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History Extension

Stage 6

Source Book of Readings

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Henry Reynolds

Why Weren't We Told?

Viking, Ringwood, 1999

Introduction

Why were we never told? Why didn't we know? I have been asked these questions by many people, over many years, in all parts of Australia — after political meetings, after public forums, lectures, book readings, interviews. It hasn't mattered where I spoke, what size the audience, what the occasion or the actual topic dealt with.

Why didn't we know? Why were we never told?

Why do the same questions recur so frequently as though many people, at different times and in different places, were reading from one script?

Why do so many people ask the same questions of themselves, of me, of their education, their heritage, of the whole of Australian society?

In the rushed, much-interrupted conversations which take place at the end of lectures or forums, neither questions nor answers can be detailed or deeply considered. But I think what my many interrogators suggest is that they found the things I said personally significant to them. More to the point, they felt that they should have known these things themselves, and didn't. They wished they had known them before. They believed their education should have provided the knowledge, the information and hadn't done so. They felt let down, cheated, sold short.

Why were they never told? Why didn't they know?

In answering these questions it seemed necessary to turn the question around. How was it that I had the knowledge, the information, the necessary insights? How had I come by them? The fact that I was an academic, a professional historian, that I was paid to write, research and question, would be an easy but inadequate answer. Why had I chosen to spend so many years researching the relations between indigenous and immigrant Australians? What was the cause of my obsession? My education had been quite conventional — no doubt similar to that of many in my audiences. I had a standard state-school education in Tasmania — primary school from 1944 to 1949, secondary school during 1950 to 1954. I suspect it might have been slightly better than average, but not by all that much. I was certainly not taught about any of those things which now seem so important — matters relating to race, ethnicity, indigenous Australia, land rights, self-determination, multiculturalism. There were great gaps in what I was taught. It seems from today's perspective that I learnt very little about Australia itself, certainly not enough to prepare me to be an adequate citizen, a well-informed voter and a participant in public life.

The extent of that deficiency was not apparent to me at the time. My education seemed appropriate; appeared adequate. Obviously some teachers were much better, more inspiring, than others. Some subjects provided me with skills or knowledge or insight that has gone on being useful or relevant to life.

My teachers, for their part, never suggested that they were not satisfied with the subjects they were required to teach.

By the time I had completed my undergraduate and honours degrees I had discovered disciplines that I wished I knew more about — philosophy and economics, for instance — but that had been a matter of choice on my part.

A two-year sojourn in Europe made me realise that there were many aspects of cultural life that I knew very little about — painting and sculpture, architecture, music, opera, ballet, for instance. In all of these areas I found I was ill-informed and I set about teaching myself as much as I could in a short time using the vast public resources in the galleries, museums, concert halls and opera houses of London and half a dozen other European towns and cities.

But I felt ignorant and ill-informed in a different way when I returned to Australia to take up a job at the Townsville University College at the end of 1965. I was suddenly confronted with aspects of Australian life that I knew nothing about, things I had not even suspected. It was as though I had come to a country that was both familiar and foreign at one and the same time.

I met Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. I saw their poverty and the way they were often treated. I heard white Australians talk about them and to them. I began to understand the complex web of social relations, habits, customs and beliefs which both bound white and black together and yet held them far apart. There was a history at work, a powerful all-important history which pressed heavily on the present. I knew nothing about it even though I had both honours and a masters degree in history.

There had been nothing in my education on which to draw, to understand many of the things I was witness to, or things that I heard about from others. I knew little about the history of Aboriginal-European relations, nothing about contact and conflict on the frontier. I had no idea there had been massacres and punitive expeditions. I was ignorant about protective and repressive legislation and of the ideology and practice of white racism beyond a highly generalised view that ‘we’ had treated ‘them’ rather badly in the past. It was a ‘we’ that at least had the right orientation but it was ill-informed, sentimental and of little depth.

I can’t even remember having discussed such questions with anyone in all the hundreds of hours of student discourse and disputation. I had some awareness of the agitation to repeal the White Australia Policy. I was in favour of reform and had actually argued that way in a university debating competition. But I don’t think it was a matter that concerned me all that much.

So in answering the oft-asked questions: Why were we never told? Why didn’t we know? I explain that I too didn’t know, that I wasn’t told, but came to an understanding of race relations in Australia as a result of living in North Queensland and spending years of research in libraries and archives all around Australia and overseas.

This book, then, is written for those Australians who feel they were never told and wish they had been, for those who don’t realise they were never told and may not want to know anyway, and for those, mainly younger Australians who have been told much more but who can understand the attitudes of those who weren’t given their opportunities

As well as explaining how I have arrived at certain conclusions and adopted particular points of view, I will discuss what I currently think about a range of questions of national significance. It is a book of opinions. Many may also find it opinionated. In my own defence I can say that my views are based on things I have seen and heard, as much as they are on

reading and research, and that many of them have changed and evolved over long periods of time. They have not come easily or quickly.

Some of these opinions are about Australian history — about frontier violence and Aboriginal resistance, about pioneering and the Aboriginal contribution to Australian development. Some are about important contemporary political and legal questions like the Mabo and Wik cases, self-determination and sovereignty. Others relate to what can be broadly called cultural politics — issues such as white racism, guilt and shame, national identity and belonging, political correctness and the black-armband version of history.

I should begin my story with an incident, still vividly remembered, which occurred in the late 1960s soon after my arrival in North Queensland. It took place on Palm Island, a large Aboriginal settlement about 40 kilometres offshore from Townsville.

Eric Hobsbawm

On History

Abacus, 1998

First, about *telling the truth about history*, to use the title of a book by friends and colleagues of the author. I strongly defend the view that what historians investigate is real. The point from which historians must start, however far from it they may end, is the fundamental and, for them, absolutely central distinction between establishable fact and fiction, between historical statements based on evidence and subject to evidence and those which are not.

It has become fashionable in recent decades, not least among people who think of themselves as on the left, to deny that objective reality is accessible, since what we call 'facts' exist only as a function of prior concepts and problems formulated in terms of these. The past we study is only a construct of our minds. One such construct is in principle as valid as another, whether it can be backed by logic and evidence or not. So long as it forms part of an emotionally strong system of beliefs, there is, as it were, no way in principle of deciding that the biblical account of the creation of the earth is inferior to the one proposed by the natural sciences: they are just different. Any tendency to doubt this is 'positivism', and no term indicates a more comprehensive dismissal than this, unless it is empiricism.

In short, I believe that without the distinction between what is and what is not so, there can be no history. Rome defeated and destroyed Carthage in the Punic Wars, not the other way round. How we assemble and interpret our chosen sample of verifiable data (which may include not only what happened but what people thought about it) is another matter.

Actually, few relativists have the full courage of their convictions, at least when it comes to deciding such questions as whether Hitler's Holocaust took place or not. However, in any case, relativism will not do in history any more than in law courts. Whether the accused in a murder trial is or is not guilty depends on the assessment of old-fashioned positivist evidence, if such evidence is available. Any innocent readers who find themselves in the dock will do well to appeal to it. It is the lawyers for the guilty ones who fall back on postmodern lines of defence.

Second, about the Marxist approach to history with which I am associated. Though it is imprecise, I do not disclaim the label. Without Marx I would not have developed any special interest in history, which, as taught in the first half of the 1930s in a conservative German *Gymnasium* and by an admirable Liberal master in a London grammar school, was not an inspiring subject. I would almost certainly not have come to earn my living as a professional academic historian. Marx, and the fields of activity of young Marxist radicals, gave me my subjects of research and inspired the way I wrote about them. Even if I thought large parts of Marx's approach to history needed junking, I would still continue to pay my respects, profound though not uncritical, to what the Japanese call a *sensei*, an intellectual master to whom one owes a debt that cannot be repaid. As it happens, I continue (with qualifications to be found in these papers) to find Marx's 'materialist conception of history' the best guide by far to history, as the great fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Khaldun described it, namely as:

‘the record of human society, or world civilization; of the changes that take place in the nature of that society . . . ; of revolutions and uprisings by one set of people against another, with the resulting kingdoms and states with their various ranks; of the different activities and occupations of men, whether for gaining their livelihood or in various sciences and crafts; and in general, of all the transformations that society undergoes by its very nature.’

It is certainly the best guide to those like myself whose field has been the rise of modern capitalism and the transformations of the world since the end of the European Middle Ages.

But what exactly is a ‘Marxist historian’ as distinct from a non-Marxist historian? Ideologists on both sides of the secular wars of religion through which we have lived for much of this century have attempted to establish neat dividing lines and incompatibilities. On the one hand the authorities of the late USSR could not bring themselves to translate any of my books into Russian, even though their author was actually known to be a member of a Communist Party, and an editor of the English edition of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*. By the criteria of their orthodoxy they were not ‘Marxist’. On the other hand, more recently, no ‘respectable’ French publisher has so far been found willing to translate my *Age of Extremes*, presumably on the grounds that it is ideologically too shocking for Parisian readers, or, more likely, for those expected to review the book if it were translated. Yet, as my papers try to show, the history of the discipline which investigates the past has, from the end of the nineteenth century, at least until intellectual nebulosity began to settle over the historiographical landscape in the 1970s, been one of convergence and not separation. The parallelism between the *Annales* school in France and the Marxist historians in Britain has often been noted. Each side saw the other engaged on a similar historical project, though with a different intellectual genealogy, and though, presumably, the politics of their most prominent exponents were far from the same. Interpretations once identified exclusively with Marxism, even with what I have called ‘vulgar-Marxism’ have penetrated conventional history to an extraordinary degree. Half a century ago, it is safe to say, at least in Britain, only a Marxist historian would have suggested that the emergence of the theological concept of purgatory in the European Middle Ages was best explained by the shift in the economic base of the Church from reliance on the gifts of a small number of rich and powerful nobles to a broader financial base. Yet who could possibly classify either the eminent Oxford medievalist Sir Richard Southern, or Jacques Le Goff, whose book he reviewed along these lines in the 1980s, as an ideological, still less a political, follower or sympathizer of Marx?

I think this convergence is welcome evidence for one of the central theses of these essays, namely that history is engaged on a coherent intellectual project, and has made progress in understanding how the world came to be the way it is today. Naturally I would not want to suggest that one cannot or should not distinguish between Marxist and non-Marxist history, miscellaneous and ill-defined though the cargo of both these containers is. Historians in Marx’s tradition — and this does not include all who call themselves by that name — have a significant contribution to make to this collective endeavour. But they are not alone. Nor should their, or anyone’s, work be judged by the political labels they or others attach to their lapels.

Richard J Evans

In Defence of History

Granta, London, 1997

The History of History

1

However much they might have agreed on the need for accuracy and truthfulness, historians down the ages have held widely differing views on the purposes to which these things were to be put, and the way in which the facts they presented were to be explained. In medieval and early modern times, many historians saw their function as chronicling the working-out of God's purposes in the world. Things happened, ultimately, because God willed them to happen; human history was the playground of supernatural forces of Good and Evil. The rationalist historians of the Enlightenment substituted for this a mode of historical explanation which rested on human forces, but they still thought of their work as a species of moral illustration. In the greatest of the Enlightenment histories, for example, Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the actors are moral qualities rather than human beings, and the ultimate lesson is that superstition, fanaticism and religious belief, all of which were of course anathema to Enlightenment rationalists, were dangerous forces that had brought down one great and benign empire and could well wreak further havoc in the future if they were not eradicated. History was 'philosophy teaching by example'; human nature was universal, unchanging and unhistorical.

In the Romantic era, historians repudiated this kind of thinking. Under the influence of writers like Sir Walter Scott, they came to see the past as exciting because it was different. Under the influence of political theorists like Edmund Burke, they began to argue that it provided the only possible basis for the kind of political stability that had been so rudely shattered by the French Revolution of 1789. The purpose of history was seen not in providing examples for some abstract philosophical doctrine or principle, but simply in finding out about the past as something to cherish and preserve, as the only proper foundation for a true understanding and appreciation of the institutions of state and society in the present. The lead in this change of direction was provided by the German historian Leopold von Ranke, a scholar whose exceptionally long life and extraordinary productivity made him something of a legend. The author of over sixty works, including multi-volume histories of the Popes, of Germany in the time of the Reformation, and of the Latin and Germanic nations, he began a history of the world when he was eighty-three years of age and had completed seventeen volumes by the time of his death in 1886 at the age of ninety-one. He was converted to history by the shock of discovering that Scott's novel *Quentin Durward* was historically inaccurate. He determined therefore that he would apply the methods he had learned as a philologist to the study of historical texts in order to make such inaccuracy impossible in the future.

Ranke's contribution to historical scholarship was threefold. First, he helped establish history as a separate discipline, independent from philosophy or literature. 'To history,' he wrote in the preface to one of his works, 'has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high offices this work does not aspire: it wants only to show what actually happened.' This last phrase is perhaps Ranke's most famous, and it has been widely misunderstood. The German phrase which Ranke used

— *'Wie es eigentlich gewesen'* — is better translated as 'how it essentially was', for Ranke meant not that he just wanted to collect facts, but that he sought to understand the inner being of the past.

In pursuit of this task, said Ranke, the historian had to recognize that 'every epoch is immediate to God.' That is, God in His eternity made no distinction between periods of history; all were the same in His eyes. In other words, the past could not be judged by the standards of the present. It had to be seen in its own terms. This was the second major contribution which Ranke made to historical scholarship: the determination to strip away the veneer of posthumous condescension applied to the past by philosophizing historians such as Voltaire and to reveal it in its original colours; to try to understand the past as the people who lived in it understood it, even while deciphering hieroglyphs of interconnectedness of which they had been largely unaware. One conclusion that followed from this doctrine was that at any given time, including the present, whatever existed had to be accepted as divinely ordained. Ranke was a profoundly conservative figure, who equated the actual and the ideal and regarded the European states of his day as 'spiritual substances . . . thoughts of God'. This distanced him from the Prussian school of German historians, from nationalists such as Treitschke, who condemned his impartiality and regretted his universalism.. The fact that he regarded all states, not just Prussia, as supreme examples of God's purposes working themselves out on earth, gave him on the other hand a reputation for impartiality that greatly helped the spread of his influence abroad.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Ranke introduced into the study of modern history the methods that had recently been developed by philologists in the study of ancient and medieval literature to determine whether a text, say of a Shakespeare play or of a medieval legend like the *Nibelungenlied*, was true or corrupted by later interpolations, whether it was written by the author it was supposed to be written by, and which of the available versions was the most reliable. Historians, argued Ranke, had to root out forgeries and falsifications from the record. They had to test documents on the basis of their internal consistency, and their consistency with other documents originating at the same period. They had to stick to 'primary sources', eyewitness reports and what Ranke called the 'purest, most immediate documents' which could be shown to have originated at the time under investigation, and avoid reliance on 'secondary sources' such as memoirs or histories generated after the event. Moreover, they had to investigate and subject to the critical method all the sources relating to the events in which they were interested. They should not be content, as for example Gibbon had been, to rely on printed documents and chronicles generally available in libraries. They had instead to sally forth, as Ranke did, into the archives, to work their way through the vast unpublished hoards of original manuscripts stored up by the state chancelleries of Europe. Only then, by gathering, criticizing and verifying all the available sources, could they put themselves in a position to reconstruct the past accurately.

