyed, or has used records in which some destruction has been allowed, knows how difficult it is to draw the line even in what seem simple cases, or to avoid the conclusion, generally however quite impracticable on account of considerations of space, that everything should be preserved.

### CHAPTER IV

1. See simile Meyerson, *Du cheminement de la pensie* (1931), for an elaborate defence of this view.

2. Quoted from his Inaugural Lecture in *Selected Epigraphs* p. 20.
3. See Langlois and Seignobos's remarks p. 40.
4. See the quotation from Faraday and the comments in Meyerson i. p. 232.
5. See the remarks in Joseph's *Logic* (1916) p. 370.
6. Quoted by Sidgwick, *History of Ethics* (1888) p. 248.
7. See *Research in the Social Sciences* (1929) p. 5.
8. H. See, *Science et philosophie de l'histoire* pp. 235, 251.
9. Ibid, chapter v.
- 10. p. 136.**
11. M. See would accept the view which M. fimile Meyerson in his *Du cheminement de la pensie* defends that all science is ultimately based on the desire of the human mind to rationalize or explain the confusion of experience. See especially p. 143.
- 12. p. 145.**
13. p. 149.
14. p. 159.
15. See especially pp. 228-30, and 255.
16. Quoted by See p. 175.
17. The time with which the mathematicians deal as a fourth dimension, assimilating it to space, is clearly not real time, the essence of which is to be irreversible, and it may therefore be neglected for our present purpose. The concepts of the theory of Relativity are strictly physical, and only deal with Time in so far as it is measurable, and 'the measurement of time offers little or no clue to its nature'. (Gunn, *The Problem of Time* (1929) p. 239.) The mathematician's time is indeed not intelligible to the uninstructed layman, who can only suppose it to be something akin to the fictitious quantities with which the mathematician can solve an otherwise

insoluble problem (see for an example Vaihinger, *Philosophie des Als Ob* chap. xxvi). In both cases there must be some relation to reality, or useful results could not be obtained, but in neither case is there any reason to suppose that the symbols used represent realities.

### CHAPTER V

1. Printed in Lambert, *History of Banstead* (1912) i. 316.
2. *Saint-Simon* by Boissier (1899) p. 89.
3. Langlois et Seignobos op. cit. p. 178.
4. *Hume* by Huxley (1887) chap. vii.
5. 'Our Knowledge', Locke had already declared, 'being very narrow, and we not happy enough to find certain truth, in everything which we have occasion to consider; most of the propositions we think, reason, discourse, nay act upon, are such, as we cannot have undoubted knowledge of their truth: yet some of them border so near upon certainty, that we make no doubt at all about them; but assent to them as firmly, and act, according to that assent, as resolutely as if they were infallibly demonstrated, and that our knowledge of them was perfect and certain' (Essay, Bk. IV chap. xv, On Probability). In the next chapter (of the degrees of assent) he considers the degrees of credibility of historical statements, adding 'I would not be thought here to lessen the credit and use of history; it is all the light we have in many cases, and we receive from it a great part of the useful truths we have, with a convincing evidence'.
6. *Rationalism in Europe* i. 136.
7. Meyerson, *Ducheminement de la pensie* ii. p. 407.

### CHAPTER VI

1. E. Fischer Baling in *Preussische Jahrbücher* Feb. 1933.

2. Quoted by Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*<sup>^</sup>. 458.
3. See in this connexion the remarks of Meyerson, *Du cheminement de lapensie* i. 286.
4. See e.g. the remarks of Professor Pollard in *History* v. 23 and Professor Morison xi. p. 203.
5. These words of Lord Morley (who at the time was criticizing Goldwin Smith) are quoted by Professor Pollard in *Histoty* iii. 218.
6. The question is even more insistent if we consider skill in the arts. The modern railway locomotive is a much more complicated machine than the Rocket, and is built with a variety of machine tools, which the builders of the Rocket never had—they relied largely on the manual skill of the workman. But it does not follow that the workman employed at Swindon to-day is a better workman than the man who helped to build the Rocket, nor for the matter of that than some of the skilled Neolithic workmen who chipped flints. It would not be difficult to maintain the thesis that our increase in command over our materials is accompanied by a decrease in our capacity to make a good use of them, that is to say that our skill decreases as we get more done for us with less trouble by using our scientific faculty. This is indeed substantially the charge so often brought against mass production by machinery. There is certainly this much of truth in the suggested thesis that the history of none of the higher arts shows any steady progress, but only fluctuation, the reason apparently being that although scientific advance may give the painter a new medium, or the musician a new instrument, it can do nothing to increase, or even to maintain the level of skill, which includes indeed itself a kind of knowledge, but one which is not reducible to scientific law, and is therefore not transmissible except by personal influence and

example, as for instance in schools like those of the Italian painters or medieval church builders.

**7. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* p. 360.**

**8. *English Historical Review* xvi (1901).**

9. This was substantially Stubbs's view. See his remarks on Hallam, p. 109 in 'Methods of Historical Study\*' (1877) in *Seventeen* "Lectures.

10. This is Dr. Gooch's opinion, *History* vii (1922) p. 191. *La Revolution* was published in 1911.

## CHAPTER VII

1. Tennant, *Philosophy of the Sciences* (1932), p. 86. See especially chapters iii and iv of that book, and also his *Philosophical Theology*I, especially p. 343. James Ward in Lecture I of the 'Realm of Ends' (1912) has some interesting remarks on the Historical Method, and speaks of 'the extravagant commonplace that history as unscientific had no interest for the philosopher'.

**2. *Poetics* ix.**

**3. *Advancement of Learning* Bk. ii.**

**4. See *Discours sur la methode* I and II.**

**5. See Webb, *A Century of Anglican Theology* p. 22. Kant tells us that in morals he was influenced by Rousseau, and Rousseau had a thoroughly unhistorical mind. See also the remarks of Pringle Pattison on the attitude of the eighteenth century in *The Philosophy of Religion* (1930) p. 5.**

6. See Prothero's Memoir of Seeley in the *Growth of British Policy* (1895).

**7. *Reflections on the French Revolution, Works* (ed. 1815) v. 184.**

**8. *American Commonwealth* (1889) ii. 487.**

9. *The Philosophy of Religion* p. 1. Whitehead urges that the complex character of human experience makes the appeal to history important. 'Metaphysics and theology alike require it\*' (*Adventures of Ideas* (1933) p. 210).
10. 'All explanation of the higher by the lower is philosophically a hysteron-proteron' (*The Idea of God* pp. 106, 107).

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