The application of philological techniques to historical sources was a major breakthrough. Ranke's principles still form the basis for much historical research and teaching today. History Special Subjects in many British universities, for example, offer a basic training in source-criticism; students are examined on extracts or 'gobbets' from set documents and are expected to comment on them in terms of their internal consistency, their relationship to other documents on the same subject, their reliability and their usefulness as a source. Questions of authenticity and attribution continue to be vitally important in historical research. Forgeries, as the lamentable case of the 'Hitler Diaries' showed over a decade ago, are still regrettably common; outright falsification and doctoring of the evidence abound in printed collections of documents and other publications relating to subjects such as the origins of the First World War and the Third Reich. They are even more common in medieval history. Technological innovation has added substantially to the Rankean armoury; the 'Hitler Diaries' were easily

exposed as forgeries by simple testing of the age of the paper on which they were written, which dated from the 1950s; perhaps Hugh Trevor-Roper (Lord Dacre), who originally 'authenticated' them for the London *Times* newspaper, should not have rested content with the fact that the name 'Adolf Hitler' was signed at the bottom of every page. Whatever the means they use, historians still have to engage in the basic Rankean spadework of investigating the provenance of documents, of enquiring about the motives of those who wrote them, the circumstances in which they were written, and the ways in which they relate to other documents on the same subject. The perils which await them should they fail to do this are only too obvious.

All these things have belonged to the basic training of historians since the nineteenth century, and rightly so. However many forgeries and falsifications there have been, they seldom escape undetected for long. Sceptics who point to the fact that all sources are 'biased', and conclude from this that historians are bound to be misled by them, are as wide of the mark as politicians who imagine that future historians will take their memoirs on trust. Nor is there anything unusual in the fact that a modern discipline places such heavy reliance on principles developed over a century and a half before: chemistry, for example, still uses the periodic table of elements, while medical research continues to employ the mid-nineteenth-century device of 'Koch's postulates' to prove that a micro-organism is the carrier of a particular disease. These analogies with scientific method point up the fact that when source-criticism was introduced into historical study, it too was regarded as a 'scientific' technique. Its use legitimated history as an independent profession, and those historians in other countries who wanted to establish themselves on a professional basis soon began to flock to Germany to undergo training at the feet of its leading exponents in Göttingen and Berlin.

In the course of this Rankean revolution, the university based historical seminar in which members of the profession were trained, wrote the American historian Herbert Baxter Adams, had 'evolved from a nursery of dogma into a laboratory of scientific truth.' The French historian Fustel de Coulanges, of Strasbourg University, declared in 1862: 'History is, and should be, a science.' The understanding of science which these claims implied was rigorously inductive. Out there, in the documents, lay the facts, waiting to be discovered by historians, just as the stars shone out there in the heavens, waiting to be discovered by astronomers; all the historian had to do was apply the proper scientific method, eliminate his own personality from the investigation, and the facts would come to light. The object of research was thus to 'fill in the gaps' in knowledge — a rationale that is still given as the basis for the vast majority of PhD theses in history today. As the most widely-used primer in historical method at the time, by the French historians Langlois and Seignobos, remarked, 'When all the documents are known, and have gone through the operations which fit them for use, the work of critical scholarship will be finished. In the case of some ancient periods, for which documents are rare, we can now see that in a generation or two it will be time to stop.' Similar beliefs were indeed common in the natural sciences: when the German physicist Max Planck took up his studies in the 1870s, for example, he was warned by his professor that it would be a waste of time, since there was nothing left to discover in the field.

But these views rested on a series of misapprehensions. The belief that all the evidence left to posterity by the past could actually be surveyed and evaluated was already beginning to look less plausible even before the end of the nineteenth century, as new techniques and discoveries in archaeology began to open up whole new areas of knowledge even about the most distant periods in time. From early on in the twentieth century, too, historians began to look away from the narrow confines of the history and antecedents of the nation-state towards economic history, social history, cultural history and, subsequently, other new branches of historical enquiry as well. New questions, it seemed, could render previously neglected areas of evidence freshly meaningful. And as the passing of time continued to consign new ages to

history, historians also began to recognize the almost exponential growth that was taking place in the quantity of source material available to them. Late-nineteenth-century American and European society was not only vastly more populous than before, it not only produced many more documents, reflecting both the increase of literacy and the rapidly increasing functions of the state, it also generated new kinds of sources, from mass newspapers to photographs and films. 'The history of the Victorian age will never be written,' declared Lytton Strachey in a fit of ironic despair: 'we know too much about it.'

Not only the idea of the final discovery of all the facts that could be known, but also the notion of a truly scientific history, began to seem more than a little shaky by the turn of the century too. Many of the advocates of a scientific approach to history failed to practise what they preached. A. F. Pollard, founder of the Institute of Historical Research at London University, established to introduce professional scientific training for history postgraduates, made little use of manuscript sources in his own work on Tudor history, preferring instead to use the transcripts and summaries provided in the *Calendars of State Papers*, which of course were shot through with inevitable mistakes and *lacunae*, seriously reducing the reliability of his writings. Even the great Ranke was open to criticism according to the criteria which he himself did so much to establish. His writing, far from being 'colourless', as some thought, was suffused with metaphor. His belief that he was writing objective history derived to a great extent from the fact that he based a great deal of his work on the dispatches of Venetian ambassadors to various European states, documents which themselves gave a deliberate impression of neutrality and value-free reporting. As the British historian John Pemble has pointed out, 'To the next generation Ranke was not Rankine enough.' His Venetian sources were partial, selective and narrow, and he made too little use of other archival material; only in this way, indeed, was he able to write so much. 'Flaubert once commented,' as Pemble remarks, 'that writing history was like drinking an ocean and pissing a cupful. Ranke it seemed was doing the opposite.'

The realization that the founders of scientific history had all too often failed to follow their own precepts did not stop historians before the First World War from proclaiming the virtues of the scientific approach: on the contrary, it merely spurred them to greater efforts. In 1903, in a famous inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History in Cambridge, J.B. Bury declared: 'History is a science, no less and no more . . . History is not a branch of literature. The facts of history, like the facts of geology or astronomy, can supply material for literary art . . . but to clothe the story of human society in a literary dress is no more the part of a historian as a historian, than it is the part of an astronomer to present in an artistic shape the story of the stars.' Bury pointed up the contrast between history as literature and history as science by referring to the example of the man he called the 'greatest living historian', the German, Theodor Mommsen. Mommsen's stature as a historian lay, Bury declared, not in his authorship of a widely-read Roman history, which merely gave him a reputation as a 'man of letters' (indeed, it won him the Nobel Prize for literature), but in his detailed critical compilation of Roman inscriptions and his specialized studies on Roman law. Here was the realm in which he had applied the scientific method; here was his true claim, therefore, to greatness as a historian. It was this example, Bury implied, that others should follow.

2

One member of the audience at that lecture in Cambridge in 1903 was the twenty-six-year-old George Macaulay Trevelyan, who was to be appointed to the Regius Chair when Bury died in 1927. Trevelyan took the lecture as a deliberate personal insult to his great-uncle, the Whig historian Lord Macaulay, whose *History of England* had been one of the greatest literary sensations of the early Victorian era. He rushed into print with an uncharacteristically savage denunciation, in his essay 'Clio: A Muse' — referring in this title

to the muse of history in Ancient Greek mythology. The 'crusade' which Bury and others were waging against the 'artistic and emotional treatment of the whole past of mankind', said Trevelyan, had become so successful that it now threatened 'the complete annihilation of the few remaining individuals' who still thought history was an art. If history was merely a 'chronicle of bare facts arranged on scientific principles', then 'literature, emotion and speculative thought' would be 'banished' from the human race's contemplation of its own past.' In his long career, Trevelyan did much to bridge the gap between the historian and the public in such widely popular works as his *English Social History*. Contrary to what many of his detractors have alleged, he was thoroughly professional both in his university career and in his research, which he based, especially in the case of his *magnum opus*, a magnificent three-volume history of *England under Queen Anne*, on scholarship that was as rigorous as it was extensive. But although he paid due regard to the 'scientific' aspects of his subject, he thought that 'the idea that the facts of history are of value as part of an exact science confined to specialists is due to a misapplication of the analogy of physical science.' The natural sciences, he thought, were valuable in terms of practical utility and in the deduction of laws of cause and effect, whether or not the general public understood them. But history had no practical value unless it was widely disseminated, and nobody had ever succeeded in deriving general laws of cause and effect from history in such a way that they stood the essential test of such laws in the physical sciences, namely by enabling people to predict the future. Trevelyan conceded that 'the collection of facts, the weighing of evidence as to what events happened, are in some sense scientific; but not so the discovery of the causes and effects of these events.'

In reaching this judgment, he was echoing the original principles of Ranke, who had distinguished in his day between the rigorous principles of source-criticism needed for an accurate representation of events in the past, and the intuitive method needed to establish the 'interconnected-ness' of these events and penetrate to the 'essence' of an epoch. It was this latter operation, which Ranke conceived of in Romantic and religious terms, and Trevelyan in literary and aesthetic terms, that made the difference, in the view of both of them, between the chronicler and the historian. History, said Trevelyan, was a mixture of the scientific (research), the imaginative or speculative (interpretation) and the literary (presentation). What the historian required was not 'more knowledge of facts', which in any case would always be incomplete. Nobody was ever going to unravel scientifically the mental processes of twenty million Frenchmen during the Revolution of 1789. Nor could interpretations of this event be arrived at by a mere process of induction. The causes and effects of the Revolution could never be known scientifically like the causes and effects of some chemical reaction, nor could they be grounded in discoverable laws like the law of gravity or the second law of thermodynamics. The historian who would give the best interpretation of the Revolution was the one who, 'having discovered and weighed all the important evidence available, has the largest grasp of intellect, the warmest human sympathy, the highest imaginative power.'

Trevelyan was essentially a *nationalist* historian; his major works were histories of England, and his objection to the 'scientific' conception of history was based not least on the fact that it was German. 'Who is the mother country to Anglo-Saxon historians?' he asked in his essay. 'Some reply "Germany", but others of us prefer to answer "England". The methods and limitations of German learning presumably suit the Germans, but are certain to prove a strait waistcoat to English limbs and faculties. We ought,' he declared, 'to look to the free, popular, literary traditions of history in our own land.' And he lamented the fact that 'the historians of to-day were trained by the Germanizing hierarchy to regard history not as . . . a "story", but as a "science".' The Germanizing tendencies of the period, he thought, were authoritarian and hierarchical, and unsuited to the liberal intellectual traditions of his own country.

Just as Trevelyan looked to English traditions and circumstances as the source of historical inspiration, so in other European countries, too, historians rejected the universalising

tendencies of both Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire and Gibbon and Romantics such as Ranke. Popular, nationalist history had reached its apogee in Britain with Macaulay, in France with Michelet, in Germany with Treitschke; and it was not without its influence even on the most 'scientific' of scholars in the late nineteenth century. Virtually all historians, for example, assumed that the nation-state was the primary object of historical study. The emerging historical profession was dominated by the view that the historian's task lay principally in the study of the origins and development of states and in their relations with one another. Even the most narrow and rigorous of learned articles were usually written within this framework; while huge resources of scientific scholarship were lavished on the publication of vast documentary collections designed to provide the basic materials for national histories, such as the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* or the *Calendars of State Papers*.

The Prussian school of historians, led by figures such as Droysen, were happy to proclaim that 'the German nation has outstripped all others' in its application of the critical method to historical sources; but they were just as critical as Trevelyan was of the notion that this was sufficient to constitute history in itself. 'History,' stated Droysen, 'is the only science enjoying the ambiguous fortune of being required to be at the same time an art.' He complained that because the German middle classes had for so long regarded 'the German method in history [as] pedantic, exclusive, unenjoyable', they all read Macaulay instead, or turned to the great French historian and statesman Thiers, so that 'German historical judgment' and even 'German political judgment' was 'formed and guided . . . by the rhetorical superiority of other nations.' The German middle classes did indeed look to the examples of English liberalism and the principles of the French Revolution for much of the nineteenth century. The Prussian school of historians set themselves the task of demonstrating through a mixture of scientific method, historical intuition and literary skill the superiority of Prussian values and their inevitable triumph in the unification of Germany in 1871. They could claim at least some credit for the drift of middle-class opinion in Germany from a liberal to a more authoritarian form of nationalism in the three decades leading up to the First World War.

Already before 1914, therefore, the ability of the scientific method to deliver a neutral and value-free history was under some doubt. Its credibility was even more severely shaken by the events of 1914—18 and their aftermath. Professional historians in every country rushed into print with elaborate defences of the war aims of their own governments and denunciations of other great powers for having begun the conflict. Substantial collections of documents on the origins of the war were produced with all the usual scholarly paraphernalia and edited by reputable professionals, but on principles of selection that seemed manifestly biased to colleagues in other countries. The rigorous scientific training which they had undergone seemed to have had no effect at all in inculcating a properly neutral and 'objective' attitude to the recent past; a view that was underlined as the 1920s progressed by the continuing violent controversies between learned historians of different nations about the origins of the war. Moreover, among British, French and American historians, the support for the war of the overwhelming majority of the 'scientific' German colleagues whose work they so admired came as a further blow. Many historians who had studied in Germany now rushed to denounce German scholarship as pedantic and anti-democratic. 'The age of German footnotes,' as one of them said in 1915, 'is on the wane.' And for G. M. Trevelyan, the defeat of the Germans also represented the defeat of 'German "scientific history"', a mirage which had 'led the nation that looked to it for political prophesy and guidance' about as far astray as it was possible to go.

The war also revealed previous, apparently neutral scholarly histories of, for example, Germany, or nineteenth-century Europe, to have been deeply flawed in their interpretations. Events such as the Russian Revolution, the Treaty of Versailles, the triumph of modernism in art, music and literature, increased this sense of disorientation among historians. Reflective

historians of the older generation realised that their faith in objectivity had accompanied their sense of living in an ordered and predictable world. One senior American historian, Clarence Alvord, confessed after the war that he had always 'conformed to the canons of my science . . . walked along the straight and narrow road of approved scholarship . . . learned to babble the words of von Ranke . . . prided [myself] on telling the story *wie es eigentlich gewesen* . . .' This had all been very fine, he said, while the world was a safe place to live in and people had been able to believe in ordered, rational and inevitable progress. But now, he said, 'all the spawn of hell roamed at will over the world and made of it a shambles . . . The pretty edifice of . . . history which had been designed and built by my contemporaries was rent asunder . . . The meaning we historians had read into events was false, cruelly false.' If unpredictable and uncontrollable forces were shaping the present, it seemed, then the previous belief of historians that they could understand by a simple process of induction the forces that shaped the past now seemed dangerously naive.

Some historians even despaired of finding any pattern or meaning in the past at all. As the English liberal historian H. A. L. Fisher remarked in the preface to his widely-read *History of Europe*, published in 1934:

'Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations, only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.... The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next.'

History, in this bewildered view, was just 'one damned thing after another', devoid of meaning, and beyond interpretation.

Such views were reinforced at a more theoretical level by the changing nature of the natural sciences in this period. Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (1913), widely popularised after it was confirmed by astronomical observation in 1919, helped create an intellectual climate in which it was thought that the 'aspect of things' changed with the position of the observer. The idea of the relativity of observer and fact was applied to history by a number of inter-war philosophers as well, in particular by the liberal Italian thinker Benedetto Croce and his English counterpart R. G. Collingwood. In doing so, they were echoing pre-war German philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey, who had begun to take a sceptical view of the possibility of objective knowledge about the past. And they paralleled the much more far-reaching doubts of cultural pessimists in Germany under the Weimar Republic, for whom Germany's defeat in the First World War had rendered history largely meaningless. Croce argued that historians were guided in their judgment as to what documents and events were important in the past, and what were unimportant, by their present concerns. All history was thus written, consciously or unconsciously, from the perspective of the present. 'All history,' in Croce's famous phrase, 'is contemporary history.' Collingwood went even further by arguing that 'all history is the history of thought,' because the documents left to the historian by the past were meaningless unless the historian reconstituted the thought that they expressed. 'History,' Collingwood concluded, 'is the reenactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying.'

Leaving aside for the moment the merits and defects of such arguments, what all this did in broad terms was to blur the distinction commonly made by pre-war historians, even those of a literary bent such as G. M. Trevelyan, between fact and interpretation. It was not a case, in their view, of the historian observing, collecting and verifying the facts and then 'interpreting'

them. The very act of observing and collecting them was itself governed by the historian's *a priori* beliefs about the past. Such views gained currency not least because, as E. H. Carr wrote, 'after the First World War, the facts seemed to smile on us less propitiously than in the years before 1914, and we were therefore more accessible to a philosophy which sought to diminish their prestige.' The crisis-ridden decades of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, with their economic privations, international conflicts, revolutionary upheavals, and perhaps above all their revelations, in Italy, Spain, Russia and Germany, of violence and inhumanity on a scale, and to a degree, previously thought barely possible, severely undermined the belief in progress that had sustained the historians of the pre-war era. The new scientific discoveries and concepts destroyed the belief that history writing would one day come to an end when everything had been discovered. If 'discovery' depended not least on the intentions and assumptions of historians influenced by the context of their own age, then it became clear that every fresh age would have to research and write the history of all past ages from scratch, all over again.

3

All these developments reflected the fact that the chaotic and disturbed inter-war period was not, on the whole, a great age of historical scholarship. Economic dislocation in Europe and America meant that historians' income declined, relatively few new historians were trained, and in the many European countries — the majority, in fact — which fell victim to dictatorships, free historical enquiry ceased. It was only after the Second World War, as economic recovery began, and the mass armies of the 1930s and 1940s were finally demobilised, that a new generation of historians entered the profession. They were immediately confronted with the task of overcoming the scepticism and disorientation of their predecessors in the inter-war years. Many historians tried to reassert what they regarded as the traditional values of historical scholarship which they thought had been perverted by the political and intellectual pressures and upheavals of the previous few decades. Their mentor and example in England was the Polish-born historian Sir Lewis Namier, whose scholarship was famously painstaking and exact. As one of his pupils noted, he thought that 'If history was not to be a catalogue of suppositions . . . it had to be solidly based on minute facts.' Namier thought that Freud rather than Ranke had established the scientific principles on which the study of the past could be more solidly based than before, and to this extent he was prepared to update the notion of 'scientific' history. But the consequences he drew from this belief were far removed from those of the speculative American psychohistorians of later decades. Namier always eschewed speculation, so he never thought that he could find out enough about an individual in the past to subject his character to psychoanalysis. However, he did think, as a result of his Freudian views, that what drove people to do the things they did were essentially personal motives and forces rather than ideologies or beliefs.

Namier used this approach, combined with formidably thorough and exhaustive research, to devastating effect in his most famous book, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*. The book was launched as a frontal assault on the 'Whig interpretation' of British history, which saw eighteenth-century politics in terms of a struggle between the forces of liberty and constitutionalism, led by the Whigs, and absolutism and royal power, represented by the Tories. In the Whig view, the latter cause was eventually taken up by George III and his pet minister Lord Bute. The new King's tendencies towards absolutism lost England the American colonies under the Premiership of Lord North. Namier looked beyond these ideologies to the personal relationships of the politicians involved. Investigating them minutely, he suggested that 'party' was irrelevant, ideology unimportant; what mattered was the struggle of individuals through patronage and kinship networks for power, money and influence. Seen from this perspective, what led to the political crisis was the disruption to these networks caused by the accession of a new King, not any particular beliefs which he

might have held, or political principles with which he might have clashed. In this way, Namier's rapier-like scholarship deflated and destroyed the Whig interpretation of British history by puncturing it at its most vulnerable point.

There was no doubting that this was a major and significant scholarly achievement.. When I was an undergraduate in the 1960s, Namier's *Structure of Politics* was considered by history tutors to have been the greatest work ever penned about English history, and Namier was a god. 'Namier,' one historian said, 'perhaps, has found the ultimate way of doing history.' 'If Namier had his way,' another remarked, 'all controversies would cease, and we would know as much historical truth as is humanly possible.' 'Fifty years from now,' one of his disciples declared at the beginning of the 1960s, 'all history will be done as Sir Lewis does it.' Namier, as even E. H. Carr admitted, was 'the greatest British historian to emerge on the academic scene since the First World War.' Seen from the perspective of the 1990s, however, these claims appear ludicrously inflated. Typically, what British empiricists admired in Namier was the thoroughness of his scholarship; they more or less ignored his Freudianism as an embarrassing but excusable continental heresy. Many historians since Namier have matched his painstakingly high standards of archival scholarship. They have long since reestablished the centrality of party labels and party ideology to the politics of the majority of the eighteenth century and made the 1760s, Namier's chosen decade, seem rather exceptional by comparison. Nobody nowadays would maintain that George III's constitutional practice was the same as that of his predecessors, and assiduous historians have made the inevitable discovery that Namier, in his anxiety to exculpate the King, was highly selective in his use of evidence and not above 'pruning' his quotations from the sources to serve his argument. The belief that Namier had found a new method of writing history was misplaced. Already in the 1950s, there were those who complained that he had 'taken the mind out of history' in his reduction of political action to the operation of individual self-interest. In the hands of his pupils and emulators, and indeed eventually in his own, his method degenerated into mindless prosopography, ending up with a series of narrow and arid studies of eighteenth-century cabinets, and producing that great white elephant of twentieth-century British historical scholarship, the huge (and hugely expensive) multi-volume *History of Parliament*, a compilation which amounts in the end to little more than a minutely researched biographical dictionary of MPs through the ages; flattering to MPs, which is no doubt why they subsidise it, but of little influence in advancing historical understanding in a larger sense.

Like H.A.L.Fisher, Namier saw no pattern in history, and distrusted ideas and ideologies, an approach which was reassuring to the pragmatism of British intellectuals. He despised and distrusted the masses whose emergence on to the social and political scene in the wake of the post-war Labour government was so threatening to conservative university dons. Insofar as he raised the standards of English historical scholarship with his meticulous, indeed obsessive pursuit of unpublished manuscript materials, he undoubtedly performed a useful service. But English historians were excessively intimidated by this, and thought that Namier had replaced Whig myth with true objectivity. He had not. Namier's work did not attract much attention when it first appeared in 1927. He really came into his own after the war. His views held sway among British historians in the 1950s and 1960s not least because they were well suited to the atmosphere of the Cold War, in which the Communist advocacy of the interests of the masses, belief in the 'laws' of history and progress, and enthronement of ideology and belief at the centre of the historical process and historical interpretation, were thought of by liberals and conservatives as principles to be combated in the interests of the freedom of the individual. Soviet historians, it was believed, had betrayed the ideals of factual accuracy, neutrality and detachment in the same way as Nazi historians had. History had become a means of indoctrination, pressed into the service of the state, and of the spread of Communism. Western history, on the contrary, was now held to represent the virtues of accuracy, objectivity and truthfulness.

The Cold War reassertion of objectivity which underpinned Namier's overwhelming influence in Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s also took place in the philosophy of science, where Sir Karl Popper, a philosopher of Viennese origin who dedicated much of his life to disputing the claims of Marxism to be a scientific doctrine, reasserted the objective nature of scientific knowledge in two highly influential works, *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Popper argued that objective knowledge could best be approached through propositions for which one could specify the conditions under which they might be falsified. Theories — such as Marxism — which accounted for everything, and which could be adapted to any circumstances, were merely metaphysical; only theories which did not claim to explain everything, and yet which resisted attempts to prove them false, were truly scientific. Popper excoriated the Marxist view that history had a discernible direction, and was subject to laws; objective knowledge of history, he said, could only be obtained in respect of short- or medium-term developments, where it was clear what evidence was needed to falsify the interpretations put forward. No historical evidence could 'disprove' the idea that history was moving through stages towards the goal of a communist society, because every conceivable kind of evidence could be adapted to fit the theory if so desired. On the other hand, the idea that (for example) the First World War was caused by German aggression could be falsified (in theory at least), because it was possible to specify the kind of evidence that would be needed to prove or disprove it.

4

This reassertion of historical objectivity came at a time in the 1950s and 1960s when the historical profession was reestablishing itself, undergoing slow but steady growth, and recapturing the social and financial position it had enjoyed in the late nineteenth century. Not only Britain and the USA, but other countries too experienced similar developments. In West Germany, the growing prosperity brought about by the post-war 'economic miracle' allowed historians, like other university professors, to regain much of the power and status they had had before the upheavals of Weimar and the anti-intellectual assaults of Nazism. A determination to distance themselves from the outrageous lies and distortions of Nazi historiography gave them a belief in the value of an 'objective' approach to history that has never entirely deserted them since. The German historians of the post-war generation, the first to have reached professional maturity in the post-war era, eagerly imported the theories and methods of American and above all neo-Weberian sociology into their work, in an attempt to escape from the perils of subjectivity which had engulfed the old tradition of liberal-nationalist historiography in their country in the 1930s and 1940s. So pervasive was the influence of the social sciences on German historiography that there were proposals to dissolve history as a separate subject in the secondary school curriculum and incorporate it into social studies, citizenship education, political science and the like; while university undergraduates were now taught, as indeed they still are in Germany, to present their work not in the traditional form of literary essays but after the manner of social-scientific research reports instead. The rhetorical style of the social sciences still pervades the work of professional historians in Germany too, with a passive, anonymous written style dominant, all reference to the author as an individual eliminated, and the word 'I' banished even from the preface and acknowledgements of the typical German research monograph or work of historical synthesis. The cult of the individual under Nazism provoked a similar negative reaction among German historians. They avoided biography and concentrated on writing the history of people in the past mainly as a history of averages, groups and global trends.

The same decade saw the invasion of the social sciences into history in Britain as well, launched by a famous issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1966, in which a series of young historians heralded the transformation of their discipline by imported theories and

methods from anthropology, social theory, and statistics. Beginning with E.H. Carr himself, historians queued up to urge history and the social sciences to move closer together. Writing in 1976, Lawrence Stone claimed that the influence of the social sciences was refining the historian's conceptual apparatus and research strategies, while rigorous quantification was destroying many cherished historical myths. The social sciences were posing new questions for the historian to answer, new hypotheses to test, and transforming the discipline beyond recognition as a result. In France, too, a 'scientific' and 'objective' approach to the past gained in prestige and influence in the post-war years. It was exemplified above all in the group of historians associated with the journal *Annales*, who had begun their work before the war but only really gained significant influence after it. By incorporating the methods of economics, sociology and especially geography and statistics into their approach to the past, the *Annales* historians thought that it would be possible to make history far more objective and scientific than ever before. The traditional methods and objects of enquiry no longer sufficed. History should be the central, synthesising discipline of the social sciences. It had to quantify. 'History that is not quantifiable,' remarked Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, one of the school's leading exponents, in 1979, 'cannot claim to be scientific.' 'Tomorrow's historian,' he added, 'will have to be able to program a computer in order to survive.'

These beliefs reached their most extreme form, perhaps, in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of 'social science history'. One of its principal exponents, the econometric historian Robert Fogel, drew a sharp distinction between 'scientific' and 'traditional' history. Scientific history, made possible above all by the computer, rested not on vague, incomplete, implicit and inconsistent sets of assumptions about human behaviour in the way that traditional history did, but on explicitly elaborated, sometimes mathematical models that could be rigorously tested by quantitative means. It applied not to individuals but to groups, and sought to develop not particular explanations but general hypotheses which could be statistically tested. It assumed that there were systematic relationships between events, structures and processes in history. It was neutral and non-ideological. It tended to be carried out by teams of scholars, just as experimental programs in the natural sciences did, rather than by the individual scholars who were the norm for the researcher in traditional history. And it addressed itself not to a wider public but to a specialist readership of fellow-scientists just as the natural sciences did.

Scientific methods used in this way, argued Fogel, were overturning the received wisdom of traditional history on many points and thus proving their superiority. Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group of demographic historians, for instance, had demonstrated the statistical prevalence of the nuclear family in pre-industrial society and established a relatively high age at marriage, confounding traditional historians' belief in the dominance of extended family forms and the normality of marriage at a very early age. Similar, major advances in knowledge had come in many branches of economic history through the application of scientific, statistical methods. Convinced that not only demographic and economic history, but also social and political history, indeed all forms of history, had to be put on to this new scientific basis, the 'cliometricians' of the 1970s unrolled a vastly ambitious program of disciplinary transformation which was intended to spell the end of traditional history altogether. There was a widespread feeling in the 1970s that 'traditional' history had proved vulnerable to the criticisms of relativists like Carr because it had not been scientific enough. By the end of the decade, there was a general consensus among observers of the historical profession that, as Georg G. Iggers put it, historical scholarship over the decades had become 'scientifically ever more rigorous', and 'historians have become more committed than ever to the scientific ideal of history.'

But were the differences between 'scientific' and 'traditional' history in fact so very great? Not surprisingly, Sir Geoffrey Elton did not think so. He pointed to the fact that what he had

described as 'traditional' history was itself widely regarded by its defenders as 'scientific' well into the second half of the twentieth century. Teamwork was common in some areas in 'traditional' history too, from the editing of documents to the compilation of prosopographies. Cliometrics had delivered only on a very limited number of generally rather narrow questions. When it came to the really big issues in history, it had to remain silent, because they could not be solved by quantitative methods. A glance at *Social Science History*, the flagship journal of the cliometricians, will easily support Elton's claim. Moreover, it quickly became clear that the ability of Fogel's scientific methods to settle beyond dispute even the questions they did address was highly questionable. In 1974, Fogel and his collaborator Stanley L. Engerman published a formidable two-volume study of slavery in the old American South. Full of elaborate statistical charts, tables and equations, it claimed to represent a new level of scientific rigour in testing well-worn hypotheses. The result was a set of conclusions which overturned existing, 'traditional' historical orthodoxy. Slavery was not, as had previously been thought, unprofitable, economically inefficient, and bad for the slaves. Fogel and Engerman argued that the economic efficiency of slavery was so high that slaves benefited from standards of living at least as high as those of free workers at the time. In defending themselves against accusations of political incorrectness for espousing such a view, the two authors suggested that this showed how proud the slaves could be of their achievements, and how dubious, even racist, were claims that their labour had been unproductive.

Fogel and Engerman were immediately attacked by their fellow-historians for flawed statistical procedures, misuse and over-interpretation of sources, vague hypotheses, and plain inaccuracy. One group of critics concluded, at the end of a lengthy re-examination of the data:

'Time on the Cross is full of errors. The book embraces errors of mathematics, disregards standard principles of statistical inference, mis-cites sources, takes quotations out of context, distorts the views and findings of other historians and economists, and relies upon dubious and largely unexplained models of market behaviour, economic dynamics, socialisation, sexual behaviour, fertility determination, and genetics (to name some).'

Moreover, all the errors apparently had a 'consistent tendency' to work in favour of Fogel's and Engerman's overall argument. When the faults were corrected and the evidence was re-examined, the two authors' entire argument simply fell apart. Quantification and statistics had thus signally failed to deliver the 'scientific' certainties which their advocates had proclaimed.

Moreover, the cliometricians' claim to be achieving a higher, indeed virtually unassailable level of objectivity and certainty through the use of properly scientific methods was also being undermined by new developments in the philosophy of science. After the broadly empiricist position of Popper had held sway in the 1950s, Thomas Kuhn's post-empiricist view of science, expounded in 1962 in his enormously influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, took over as the dominant explanatory model. In place of the existing view of science as continuous progress, Kuhn argued that most scientists worked, often unconsciously, within a 'paradigm' or set of theories, assumptions, research agendas and so on, which guided their experiments and ensured that their observations matched the theories they held. Paradigms could thus not be falsified, and anomalies, where the data did not fit the paradigm, were usually ignored or worked around. Only when the anomalies had accumulated to a point where they caused a general sense of unease in the scientific community did the search for a new paradigm begin. The disadvantage of a new paradigm was often, however, that it failed to account for some phenomena that the old one succeeded in explaining. And different paradigms constituted different mental worlds, which were not comparable with one another. Thus science was not necessarily progressive, and falsifiable scientific theories were not established by experimental confirmation, but maintained by intellectual consensus. This

view was widely attacked by scientists as irrationalist and relativist, portraying their disciplines as guided by 'mob rule'. But by the 1970s it had become the dominant view among philosophers of science and was being applied to other forms of knowledge as well. To be sure, Kuhn believed that the natural sciences progressed entirely free of any external influences and insisted that his ideas were not applicable to other fields. Nor is the Kuhnian notion of a paradigm really applicable to history; historians in general do not work within rigid and constricting paradigms. But substitute the words 'historical interpretation' for 'scientific paradigm' and one can see that those historians who did take Kuhn's ideas on board found their implications to be strongly relativist, as well as corrosive of the idea that the 'scientific' credentials of history could be established by methods which guaranteed the production of 'objective' knowledge about the past.

By the 1980s, therefore, the long search for a scientific method of history had failed to yield any definitive results. The period in which the social sciences, encouraged by historians like E.H.Carr, had been exerting their influence over the practice of historical research and in the most extreme cases such as that of Fogel threatening to displace 'traditional' methods of history altogether, seemed to be coming to an end. The argument that history is, or should be, a science, in principle no different from quantum mechanics or crystallography, began to come under renewed and sustained attack, more radical than ever before.

Objectivity and its Limits

(...) the historian has to develop a detached mode of cognition, a faculty of self-criticism and an ability to understand another person's point of view. This applies as much to politically committed history as it does to a history that believes itself to be politically neutral. Politically committed history only damages itself if it distorts, manipulates or obscures historical fact in the interests of the cause it claims to represent.

As Novick defines it, the idea of objectivity involves a belief in 'the reality of the past, and [to] the truth as correspondence to that reality.' The truth about patterns and linkages of facts in history is in the end discovered not invented, found not made, though, as Haskell adds, 'not without a process of imaginative construction that goes so far beyond the intrinsic properties of the raw materials employed that one can speak of their being "made" as well.' Making such patterns and linkages, causal and otherwise, is by no means the only function of history, which also had a duty to establish the facts and recreate the past in the present, but it is in the end what distinguishes it from the chronicle. Trevelyan was both right to point to the importance of the historical imagination in this process, and to insist on the strict limits within which that imagination is bound.

It is right and proper that postmodernist theorists and critics should force historians to rethink the categories and assumptions with which they work, and to justify the manner in which they practise their discipline. But postmodernism is itself one group of theories among many, and as contestable as all the rest. For my own part, I remain optimistic that objective historical knowledge is both desirable and attainable. So when Patrick Joyce tells us that social history is dead, and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth declares that time is a fictional construct, and Roland Barthes announces that all the world's a text, and Hans Kellner wants historians to stop behaving as if we were researching into things that actually happened, and Diane Purkiss says that we should just tell stories without bothering whether or not they are true, and Frank Ankersmit swears that we can never know anything at all about the past so we might as well confine ourselves to studying other historians, and Keith Jenkins proclaims that all history is just naked ideology designed to get historians power and money in big university institutions run by the bourgeoisie, I will look humbly at the past and say despite them all: it really

happened, and we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out how it happened and reach some tenable though always less than final conclusions about what it all meant.

Carl L Becker

‘What are Historical Facts?’

in **The Philosophy of History in Our Times**, (ed Hans Meyerholtt)

Doubleday Publications, Garden City, New York, 1959

What Are Historical Facts?

History is a venerable branch of knowledge, and the writing of history is an art of long standing. Everyone knows what history is, that is, everyone is familiar with the word and has a confident notion of what it means. In general history has to do with the thought and action of men and women who lived in past times. Everyone knows what the past is too. We all have a comforting sense that it lies behind us, like a stretch of uneven country we have crossed; and it is often difficult to avoid the notion that one could easily, by turning round, walk back into this country of the past. That, at all events, is what we commonly think of the historian as doing: he works in the past, he explores the past in order to find out what men did and thought in the past. His business is to discover and set forth the ‘facts of history’.

When anyone says ‘facts’ we are all there. The word gives us a sense of stability. We know where we are when, as we say, we ‘get down to the facts’ — as, for example, we know where we are when we get down to the facts of the structure of the atom, or the incredible movement of the electron as it jumps from one orbit to another. It is the same with history. Historians feel safe when dealing with the facts. We talk much about the ‘hard facts’ and the ‘cold facts’, about ‘not being able to get around the facts’, and about the necessity of basing our narrative on a ‘solid foundation of fact.’ By virtue of talking in this way, the facts of history come in the end to seem something solid, something substantial like physical matter (I mean matter in the common sense, not matter defined as ‘a series of events in the ether’), something possessing definite shape, and clear persistent outline — like bricks or scantlings; so that we can easily picture the historian as he stumbles about in the past, stubbing his toe on the hard facts if he doesn’t watch out. That is his affair of course, a danger he runs; for his business is to dig out the facts and pile them up for someone to use. Perhaps he may use them himself; but at all events he must arrange them conveniently so that someone — perhaps the sociologist or the economist — may easily carry them away for use in some structural enterprise.

Such (with no doubt a little, but not much, exaggeration to give point to the matter) are the common connotations of the words ‘historical facts’, as used by historians and other people. Now, when I meet a word with which I am entirely unfamiliar, I find it a good plan to look it up in the dictionary and find out what someone thinks it means. But when I have frequently to use words with which everyone is perfectly familiar — words like ‘cause’ and ‘liberty’ and ‘progress’ and ‘government’ — when I have to use words of this sort which everyone knows perfectly well, the wise thing to do is to take a week off and think about them. The result is often astonishing; for as often as not I find that I have been talking about words instead of real things. Well, ‘historical fact’ is such a word; and I suspect it would be worthwhile for us historians at least to think about this word more than we have done. For the moment therefore, leaving the historian moving about in the past piling up the cold facts, I wish to inquire whether the historical fact is really as hard and stable as it is often supposed to be.

And this inquiry I will throw into the form of three simple questions. I will ask the questions, I can't promise to answer them. The questions are: (1) What is the historical fact? (2) Where is the historical fact? (3) When is the historical fact? Mind I say *is*, not *was*. I take it for granted that if we are interested in, let us say, the fact of the Magna Carta, we are interested in it for our own sake and not for its sake; and since we are living now and not in 1215 we must be interested in the Magna Carta, if at all, for what it is and not for what it was.

This is the case of the historian. The only external world he has to deal with is the records. He can indeed look at the records as often as he likes, and he can get dozens of others to look at them: and some things, some 'facts', can in this way be established and agreed upon, as, for example, the fact that the document known as the Declaration of Independence was voted on July 4, 1776. But the meaning and significance of this fact cannot be thus agreed upon, because the series of events in which it has a place cannot be enacted again and again, under varying conditions, in order to see what effect the variations would have. The historian has to judge the significance of the series of events from the one single performance, never to be repeated, and never, since the records are incomplete and imperfect, capable of being fully known or fully affirmed. Thus into the imagined facts and their meaning there enters the personal equation. The history of any event is never precisely the same thing to two different persons and it is well known that every generation writes the same history in a new way, and puts upon it a new construction.

The reason why this is so — why the same series of vanished events is differently imagined in each succeeding generation — is that our imagined picture of the actual event is always determined by two things: (1) by the actual event itself insofar as we can know something about it; and (2) by our own present purposes, desires, prepossessions, and prejudices, all of which enter into the process of knowing it. The actual event contributes something to the imagined picture; but the mind that holds the imagined picture always contributes something too. This is why there is no more fascinating or illuminating phase of history than historiography — the history of history: the history, that is, of what successive generations have imagined the past to be like. It is impossible to understand the history of certain great events without knowing what the actors in those events themselves thought about history. For example, it helps immensely to understand why the leaders of the American and French Revolutions acted and thought as they did if we know what their idea of classical history was. They desired, to put it simply, to be virtuous republicans, and to act the part. Well, they were able to act the part of virtuous republicans much more effectively because they carried around in their heads an idea, or ideal if you prefer, of Greek republicanism and Roman virtue. But of course their own desire to be virtuous republicans had a great influence in making them think the Greek and Romans, whom they had been taught to admire by reading classics in school, were virtuous republicans too. Their image of the present and future and their image of the classical past were inseparable, bound together — were really one and the same thing.

In this way the present influences our idea of the past, our idea of the past influences the present. We are accustomed to say that 'the present is the product of all the past'; and this is what is ordinarily meant by the historian's doctrine of 'historical continuity.' But it is only a half truth. It is equally true, and no mere paradox, to say that the past (our imagined picture of it) is the product of all the present. We build our conceptions of history partly out of our present needs and purposes. The past is a kind of screen upon which we project our vision of the future; and it is indeed a moving picture, borrowing much of its form and color from our fears and aspirations. The doctrine of historical continuity is badly in need of overhauling in the light of these suggestions; for that doctrine was itself one of those pictures which the early nineteenth century threw upon the screen of the past in order to quiet its deep-seated fears — fears occasioned by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

John Vincent

An Intelligent Person's Guide to History

Duckworth, London, 1995

History is deeply male. History is essentially non-young. History is about the rich and famous, not the poor. History favours the articulate, not the silent. History is about winners (including those losers who were eventual winners), not about losers. History is about assessing distortions, not copying out truths. History has to live with, is indeed the child of censorship: the censorship by one culture of its predecessor, the censorship by a great modern bureaucracy of its own overproduction of records, the censorship of astute reticence by those aware that the eye of posterity will watch them. History has much to say about the way the powerful handle power, for power engenders records. History is almost silent (so far) on psychology, but copious on sociology in the sense of social structure (less so, perhaps, on sociology as values). History is hopeless on love, but excellent on hatred. Such a state of things may not please all, but then it was never meant to please. One-sidedness lies at the heart of historical knowledge.

VII Bias in History

History is about evidence, and evidence flagrantly distorts. There is a bias in the creation of evidence, and a bias in the survival of evidence. There may be a bias in access to what survives, too. There is a bias towards the important (and self-important), a political bias to winners against losers, a bias towards the stable and against the unstable, and perhaps a deliberate censorship of the past by the past on top of that. Before we even get to modern historians, distortion is built into the very nature of history.

This suggests a simple rule. No evidence, no history; imperfect evidence, imperfect history. Against such stark considerations, purity of motive on the part of historians today faces an uphill task. The distortions in evidence that are already there, cannot be brushed away with a broom called objectivity.

But — our culture has a bias against bias. In a truth-centred culture, bias means departure from the scientific model. Indeed, it is seen as meaning departure from morality itself. To accuse someone of bias is to hit hard. And, worse, the word has an ugly ring to it; let no one believe that lack of euphony makes no odds. (Call bias commitment, and it might be a different story.) That bias might be a means to truth, is not easy to say in our supposedly truth-centred world.

Nine out of ten students, then, would be against bias; would indeed be rather horrified by the thought. That must be our starting-point. And at once mountainous difficulties confront us. The first great difficulty is purely practical. It is the extreme difficulty of naming any historical writers who are not well and truly biased. Worse still, their bias is not some shameful blot upon their reputations, but no small part of their reputation itself.

A Gibbon who lacked a sadistic bias against Christianity would be insipid; a Macaulay who was fair to Tories, unthinkable.

The second great difficulty, if we wish to rule that bias is bad, comes from the sociology of knowledge. It is perhaps something of an oddity that in discussions of bias, we always begin (and usually end) by looking at this or that individual writer and his individual quirks, while paying little or no attention to the general forces shaping the body of writers as a whole. And indeed there are reasons for this avoidance of overmuch sociological determinism. For one thing, at certain times in the past (though not many), historical writing may have been a heterogeneous, miscellaneous, fractured thing, not lending itself to general explanation. That is not the case today, when history is a professional activity almost monopolized by academics. For another, the sociology of knowledge always irritates. How, they cry, can my most intimate, my most personal moments of mental life result from some broad sociological forces of which I am hardly aware? Outrage ensues, and always will.

Historians today — and probably the great majority of historians who have ever lived, live today — exist in a definite sociological situation. Writers of history are, in Europe and elsewhere, state employees; in America, a workforce, albeit within large organizations like those fostered by public collectivism. They are not rentiers, landowning gentry, monkish scribes, churchmen, practitioners of public affairs, or intellectual hunter-gatherers. If they were, we should comment on it, and so we should on their being public employees.

The question, at its simplest, is not what difference it makes but whether it is so; and it is so, despite the presence in varying degrees of many trappings and vestiges of independence, the afterglow of gentlemanliness, and even the sensibility of the ‘free intellectual’, diminish though these do by the year. Yes, the production of historical truth has become ultimately a sub-department of the collectivist state; it has one, single, definite sociological location — and for that not to imply bias of some sort would need quite majestic powers of disconnection from surrounding circumstance.

Historians today are not holders of power — power over men, over money, over opinion. They live among the foothills of society, where they engage anxiously in downward social mobility. They see very little of power in their own lives; they do not catch its reflections in the lives of others. From the life of action in its modern form — business — they are quite especially remote. Their disconnection from things, their want of rootedness, their poverty of commitment, are those of the minor official class the world over. History may have changed; but historians, as a class, have changed more.

Present historians experience less than past historians. This narrowing of life they call professionalism, as indeed in a technical sense it is. Professionalism is the positive name given to a negative fact (and social novelty): the single historical career from youth to age, lived within large academic institutions, based on a single academic subject, worthy indeed and commendable but ill matched with the task of understanding other existences.

But what has all this to do with bias? Well, living on a state salary, while looking forward to an index-linked pension, rather than by selling books, is unlikely to weaken one’s collectivist outlook. The payroll historian is likely to look with tender sympathy upon the general system which produces salaries for people like him to live on, just as in the days of gentry scholarship, few raised their voices to condemn rental income from land. In broad terms, historians rightly see their well-being as connected with the big state, the high tax economy, and the acceptance of definitions of progress linked to these. Historians of recent centuries visibly approve the growth of the hand which has fed them. They may be right to do so; indeed probably are. But when they mix description and prescription, make ‘social reform’ the measure of all things, and deride market forces, it is appropriate to recall that, left to the market, there would be few historians and little history. Whether it is bias, or just a subtle convergence of view between paymaster and paid, it works rather like bias.

There is another aspect to state-paid history. The outlook of the minor official leans to grumpiness, to the cultivation of an opposition mentality, to failure to sympathize with those in responsibility — for in a collectivist world all mistakes come from above. What supply and demand are in the world of market forces, so mandatory clamour and dissatisfaction are within a collectivist polity, each part of which must intone fervent anthems of ‘More!’ The academic mind sees itself as ill-paid and under-rewarded, in the sense of not having enough for habits of life which it affects to scorn; and from this, some sense of critical sourness will long arise, some unwillingness to accept the normality of failure in others. Whether we call it bias or not, the relaxing experience of easy and natural success — that root of forgiveness — will have corrupted few historians’ hearts.

Payroll history is here, has been here for some time, and will not go away. It bears no resemblance to the flourishing literary history of before 1900. It must have some inner bias of its own, even if it is still hard to define. It is a new phenomenon in the sociology of knowledge — an economic lobby charged with the production of truth, a profession supposed to look from the outside on great social changes of which its own existence forms a minute part. (As well might one ask teeth to give a neutral view of dentistry.) Of course there are colourful freebooters and subtle quietists who follow no rule. That does not mean that general tendencies cannot be observed.

As Mr Gladstone rightly said, in the old days one bribed individuals, but in modern democracy one bribes whole classes. Or, as Koestler put it, a Communist who is a deputy will have more in common with a non-Communist deputy, than he will have with a Communist who is not a deputy. Sociologically, the professional historian of today, with his pension, is deeply ‘inside’, deeply encased in something, some form of stability and predictability and also limitation, in a way that will both define his habits of thought and separate him from his predecessors. Something rather big has happened, and squeaks of pained non-recognition cannot regain for him a position of entire freedom in the sociology of knowledge, the position of freebooter or lone adventurer. So it is with bias. In the old days, bias was primarily individual, a product of personal commitment. As such, it might be a path to understanding. Under modern conditions, bias is more likely to be socially determined, and the face it wears will be that of the minor official.

Keith Jenkins

What is History

Routledge, London and New York, 1995

(based on Hayden White)

- 1 The actual past has gone. It has in it arguably neither rhyme nor reason: it is sublime. The presence of the past is manifested only in its historicised traces accessible now; such traces signify an 'absent presence'.
- 2 From work on that historicised archive, historians and those acting as historians in the 'historical public sphere' (as historians in universities and other places) informed by the extant historiography relevant to the area in question and their general notion of what doing historical work might be like in the context of their lives, extract from the traces of the historicised archive various 'data'/facts and so forth. Here ideology is at work. Consequently, at this point:
- 3 White's ideological modes of conservatism, liberalism, radicalism and anarchism become determinate;
- 4 these, in interpenetrative ways, then attract to them tropological modes of configuration: the tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Subsequently,
- 5 these themselves interpenetrate with the modes of emplotment — romance, tragedy, comedy and satire — to then interpenetrate with the
- 6 modes of formist, contextual, mechanical and organic argumentation. Then,
- 7 the historian goes to work. The traces of the past are worked up into a chronicle and then
- 8 into a story form, a story form which answers such questions as, what comes next? What happened then? Here, already at all these stages, the modes of ideology, argument, emplotment and the tropes will already have been active (I mean: it's not as though the historian does all these things without a trope in his/her head) such modes, however, coming into their own as
- 9 the story is transformed into the narrative structure; such a structure being part trace and part imaginative configuration *vis-a-vis* the types of narrative forms existing in the culture in general (and the 'history culture' in particular) so as to re-order the resultant historiographical construct understandable, consumable, and thus, as an artifact — as a commodity like any other commodity — to exercise its various effects *vis-a-vis* the forces at work within any given social formation.

(...) at the same time it might be useful for me to pull together, in the form of a 'definition', some of the strands of thought I have tried to present in an introductory way. This definition, like all definitions of this type, is obviously not definitive. In fact it is not really a definition at all, being more like a summary of some of the 'key' areas discussed. And I am aware that in these 'postmodern days' even 'definitions' of this kind are — what else? — the stuff of cliché.

Nevertheless, with all its faults and limitations and provisionality, it is sometimes useful to have this kind of summary/definition available for discussion and perhaps for future work. And so I end with what, for me, history might — in the context of this text only — be read as today:

History is arguably a verbal artifact, a narrative prose discourse of which, *apres* White, the content is as much invented as found, and which is constructed by present-minded, ideologically positioned workers (historians and those acting as if they were historians) operating at various levels of reflexivity, such a discourse, to appear relatively plausible, looking simultaneously towards the once real events and situations of the past and towards the narrative type *mythoi*' common — albeit it on a dominant-marginal spectrum — in any given social formation. That past, appropriated by historians, is never the past itself, but a past evidenced by its remaining and accessible traces and transformed into historiography through a series of theoretically and methodologically disparate procedures (ideological positionings, tropes, emplotments, argumentative modes), such historiography — as articulated in both upper and lower cases — then being subject to a series of uses which are logically infinite but which, in practice, correspond to the range of power bases that exist at any given juncture and which distribute/circulate the meanings drawn from such histories along a dominant-marginal spectrum. Understood in this way, as a rhetorical, metaphorical, textual practice governed by distinctive but never homogeneous procedures through which the maintenance/transformation of the past is regulated (*apres* Bennett) by the public historical sphere, historical construction can be seen as taking place entirely in the present, historians *et al.* organizing and figuring this textual referent not as it was but as it is, such that the cogency of historical work can be admitted without the past per se ever entering into it — except rhetorically. In this way histories are fabricated without 'real' foundations beyond the textual, and in this way one learns to always ask of such discursive and ideological regimes that hold in their orderings suasive intentions — *cui bono* — in whose interests?

Bernard Bailyn

Two Encounters

1. Jack N Rakove, 'Encountering Bernard Bailyn'

Humanities, Vol 19, Number 2 (March/April 1998)

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First, the great conceptual challenge that a working historian faces is to define a good problem, and the essence of a good problem lies in identifying two points in time between which something significant (and often surprising) had happened. History is primarily about change and movement, Bailyn taught us; however hard we have to work to understand just what the past was like, the deeper challenge is to explain how one part of the past gave way to another. Second, because change can only be described through narrative, historians must be sensitive to all the matters of exposition that make narrative effective. Sometimes this meant recognizing the importance of adjectives (the point of reading Lord Denning's account, which interrupted its spare legal language to apply a few salacious modifiers to the prostitutes, Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies). Sometimes it meant recalling the importance of transitions (the point of reading David Cecil's brilliant Prologue to his life of Melbourne). Always it involved understanding that expository decisions are as essential to historians as their mastery of sources and all the other technical skills on which our scholarship depends.

2. *On the Teaching and Writing of History*

University Press of New England, 1994

To begin quite basically, Professor Bailyn, how would you define 'history'?

BB: The word 'history' has, I think, two meanings. One is simply *what happened*; that is, the events, developments, circumstances, and thoughts of the past, as they actually occurred. The other is history as *knowledge of what happened*, the record or expression of what occurred.

Carl Becker, a leading historian a generation or so ago, gave as good a definition of history — in the second of these two senses, *knowledge of the past* — as I know of. History, he said in an address to the American Historical Association in 1931, is simply 'the memory of things said and done.' And it functions, he added, as 'the artificial extension of the social memory.'

'The memory of things said and done' does not pretend to be the recall of all past experience. It is a necessarily imperfect and selective reconstruction. But it serves to extend and to enlarge our own, personal experience and to orient contemporary issues, values, goals, and behaviour.

One needs to understand the relationship between the reality of what happened — the totality of past events and developments, past circumstances and thoughts — and what, in historical writings and compilations, people represent them to have been. That relationship, it seems to me, is crucial to all historical study and knowledge. The accuracy and adequacy of representations of past actualities, the verisimilitude or closeness to fact of what is written about them, remain the measure, in the end, of good history — this despite all the fashionable

doubts that are raised about the attainment of absolute or perfect objectivity and accuracy (which no one pretends to, anyway).

And how' would you describe or characterize what a 'historian' 'is'?

BB. A historian, I assume, is someone who develops, in one way or another, what Becker called the 'artificial extension of social memory' — by recovering, through the evidences of the past, aspects of what happened. But that does not confine historians to people who teach in colleges and universities. One of the interesting things about the practice of history these days is that history, while largely the domain of academicians, is not entirely so.

First of all, you have some well-known historians who are non-academicians, yet people who are professionally trained. Barbara Tuchman was a prime example. She had the credentials of a professional scholar, even though she practised, so to speak, as an amateur — in the sense that she was not involved in the critical, systematic development of knowledge in certain areas and was not responsible for passing on to the next generation a large scale, integrated picture of what our past has been.

Then, too, there are more and more 'public historians'; that is, professionally trained historians who do not teach in universities or who do not write as Barbara Tuchman did, but who work in commercial organizations that provide accurate historical studies, on a contract basis. For example, there is the Winthrop Group, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a team of excellent historians who run a commercial organization that serves a variety of historical functions. They work for business corporations that want company histories written or that want their archives put in order or want an accurate historical record kept of an on-going experimental project. They also do historical research for legal briefs, where objective history by impartial scholars can be critical, and they arrange for oral histories.

Third, another group of non-academic historians work in state, regional, and local historical societies, museums, and restorations. They are experts in regional history or masters of specific archives for which they provide valuable guides and from which they publish documentary series. Often they are involved in or help sponsor the editing of the new 'Papers' series. Julian Boyd, the first editor of the great *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* series, set a standard for technical scholarship in such editing, beyond anything known before in this country, and he established a new style for what are, in effect, massive documentary biographies. His volumes — like the new Adams, Madison, Washington, and other 'Papers,' all of them works of excellent historical scholarship — provide basic source material that historians of all kinds will use for generations to come.

It is amusing to contrast Boyd, a meticulous scholar who reproduced every orthographic peculiarity of the original texts and published variant readings of every word that was not perfectly clear in the original, with predecessors like Jared Sparks, the nineteenth-century President of Harvard, who falsified the texts of Washington's letters, because he thought they were too colloquial — even, indelicate.

Finally, there are historians who are professional journalists. Theodore White, famous for his presidential-campaign histories, established his reputation as a journalist covering China, whose history he had studied extensively with John Fairbank at Harvard; he prided himself on his writing on the history of modern China. Journalists like White or like Theodore Draper (his book on the Iran-Contra affair, *A Very Thin Line*, is a first-class work of history) are important figures in the historical world. They write contemporary history — which has both positive and negative sides. On the one hand, they capture the immediacy of a situation, because they are almost participants or can talk to the actual participants. What they write has

a vividness that no historian dealing with the deeper past can have. On the other hand, they lack the perspective that a historian reaching back a hundred years would have. Their perspective is necessarily shallow. They don't know, cannot know, all of the circumstances, nor what the eventualities will be — and so, in the end, the costs. But they certainly do convey, as I say, the vividness of events, the peculiar atmospheres and moods and the complex balances of personalities that only participants can truly grasp.

This kind of history attracts some of the best academic historians, too. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote a biography of John Kennedy very soon after the President was assassinated, and since he was a member of the White House staff and knew Kennedy well and admired him, his book, while partisan, has a wonderful immediacy and a sense of the personalities involved that no later historian would be able to capture. But inevitably — necessarily — there was much that he did not know, could not have known, about Kennedy and about the circumstances that shaped his life and brief presidency.

But the preponderance of historical writing does, of course, come from universities.

Would you cite a few individuals of the past from within the field of history, whom you regard as among its most eminent practitioners — and tell why?

BB. I did do this on one occasion and published it in a booklet called *History and the Creative Imagination*. I selected four historians who, it seemed to me, have had a peculiarly creative effect on historical understanding. By that I don't mean the most popular historians; they weren't particularly popular historians, but historians whose work shifted their subject substantially and irreversibly — so that it was never the same after they wrote — and gave rise to new ways of approaching a large area of the past. These were recent historians, scholars within our own present culture, who altered, enriched the basic understanding of large fields. And I tried to isolate the qualities and intellectual processes that lay behind their creativity.

What I found was, first of all, that each of them penetrated deeply into the context of past circumstances. They were all, deeply, contextualists. Second, they all were working with new data, masses of data that they had recently recovered or that had been known but that had never been used much before. And, third, all of them had some kind of personal involvement with their subject, which almost obliged them to think freshly and originally about it. One can trace the dawning of their perceptions and the ways in which large configurations grew out of their study of details

I won't go through all of this, but let me illustrate one issue. One of the historians was Charles M. Andrews at Yale, who was a very important academic historian in his time, though now largely forgotten. He reconstructed for the first time the eighteenth-century Anglo-American administrative empire, showing the deep interconnections between the two peoples, and particularly the way early American public institutions grew from British origins. He did his main work, explaining and cataloguing and using masses of neglected documents in the Public Record Office in London, just before and during World War 1, at a time when America's allegiances in the divisions of Europe were the subject of fundamental debate here in the United States.

Andrews was a Connecticut Yankee whose native culture was deeply Anglophile. He taught school in Hartford, Connecticut, for a while, and was at Yale during all of his career thereafter. His scholarship was meaningful to him in a personal way. He was able to show the age-old, almost immemorial connections between America and England, at a time when this was very much in question. While other historians affiliated with him were getting into this

issue publicly, politically, and polemically (like George Louis Beer and others who were writing for *The Round Table*, the magazine of the empire, some of whom were even predicting that soon Britain and America would become politically reunified), Andrews never discussed political questions directly. But he did show in his history the deep historical affiliation between Britain and America, which must have satisfied him in some subjective, personal way.

So, too, the others I wrote about. Ronald Syme, for example, writing about the late Roman Republic and the Principate in a very rigorous fashion, using the elaborate genealogical data of prosopography, came to the conclusion that the development of politics in that period depended on recruitment of people from the provinces. New men came in from Spain and from elsewhere on the periphery of metropolitan Rome and joined the mainstream in Rome.

Syme was a New Zealander, who in time became the Camden Professor of Ancient History at Oxford. The whole process of moving in from the periphery, from the colonial provinces, somehow fitted him, and he worked the theme out broadly in a fascinating little book, *Colonial Elites: Rome, Spain, and the Americas*, in which he argued that the strength of empires frequently depended on recruiting or coopting the new aristocracies developing on the peripheries. I don't want to imply that this was mere self-expression on his part. His great book, *The Roman Revolution*, is highly technical history, but it is history that meant something personal to the author.

And, as I say, all of these historians — Andrews, Syme, and the others — were contextualists. All of them were working with new or freshly perceived data, just as all of them had some kind of personal involvement with the subjects they were explaining. Thus instigated, they began to see in the data connections of people and circumstances that had not been perceived before, and which together would form a new picture—one different from the previously familiar historical world.

You had Andrews and Syme as two of your four. Who were the other two?

BB. One was Perry Miller, who wrote on Puritanism in America. The personal side in his case is more complicated than with the others, but his analysis of his data — sermons that had been dismissed as theological rubbish — was as expert as Syme's prosopography or Andrews' administrative analyses.

The other was Lewis Namier, writing on eighteenth-century British history. Namier was a displaced Polish Jewish intellectual of a landed-gentry family. For him eighteenth-century England, as he viewed it, was profoundly satisfying. His arguments on the importance of secure landholding in eighteenth-century Britain and on what he took to be the non-ideological character of British politics (he hated ideas — or, rather, the belief that ideas shaped history) reflected his own biography, the losses and aspirations of his displaced, disoriented gentry family. In his biography, written by his wife, the deep emotional involvement he had with these technical questions of eighteenth-century British history becomes perfectly clear.

Anne Summers

Damned Whores and God's Police

Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994

Introduction (to 1975 edition)

This is a book about Australia. More particularly, it is about women and the ideology of sexism which has governed so much of our lives — an ideology which has determined and limited the extent to which women have been really able to participate in Australian society.

The first white person recorded as being born in Australia was a woman. Her name was Rebekah Small and she was born on 22 September 1788. However, for those who would attach symbolic importance to this, and possibly speculate that women were to occupy a pre-eminent place in the new colony, it is not the fact of being first-born but rather her name which is significant. Her surname could be seen as a presage of the status which women in this country could expect, while the first name assigned to her (in prophetic prescience by Mary Parker Small, her convict mother?) was symbolic of the likely prospects for women in a society that was both sexist and patriarchal. According to the Biblical scholar Lockyer, Rebekah has the following meaning:

'Rebekah is another name with an animal connection. Although not belonging to any animal in particular, it has reference to animals of a limited class and in a peculiar condition. The name means a "tie rope for animals" or "a noose in such a rope". Its root is found in a noun meaning a "hitching place" or "stall" and is connected with a "tied-up calf or lamb", a young animal peculiarly choice and fat. Applied to a female, the figure suggests her beauty by means of which men are snared and bound. Thus another meaning of Rebekah is that of "captivating".'

The life of Rebekah Small is distinguished from those of most women in convict Australia in that it has been recorded. We know that in 1806 she married Francis Oakes, a missionary, and that she had fourteen children, most of whom she outlived. She died in 1883. Such records survive to give us fragmentary details of the lives of a number of individual women and this is all we have from which to glean some idea of what life in early Australia was like for most women. Our knowledge is, therefore, scanty and inadequate and so our comprehension of the social forces and ideas which determined their lives — and which still persist today — is very hazy.

The intention of this book is to begin the process of reversing this lack of comprehension. In what follows I suggest a framework within which to explore the experiences of women in Australia's past and present, and I put forward an argument which tries to make intelligible what I see as the crucial determinants of women's lives today. In my view, we cannot begin to understand the position of women today simply by amassing statistics on how many women are in the workforce, how they fare within the education system, how many are married, how many children they have, and so on. By doing that we might assemble an elaborate composite of information, but this Statistical Woman would be an artificial construct which would

provide no insight into the experiential dimension of women's current position in Australian society, and would be of limited value even for outlining the many variants and complexities of those areas of women's lives which are open to more objective scrutiny. Such an approach would give a shallow and static picture, whereas I am concerned to try and illuminate not merely the heterogeneity existing within the common experience of being female in Australia today, but also the changes which have occurred since this country was first colonized. I do not think we can begin to understand women's position in Australia today, nor men's attitudes to women, without at least a cursory consideration of those past events and ideas which cast shadows on the present. Nor do I think that a comprehensive picture of women's expectations and experiences can be gained by confining one's inquiry to narrowly defined conventional academic disciplines. This book is neither history nor sociology although it draws on techniques and materials from both disciplines. It also explores other areas such as literature, psychology and medicine. In style it is both 'academic' and 'journalistic'. It employs extensive documentation when necessary, on the one hand; and expansive speculation or description culled from experience and observation on the other. As such, this book does not fit easily into any existing categories of works which analyse either Australian society or the position of women therein. Accordingly, I want to explain in some detail what I have attempted to do, and what some of my major premises are.

Since most books about Australia totally ignore women, or at best give them the token consideration of a single section or chapter, there was no possibility of my following any of the conventions established in that field. Virtually all writers about Australian society and history use the terms 'Australian' and 'male' synonymously and so anyone who wishes to write about women has to seek guidance and precedents from other areas. There does exist quite a large body of writing about women in Australia. (There is virtually nothing written about *men* in Australia but, given the assumptions of most writers about Australia, this would be quite superfluous.) Until very recently, when the emergence of the new feminism gave rise to a preoccupation with experiential writing, there had been three ways of writing about women. I felt that Australian society and history needed to be subjected to re-analysis in the light of many of the insights and assumptions of the new feminism and so a book simply about my own experiences would not have met this need. But neither did I consider any of the previous ways of writing about women to be capable of accommodating what I felt needed to be done. In order to illustrate this I will briefly describe each of these methods and what I consider to be their limitations.

The first method can be called the feminist* approach. Generally it isolates a group of female activists, or concentrates on a single campaign — such as the struggle for suffrage — which has involved several groups and it writes about them *in vacuo*. Such writings about feminists are invaluable for recording and evaluating feminist activities of past and present but they are, by definition, concerned only with politically conscious, active women and not with *all* women. Often the campaigns of feminists herald social changes which will ultimately affect larger numbers of women, and their activities can therefore be treated as indices of the changing nature of women's position. Many of the memoirs of individual feminists contain informative accounts of women in other areas, for example, exploitation of women in factories, or the inequality of women before the law, and thus provide some intelligence of the position of the submerged, inarticulate majority of women. But if we want a more detailed explication and understanding of the experiences of that majority, as distinct from the feminist minority, we cannot concentrate on the activists.

* The term *feminist* is often misunderstood, especially as its meaning has shifted in common usage in recent years: it will be defined more fully later in this Introduction.

The second method of writing about women comprises those ubiquitous accounts of individual women, those biographies which are generally narrative rather than analytical. Their subjects are usually selected for their notoriety, for their unusually diligent pursuit of social reform, because they pioneered a career or activity new to their sex, or because they happened to be attached by family or marriage to a famous man. A good biography can afford a microcosmic view of a larger society and can be of general as well as of particular interest. But most writing in this category does not attain this distinction; with most biographers of women there is an obsessive tendency to reproduce detailed minutiae from the subject's family life and to treat whatever it was that secured her fame with indulgence and sentimentality. Such writing tells us very little about the female subject and even less about her female contemporaries.

The third method is the token fragment approach. Here a general (that is, mainly concerned with men) account of a particular social phenomenon or historical occurrence will include a cursory account of the activities of what is considered to be an important group of women. In practice this approach is generally a throwaway although it is potentially the most valuable for it treats the activities of women in a social context while the other two methods isolate women and can tend to treat them as objects outside the usual processes of society. But seldom do practitioners of this method develop its potential: they treat the activities of women as peripheral without ever asking why this is so, or even *if* it is so.

Past Australian writing about women has fallen exactly into this pattern. We have quite a large body of feminist literature, mainly accounts of the suffrage movements and of individuals prominent in these movements. There is also a considerable amount of institutional feminist writing: the activities of bodies such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union or the Women's Services Guild have been the subject of numerous books, articles and pamphlets. The (usually female) thesis writer who searches for material for her history of women's suffrage or some similar topic will be pleasantly surprised to find that her subjects wrote voluminously and have left ample testimonies of their activities. She is surprised because she has been assured by her supervisor that 'nothing has been written about women'. Such ignorance merely highlights the major deficiency of the feminist method at present: in Australia especially, such writing has not been absorbed into any intellectual tradition of teaching or writing. Each new generation of researchers has had to begin afresh for there are no definitive works surveying the field to date or compiling and assessing the debates. Until such works begin to be written, forcing awareness of the existence of this rich lode of literature, feminist writing will continue to collect dust on the shelves of libraries and remain unread and unabsorbed into any tradition.

This has been the fate of Norman MacKenzie's *Women in Australia* (Melbourne, 1962). Although not strictly speaking a feminist book it must be included in this category because it deals only with restricted groups of women. It is concerned with women who are politically active (although not only as feminists), with women in the workforce and with women in education. MacKenzie made some attempt to relate his conclusions about women to various Australian social and historical phenomena, but his lack of overall theoretical perspective as well as his neglect of non-organized women meant that his book has remained outside the mainstream of Australian social criticism. His work is an example of the limitations of the feminist approach: because it isolates women it can be ignored by those with the social or political power to alleviate at least some of the things that the book was trying to draw attention to.

Biographies of women suffer a mixed fate. Scholarly works like Margaret Kiddle's *Caroline Chisholm* (Melbourne, 1950) are read by fairly select groups and are occasionally referred to by historians of the period but they too generally fail to be integrated into any tradition

because the subject of their research is too often relegated to a footnote in the more general studies. There is a double standard of writing and criticism operating here which has ensured that a vicious circle exists: biographies about women are seldom taken seriously, certainly not in the way that a political biography of a male politician or some other prominent man is, and hence biographers of women have tended to internalize both *this* and the fact that women are trivialized and not taken seriously within Australia anyway. The result has been a plethora of chatty, discursive books about Australian women which have concentrated almost totally on their subjects' domestic affairs and which have reinforced the practice of not taking biographies of women seriously.

Some academic works concerned with the lives of famous and infamous women are absorbed into a kind of folklore. Here the distinctions between legend and fact become blurred and, in any case, the subjects of these biographies exist as eccentrics or heroines, both categories which ensure that they are removed from serious consideration as individuals who could be seen as providing some insights into the general situation of women of their age. There are also a number of short biographical works on famous women such as Mary Gilmore which have been specially written as school texts; they are most likely to be used in literature courses, providing 'background' biographical and historical material. Again, there is no way in which any of these biographies are permitted to become part of a general consciousness about women's position in Australian society.

The third method — the token fragment — is by no means common in this country. A search of the indexes of book after book of Australian history reveals no mention of either women or the family. There are exceptions, of course. Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne, 1958) is one, and any book concerned with Australia prior to 1850 can hardly avoid at least mentioning female convicts and immigrants, but even in these works there is usually only a paragraph or two or, at the very most, a chapter. Moreover, the bias — in many cases amounting to outright misogyny — against treating women as historical subjects worthy of detailed analysis, has meant that these fragments remain as unintegrated ephemera and are seldom related to the major theories about the evolution of Australian civilization. Some of these biases, as they emerge in particular works or arguments, will be explored in more detail throughout this book.

The net result of all this has been that there exists a profound ignorance about the roles which women have played in our history and also of the ways in which women have been suppressed and prevented from moving outside those roles. I hope to begin eroding some of that ignorance with my insistence on the importance of understanding the historical processes by which women's current situation has evolved; unless we have some comprehension of the sources of that situation and the functions the oppression of women has fulfilled for Australian society then our chances for evolving political strategies for the liberation of women will be remote.

Contemporary sociological writing has also contributed to both misunderstanding and neglect of the position of women in Australia. In sociology the tendency to isolate one aspect of women's social existence and develop theories about that alone is fairly pronounced. There are, for instance, a great many articles and sub-theories about 'women in the workforce' but it is rare to find one which does more than outline the participation rates of women, enquire into the reasons for married women working and perhaps make some general comments about women's concentration in low-status and unequally paid jobs. Occasionally some historical perspective will be included but seldom is the analysis related to those tendencies in the Australian economy and society which have precipitated the increased participation of married women workers. In general, however, sociologists are far more likely than historians to include some consideration of women's activities in their general analysis of society. But

they are often guilty of the same form of sexist scholarship as the general historian: that of interpolating, rather than integrating, a particular facet of women's many roles into their overall schema. Their sexism consists of treating women as a homogeneous object-group, not recognising their varieties of aspiration and experience; and of fragmenting whole individuals into a series of objectified roles which are based on sex stereotypes.

The term 'role' when applied to women's activities has become a non-historical objectification. It is often used descriptively rather than analytically and has acquired an amorphous blanket quality: it is employed to describe everything that women do, but it actually tells us nothing. Even those writers who acknowledge that some changes have occurred in its content in the past 200 years still assume some fundamental universal content such as child rearing. Few writers in Australia have subjected this content to historical analysis and so discovered that this particular function has undergone quite marked changes even in the past eighty years. Since the entry of married women into the paid workforce has assumed such social importance in the past decade it has become fashionable to speak of women's two 'roles': home and work. Used loosely, as it often is, this dual terminology suggests a dual existence rather than a single life characterized by several, possibly contradictory, social demands and expectations.

A similarly uncritical use of the term 'the family' has added to the propensity to reduce the discussion of women's activities to simple schema whose content is assumed rather than actually described and analysed. Such a term implies the existence of a universal institution — or at least one that is common to all societies — whose variations at present and in the past are totally overlooked. It is questionable whether it is possible to speak of 'the Australian family of 1975' let alone use this term to describe the varieties of familial groupings and relationships which have existed among Europeans in this country since 1788. The term assumes a norm, at present the heterosexual 'nuclear' family of conjugal couple and two or three children. Yet there are an enormous number of exceptions to this norm: people who live in a vast range of non-kinship household arrangements or with kin who extend beyond the 'nuclear' norm; and these are not accommodated by the insistence that we can treat this country as a society in which 'the family' is the pre-eminent form of social organization. Such a sweeping generalization excludes from consideration and hence from awareness of their special needs or problems single people, unmarried heterosexual couples, homosexuals, single-parent families, childless couples, migrant families with several generations coexisting in one household, one-sex or mixed-sex communes, and people living in institutions such as prisons, orphanages, children's homes, convents or seminaries. If all of the people living in these extra-'nuclear' family relationships were added up they would probably outnumber those who live according to the norm and so the norm is of dubious value even for describing how the majority of Australians live. It is also evident from the great variety of situations described above that the situation of women is going to differ markedly according to how they live: how then can we speak of women's 'role' in 'the family'? If sociologists do this — without acknowledging that this blanket phrase is in reality one that can only be applied to a proportion (and possibly a quite small proportion) of the female population — then their findings and theories are going to be of very limited value. They are going to exclude enormous numbers of women and yet appear to be oblivious of having excluded them. They will continue to propagate the fiction that all women live in situations defined by traditional sex roles without exploring the processes by which some women follow these while others reject them.

For the reasons outlined above I found I could not follow the established conventions of Australian historical or sociological writing. I see the need to move beyond merely accepting the premise that people's lives are to a large extent governed by sex-roles and to start investigating the extent of this control and the influence it has had in shaping Australian

society. Both women and men are socialized into sex-role behaviour but what follows concentrates mainly on women and on the social forces which affect women. These of course include men, and sex-role behaviour in men, for it is impossible to talk about women's lives without also talking about men. Within a society where men occupy all positions of power in government, law, the churches, and the civil service, women as a group are powerless and that powerlessness needs to be explored. Women in Australia *are* powerless but we still do not understand exactly how or why. In 1958 Kathleen Fitzpatrick said that women 'have a legal right to do almost anything, but they are in fact hedged in with invisible barriers which keep them, as it were, on the outer of our national life'. This assessment is still true seventeen years later but so far no one has tried to delineate these 'invisible barriers' with any clarity or precision. This is what I have attempted to do.

Broadly my argument is that women in Australia are forced to eke out a precarious psychic and physical existence within a society which has denied them cultural potency and economic independence and hence has prevented women from being able to construct their own identities or from having more than a very restricted choice about what they can do with their lives. Although basic sexist assumptions about women and men were transported from England with the First Fleet, social and economic conditions in the first fifty years of colonization of this country gave rise to an indigenous variety of the ideology of sexism. A particularly rigid dualistic notion of women's function in colonial society was embodied in two stereotypes. They have been both descriptive and prescriptive, at the one time both adumbrating a function for women and exhorting them to conform to it, and also maintaining that they actually represented what women were. Each is a sex-role stereotype which exaggerates the characteristics of the basic dualistic notion that women are either good or evil: this judgement is based on whether or not women conform to the wife/mother roles prescribed by the bourgeois family.

Prior to 1840 when the majority of the population in colonial Australia did not live in this kind of family structure, and women were viewed primarily as objects of sexual gratification, the 'Damned Whore' stereotype was predominant. Female convicts and female immigrants were expected to be, and were treated as, whores, and this label was applied indiscriminately to virtually all women in the colony. During the 1840s and 1850s the bourgeois family was propagated as the most suitable form of social organization for the new nation and the 'God's Police' stereotype assumed ascendancy. Its general prescription was that women as wives of men and mothers of children were entrusted with the moral guardianship of society, that they were expected to curb restlessness and rebelliousness in men and instil virtues of civic submission in children. Both these functions were to be exercised primarily through family relationships but during the past century the sphere of this function has expanded. Women have been permitted some participation in social or political affairs, so long as they confined that participation to performing this moral policing. While this kind of role has been the lot of women in most Western societies, in Australia it has acquired an almost evangelical cast and many of its particularities have given it a unique form. It is perhaps no coincidence that in 1915 Australia was the first country to appoint women police:

'They (the first women police) did little in the way of tracking down criminals. Their work consisted mainly in patrolling dance halls, parks, beaches and other places where young people congregate, on the lookout for girls under age. They also watched railway stations, bus terminals and wharves. They developed a flair for detecting girls who were trying to appear over eighteen, or who had run away from home.'

The God's Police stereotype has also included the redemptive idea that women could and should police other women.

These stereotypes are the product of a society in which sex is viewed as a major means of categorising people and assigning their social functions. The justificatory ideology — sexism — has been a major component of Australia's social structure and an exploration of sexism is one of the principal concerns of this book. Although the ideology and practice of sexism will be discussed continually throughout this book it is necessary to say a little about it now for it is often misunderstood. Sexism 'refers to a division made between people on genital/sexual grounds which goes beyond the simple biological classification and into the area of suppositions about personality, ability, equality, etc. It is about a series of alleged differences extrapolated from one basic biological difference (. . .) it seems to me to be sexist to say that women are 'naturally' emotional, men are 'naturally' rational, even though it may be true and non-sexist to say that because of sexist expectations in our society men and women may be more inclined in either of these directions.'

Sexism is a sex/political means of identifying and then dividing people. Often it is confused with 'male chauvinism' and used as a synonymous term. Sexism does not mean male dominance — although the political system of male dominance, patriarchy, is the usual form of sexism in this era. Men occupy dominant positions in all important political, economic and cultural institutions and are able to control the lives of some other men and all women. This is not a necessary corollary of sexism: a matriarchy or a gynarchy would also be sexist. It is always necessary to look at the power structure which upholds and reinforces a sex distinction and to see who benefits from it.

In practice sexism, like racism, is almost always discriminatory. Such a division of society could not be maintained unless one group had the power to enforce it, and that it chooses to enforce it generally means that considerable benefits derive to members of the powerful group from the division. The discrimination of racism is usually quite patent even though the economic reasons for race discrimination are always glossed over with ideologies which supposedly rationalize the imputed inferiority of the oppressed race.

Two distinct but overlapping processes coincide in perpetuating such oppression. The ruling group constructs an ideology to justify the validity of its own political, economic and cultural practices and then universalizes it, that is, decrees that it ought to be subscribed to by all people, even those outside the ruling group. It then labels as inferior, and not deserving of its own status, those who do not conform to its dictates. At the same time it refuses to recognize, or to give equal status to, the culture of the oppressed group. This is where the differences matter. It is not possible for the two (or three or however many) groups to coexist with equal power and status. The ruling group protects its power, and continues to reinforce its convictions of its own superiority, by denying the other group access to that power or status. And this power is maintained partly by convincing the other group that its own culture is worthless. Such power can only be maintained while the ruling group controls the major economic resources of society and is thus in a position to enforce the subordination of the other group which must accede to the ruling group's ideology in order to exist.

In Australia the overall control system is that of a capitalist economy and the ruling group is the class which controls the means of production. It is composed entirely of white men. Its ideology justifies its own class, race and sex position in order to perpetuate the capitalist system and it maintains its class, race and sex superiority through the political, economic and cultural institutions of society. Both race and sex ideologies were transported from England with the capitalist system but they have been maintained in Australia with a distinct and explicable fervour. The ideology of racism was used to justify the invasion of the continent and the dispossession of the original inhabitants of their land. The ideology of sexism has served several varying purposes in Australia's economic development and these are explored at some length in the second part of this book.

These mediating ideologies of racism and sexism are generally overlooked, or paid insufficient attention, by Marxists who concentrate entirely on class relations and class ideology. But it seems likely that for two large groups in Australia, women and Aborigines, class ideology is relevant only in a very generalized sense and its relevance is mediated through the more specific ideologies of race and sex. Members of these groups have a primary self-identification as women or as Blacks, which precedes class identification. Both groups are specifically oppressed through the use which society makes or has made of their sex or race, uses which may not always be directly related to the maintenance of the capitalist system. Those theories of capitalism which underrate the importance of these mediating ideologies are neglecting vital areas of subversion and revolt.

The class struggle has only limited relevance to people who are largely outside it even when they are conscious of being exploited. For that exploitation is a function of their sex or race. *That* is the consciousness they already have or that which they are more likely to arrive at. Having attained that consciousness they are then in a better position to be aware of the wider system of control which perpetuates their specific oppression. But the ideologies of sex and race are powerful and pervasive. They are continually reinforced at every level of society. The manner in which they are upheld even by those who are themselves oppressed and exploited is a measure of the intricate nexus of repression which occurs within capitalism and which prevents the massed opposition to capitalism of all oppressed groups. The working class, as defined by Marxists, is exploited within the capitalist system but its members are preponderantly white men, and they uphold the values of both sexism and racism. And they benefit considerably from upholding them: they protect their jobs by keeping Australia white and they preserve their own little domain of personal power and sustenance by living in bourgeois families. Similarly women and Aborigines apply racist and sexist values to each other — and to themselves. Thus the exploration of the ubiquitousness of these mediating ideologies is important not only as a necessary task in itself but for gaining an understanding of the ways in which their perpetuation prevents revolt against the larger system.

I will concentrate on sexism and I want to stress that to concentrate simply on its most blatant discriminatory manifestations tends to obscure its pervasiveness and hence its power. To point to such things as wife-bashing, the refusal to give women the right to abortion or to allow them equal wages with men, is indeed to illustrate patriarchal power in a sexist society. But such examples are not necessary consequences of sexism and concentrating on them tends to disguise the more subtle and intricate textures which are the basis of sexism and which lead to these extreme discriminations. It is possible to envisage a benevolent patriarchy or one which wanted to alter the present content of one or both sex roles. In such a system women could have equal legal rights and access to the cultural, economic and political institutions of society. But unless that society had also abandoned a sexual division of labour in every area of existence, most especially in family relationships, then it would still be sexist. A reversal of the current division, whereby men were housekeepers and women went out to work, would be sexist — and it would not be long before such a society generated its specific ideological justification for this particular form of ascribing social functions. Men and women sharing roles which are currently performed by one sex only would only be non-sexist in so far as all assumptions and expectations about what men (or women) should ‘normally’ do disappeared. But to see sexism as only manifested in the work (in families and outside) that people do is to neglect the vast array of cultural assumptions, prejudices, myths, fears and other ideologies which shore up this ideology and which are embodied in practically every institution, ritual and pastime in this country.

I will give just a few examples. The Christian Church is based absolutely on sexist assumptions which have been given the authority of divine law: the male God with a saviour

son borne by a woman (there is no need for gods to be born in the way mortals are) has imposed a basic pattern of male spiritual and political power contrasted with women's purely reproductive function. Introduction rituals in Australia dictate that men shake hands with each other when meeting for the first time — women do not shake each other by the hand and they choose whether or not to extend their hand to men. A national pastime — drinking — has distinct rules, rights and conventions for each sex.

Sexism is a system of oppression within capitalism and, like the larger system, it is neither static nor uniform in its manifestations. 'Oppression', writes Sheila Rowbotham,

'is not an abstract moral condition but a social and historical experience. Its forms and expressions change as the mode of production and the relationships between men and women, men and men, women and women, change in society. Thus, while it is true that women were subordinated to men before capitalism and that this has affected the position of women in capitalist society, it is also true that the contest of oppression we fight against now is specific to a society in which the capacity of human beings to create is appropriated by privately-owned capital and in which things produced are exchanged as commodities.'

The various permutations which have occurred in the oppression of women in Australia are traced in Part Two.

Oppression can be explored and evaluated by outlining the many dimensions of the structure, for example, of relations between the sexes, and its supporting ideology and by attempting to assess the extent to which the less powerful group complies with its situation of powerlessness. Both measures are necessary if we are to understand the nature of that oppression and the means by which it changes. Sexism differs from other systems of oppression because of the close relations between women and men. Women's oppression is often not seen or felt as such because, unlike most other systems, many members of the two groups are bound to each other by ties of mutual affection. The ideology of 'the family' prescribes that the sexes love each other and such love, and the institution on which it is based, often disguise the existence, or the extent, of women's oppression. A further difference in women's oppression also stems from this close relationship: the women who are most compliant with sexist norms are awarded certain compensations. These are culturally determined, and in Australia the main compensation has been to give the maternal role a revered status. This status is largely a sham since it is superficial and is by no means an adequate compensation for the demands of the role. But most women have accepted it for it has enabled them to attach value to an activity which is unique to their sex and thereby to wear the role with pride.

For most of Australian history this compensatory status has been sufficient to quell whatever restlessness many women must have felt. It has only been during periods when the demands of motherhood have been completely out of tune with other social forces that revolt has occurred. Mostly this has taken the form of a demand to alter the content of the role or else to increase its status in recognition of an expansion of the role which has already occurred. But occasionally it has been a revolt against the role itself and it is these occasions which really threaten to undermine sexism. Such a revolt can be named *feminism*.

Feminism has to be distinguished from *female consciousness*. Female consciousness describes the first situation: it entails a heightened awareness amongst women of their sex roles. But it is awareness coupled with acceptance of sexism. Women with female consciousness wish to preserve their roles as wives and mothers and the special and separate status they carry. Such female consciousness can often lead to militant action if women feel that their effective performance of those roles is being threatened. Women have formed Housewives'

Associations and Consumer Protection Groups and have been active in resident action groups and other community activities in attempts to prevent encroachments on what they cherish as their unique contribution to society. This female consciousness is active acceptance of female roles and differs from the more passive acceptance which characterizes most women who comply with sexist norms.

Feminism is more difficult to define since its meaning has altered in recent years. At the turn of the century feminism meant support for women's rights. The rights sought were defined differently in different countries and in Australia were rather circumscribed. The early feminists here sought to extend the area of women's participation in society but, as Chapter Eleven argues, they did not seriously wish to challenge the sexist *status quo*. Since the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960s feminism has been radicalized to mean rejection of sexism and sex roles, and what radical feminists seek today is the freedom to decide what to do with their lives without the determining mantle of sex limiting or impeding their opportunities. The older form of feminism has also resurged with large numbers of women demanding an expansion of existing sex roles.

Whether this new wave of feminism will be able to alter significantly the sexist *status quo* remains to be seen. The radical feminists have correctly identified the sexist division of societies as the major way in which women are oppressed but this recognition needs to be coupled both with a comprehensive understanding of the complex and subtle ways in which sexism permeates every facet of social and economic organisation, and with a revolutionary strategy for undermining it. I see this work as contributing to the first requirement: this book assumes a critical stance towards sexism and concentrates on important events, issues and ideas in the development of sexism in Australia.

This book has taken almost four years to research and write. During that time I have changed my ideas, not only about the book's subject matter but also about how it should be written. When I began, I was very concerned to present an extensively documented case for my contentions and although I felt unfettered by the traditional boundaries of academic research, I was nevertheless still convinced of the need to adhere to its conventions of scholarship. I have recently felt increasingly that this is not so necessary, especially when it can often lead to omitting important insights and observations simply because they cannot be incorporated within an academic framework. Thus, the chapters written most recently diverge considerably from the patterns I established with those I wrote first. This will be evident to the reader. But since I see my work as reflecting my ideas at any given time, I saw no need to rewrite these earlier chapters to give the book a uniformity of style or method.

What follows is the result of four years of thinking and writing and engagement in numerous political activities. The latter, especially, have profoundly influenced me. I have been involved in three major political activities in the last three years: the establishing of *Refractory Girl*, a women's studies journal which was begun in December 1972; the squatting movement in Victoria Street, Kings Cross, as part of a protest against the tearing down of inner-city low rent housing areas to be replaced by high-rise speculative office or hotel developments; and the setting up of Elsie Women's Refuge in Glebe in March 1974. Each of these involvements has been the result of convictions I have had about the economic and cultural needs of disadvantaged groups in our society, the majority of whom in each case have been women. But my ideas have been altered to some extent as a result of these practical involvements. I see the constant interaction of ideas and action as being necessary to my self-development and my struggle against oppression in the various forms it takes in Australian society. I hope that this book will provide ideas and incentive to others who are similarly engaged in such struggles

Miriam Dixson

The Real Matilda

(3rd ed)

Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994

In this exploratory book I propose that Australian women, women in the land of mateship, 'the Ocker', keg-culture, come pretty close to top rating as the 'Doormats of the Western world'. Since I am part of my culture, since it is in me and I am of it, I include myself in all I say about Australian women.

This book is called *The Real Matilda*. Australia's unofficial national anthem is often said to be 'Waltzing Matilda', linked partly with poet Banjo Paterson in the 1890s though possibly originating earlier as a folk song in Western Queensland. The innocent foreigner may be forgiven for thinking the 'anthem' includes a woman called 'Matilda' and some scholars suggest an early English origin which did include a woman. But our anthem does not. The words 'Waltzing Matilda' mean 'carrying a swag', and a swag is a bundle of the possessions or property of a swagman. One might be going too far in describing the swagman as an isolate-reject. On the other hand, Australians would probably not quarrel with the statement that the swagman rejected *women*. Not that the statement isn't questionable: it just isn't worth questioning; let's get on with the action. Matilda, then, is a thing, an item of property of a male who rejects women. This anthem relies more than do formal anthems on its action or story, so we have to note that the actors include a sheep ('jumbuck'), which, unlike the surrogate woman Matilda, is at least alive; horses, troopers mounted on horses (the military aren't far away in an ex-convict colony); and finally a landowner called a squatter. Emotional involvement centres around these players, and Australians have widely taken the drama to their heart, finding it all part of the natural order of things. Not surprisingly, then, there are also no women in the pantheon of Australian gods. No goddesses: the Norsemen, Greeks and Romans didn't know the score. Among the gods of Australia there is, once more, an animal, this time a horse called Phar Lap. The rest tend to be males under all-male and danger-fraught conditions: eg mateship-men at Gallipoli and Ned Kelly's all-male gang; or males who are loners and rolling-stones, nineteenth-century Ockers, eternal sexual adolescents, one feels, exuding wariness or fear about women, and often themselves virtually womanless. Henry Lawson and Ned Kelly will do as examples. In short, Australian gods were and are largely misogynist.

During the formative times of all States, except South Australia, women were widely treated with contempt, in its many variations, and often with brutality. We have never outgrown the former attitude, and our women are still deeply, if unconsciously, impoverished by this dominant cultural characteristic.

Australians are now increasingly discovering their past. But the explorers are mainly males and what they are uncovering tends to concern the lives and achievements of males. Their work is thus a kind of unacknowledged affirmation of their present identity through a celebration of their past selves. They believe, however, that they are uncovering 'the past', and fail to notice that they deny that same affirmation to women through school, university, the novel and the mass media. Thus, in this proud democracy, women figure as pygmies in the culture of the present and are almost obliterated from the annals of the past.

Clinical psychologist Ronald Conway believes we Australians have exaggerated 'the Anglo-Saxon habit of differentiating the sexes to the point of parody'. There's no doubt that Australian men and women are *supposed* to differ from each other in a quite weird way. The 'ideal' Australian male 'should' be insensitive and blockish, while his 'ideal' female counterpart should be so colourless that she seems mentally backward. Happily many of us ignore ideals like these. But still, by adopting such rigid ideal sex-role differences, Australian men and women deny one another too many of the human qualities which the sexes share. And so we short-change each other pathetically, stunting possibilities for fellowship and the kind of sexual joy that can only go with a rich sense of shared humanity. That sharing process is taking place more slowly here than in any of our cousin countries: England, the United States, Canada, Sweden . . .

A past, a history, unusually steeped in misogyny, has bequeathed Australians some especially narrow styles of man-woman relations, with nuances specific to Australia. Our task is to look at these specific nuances and the historical influences that shaped them. Why? In order to understand, and then to change, the present. Thus these chapters look at misogynous influences arising from Australia's history so as to shrug off the faster those influences we feel impoverish us as we live out our present. The magic might work like this. Looking at history, we finally decide, yes, all things considered, our ancestors couldn't have been much different. There but for the grace of God go I . . . in 1788, or 1830, or 1875. But they've landed us with much the same attitudes. The needle has lodged for too long in one groove of an old record. We must exorcise the ghosts of yesterday.

Apart from influences peculiar to the Australian past, twentieth century international consumer society, with its new religion of technology, weaponry, machismo ('Marlboro Country') maleness, and consumerism, threatens to convert women (as John Kenneth Galbraith puts it) into a 'cryptoservant class'.

I call this an exploratory book, not as a device to disarm critics, but as an honest statement of intent and limitations. Virtually all serious analysis of Australian character — or identity — is *by* males *about* males. So what else could I be doing but throwing up a temporary scaffolding? As things stand at the moment, males unknowingly use history as a way of ensuring that their existence in the present is worthwhile, by exploring its roots in an allegedly national past. At the same time, they effectively deny this to women. So women's virtual obliteration from a communal past has left them without overarching perspectives, generous and airy dwellings within which they can seek their faces in the present with surer direction.

This book explores the issues of woman and identity in Australia from 1788 to the present. I have followed Erik Erikson's use of identity, which he sees as 'a process "located" in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of this communal culture . . . [it] depends on the support which the young individual receives from the collective sense of identity characterising the social groups significant to him: his class, his nation, his culture . . .'

Erikson would not regard this as a definition of identity, for he explicitly refuses to define the concept, letting its sense emerge in the course of his writings, as it does. This very lack of semantic polish serves as an index of the exploratory state of psychohistorical inquiry. Nevertheless one can see that Erikson's use of 'identity' gathers in the unconscious, our sense of the body, social class, the nation, and cultural tradition. All these live as throbbing psychic realities in the individual as he or she moves through the days. Erikson's approach to identity thus allows one to follow a given problem into many disciplines, though, as his readers will know, there is one central to them all: history.

I've had to accept the fact that his conceptual itinerary, as he calls it, takes its point of departure from the life-cycle of males. But his concept of identity seems as good a starting point as one can find, given that women are only beginning to define themselves as culturally authentic existents.

While one must agree with Herbert Marcuse that 'no degree of androgynous fusion could ever abolish the natural differences between males and females as individuals', my final understanding of man and woman is that in the last instance — not, for example, in bed — they aren't separate beings but two complementary aspects of an entity called 'the human being'. So Tennyson's words on the cover of the *Rules of the Womanhood Suffrage League of New South Wales*, 1895, make a lot of sense to me: 'The Woman's Cause is Man's; they rise or sink together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free.'

In the long history of patriarchal societies, certain human qualities have been attributed to the female rather than the male ... 'receptivity, sensitivity, non-violence, tenderness, and so on'. But, Marcuse continues, why 'do these life-protecting characteristics appear as specifically feminine characteristics?' At this moment, characteristics which males in patriarchal society have tended to deny in themselves are surfacing for increasing numbers of men. Theodore Roszak believes the woman most in need of liberation is the woman 'locked up in the dungeons' of man's psyche.' Well, it looks as if she's on her way out, and nothing is going to stop her.

Our species has experience of a wide range of styles of being male, and the 'machismo' or 'macho' style is only one. 'Macho' qualities — a relentless drive to dominance, competitiveness, restlessness, status-obsession, insensitivity and lack of inwardness — characterize those men in Western and Westernizing societies whom David Riesman calls the 'pace-setting and boundary creating men'. If by their domination of major institutions they con other men into believing theirs is the only way of being men, they also con women into believing theirs is the authentic way of being *people*, and that consequently women should be, not female human beings, but *feminine* human beings. That involves 'servicing' the needs of real people — macho males — in the economy, the polity and the home.

Erich Fromm shows that eight 'life-affirmative societies' (the Zuni Pueblo Indians, the Mountain Arapesh, the Bathonga, the Aranda, the Semangs, the Todas, the Polar Eskimos, and the Mbutus) are not achievement-oriented, nature-destroying or violence-addicted: 'There is little envy, covetousness, greed and exploitativeness. There is also little competition and individualism and a great deal of co-operation.' Our way of being human, then, is not inevitably dictated by nature but shaped by the special type of social arrangements in which, as children, we begin to take form, from the moment we open our eyes. However in Fromm's life-affirming societies, 'women are in general considered equal to men, or at least not exploited or humiliated . . .' This is also a way of saying that, in contrast to the pattern-setting males in our own society, males in the life-affirming societies do not deny and denigrate their own qualities of receptivity, sensitivity, non-violence, tenderness, by labelling them 'feminine'. Such males, then, are not machismo males, and the woman in their psyche is not locked in any dungeon.

Men often say that Australian women can be paralytically boring to be with — though I must admit I often find our men that way too. But the frequent flatness of Australian women — if we confine ourselves to women for the moment — is only a variant of what is called 'feminine conservatism'. As Philip Slater puts it, feminine conservatism 'is part of a role into which women are inducted by men . . . Men, like all dominant groups, have generally been successful in getting women (like other "minority" groups) to accept whatever definition of their essential character has been convenient for men.' Feminine conservatism clutches on to

power through the family, where the mother plays her part in setting up the same psychic pattern for the rising generation. But now, for better and for worse, the disjuncture between generations has become so sharp that the mother's usual unconscious transmitting devices do not work, and significant layers of younger women, (though not *just* younger women), are failing to be drawn into the substitute-gratification patterns of earlier generations. They are intuitively moving towards ways of living as 'subjects' in their own right. And the same historical development is also throwing up a complementary, though at present it seems much smaller, layer of men who feel a gut-revulsion over the demand that they relate to women in terms of domination and subordination.

This is happening on an international scale, but we in Australia are lagging seriously, and in any case, we need to get it together in the light of our own specific traditions, which means in the light of our own historical legacy. Men *like* women less in Australia than in any other community I know. However if it is true that, in some final sense, men and women are not separate universes, but two complementary aspects of an entity called 'the human being', the whole starves when the parts are stunted. And in any case, women's progress in Australia will probably finally undergo that odd bogging-down process that Scandinavians seem to be reporting' unless men wake up to what *they* are missing out on, and *want* women to go further. That does seem to be happening. For example, Professor Warren Farrell, an American, writes: 'The liberated woman can allow a man more autonomy in his personal life' . . . 'Sexual attractiveness deserts a woman who gives up her sense of freedom and her ability to explore . . .' and 'Men who learn to listen to women . . . acquire a new set of values.'

Since 1788 there has always been a time-lag between major social developments in the rest of the Western world and in Australia, and admittedly in this question of man-woman relations, Australian men, by and large, still look pretty backward. An American male historian I know teaches about civil rights and women's history in an Australian university history department. A student asked one of the American's male Australian colleagues, a fellow historian, what the American's course dealt with, and the Australian historian replied — and amicably told the American later — that he taught about 'coons and cunts'. Still, the particular substitute-gratifications Australian males clutch at in place of authentic human relations with women are shoddier than the ones men have in many other patriarchal countries, and somehow even these grow increasingly sour as the years go by.

As in all patriarchal societies, men in Australia have laid down the basic ground rules for the power structure, itself apparently pivoted around the sexual power-relationship. Having set it up (though many complain — quite rightly and literally — that it's killing them) men still get the bigger power pay-offs from the game itself. So they have more vested interest in keeping the game going than have women. Ronald Sampson writes: 'To the extent that we develop our capacity for power we weaken our capacity for love; and conversely, to the extent that we grow in our ability to love we disqualify ourselves for success in the competition for power.'

Understandably, more men than women feel safer in clinging to power, in the economy, polity and in personal relations, because since our capacity to love has been so much diminished, it is none too sure that love can be rewarding enough to make up for loss of power. This is all worked out unconsciously, and it surfaces, if at all, in terms of a belief that domination-subordination relations are the crux of sexual relations. The paradigm case of defining sexuality as domination and subordination, I think, is exemplified by the Androids inhabiting *Playboy* magazine and its feminine counterparts, *Cosmopolitan*, etc.

This is what Freudians mean when they say people will cling to 'substitute-gratifications' even though they half-realize they are being destroyed by them, because they have no deep-down certainty that there are other gratifications. The game men have set up — a game in which

women adapt, grasp at compensations, and a game whose patterns they transmit as mothers — is starving both men and women. Australia's history has made that starvation more severe than in analogous patriarchal societies. So men and women alike have the best possible reason for changing the whole game: unadulterated and enlightened self-interest. Put Eros to work!

Keith Windshuttle

The Killing of History

Macleay, 1994

Like other scientific practitioners, historians study their subject by means of a disciplined methodology. This involves adopting practices and standards that are commonly recognised throughout the discipline, especially in their handling of the evidence that goes to make up their explanations. The deployment of evidence within history, however, is one area in which many of those who reject its scientific status believe they have a winning hand. Historical evidence takes the form of the documents that remain from the past, and there are two arguments frequently given about why this is always problematic. First, it is claimed the process is inherently selective. The documents that remain from the past are not a complete record. What has been preserved is often determined by what the historical actors themselves thought desirable to leave to posterity. The evidence available is therefore claimed to be always tainted by subjectivity. Second, it is argued that the process is basically interpretative. Analysing documents is nothing more than interpreting texts and the process of interpretation is, again, always subjective. Hence, on this account, historians are just as far removed from any claim to a scientific method as are literary critics.

Many of those who put one or both of these arguments appear to assume that the evidence upon which historians rely is composed of a fixed and given body of documents. This certainly seems to be behind many of the assumptions of the French author Paul Veyne, whose book *Writing History* mounts a sustained critique of the scientific status of history. The same is true of Michel Foucault who, when interviewed about his history of medicine, *The Birth of the Clinic*, said he had prepared himself by reading all the documents on the subject for the period 1780-1820, by which he meant nothing more than the small number of published works written by contemporary health reformers and medical scientists. While this may be acceptable in France, in most other countries historians operate on a different plane. They do not assume there is a given body of specially preserved documents with which they must work. As G. R. Elton has observed, arguments like those above show their authors are not well acquainted with the way historical evidence comes into existence since 'that which is deliberately preserved by observers is a drop in the bucket compared with what is left behind by action and without thought of selection for preservation purposes'.

Rather than 'selecting' from a given body of texts, most historians go in search of evidence to be used to *construct* their own account of what happened. To this extent, those structuralists and poststructuralists who say that history is constructed are correct. However, the historian's construction is not something derived solely from the internal machinations of his or her language and text. Nor is it a mere 'interpretation' of the texts provided by the people of times past. An historical explanation is an inductive argument constructed out of evidence, which is quite a different thing. There is actually a dual process involved: first, determining what evidence exists to address a given issue; second, analysing that evidence, which means testing it for authenticity and then assessing its significance for the case at hand. Although historians construct their case, they do not construct the evidence for that case; rather, they *discover* it. Very few documents left from the past are compiled for the benefit of historians. Probably the biggest single category is made up of the working records that all human institutions — family, workplace, law court, government or military — use to manage their affairs. The archive records of these institutions provide far more historical evidence than the limited

range of published essays, books and memoirs consulted by Foucault and Co. Archival research has to be both painstaking and imaginative — the past does not yield up its secrets willingly — and is never neatly packaged and readily accessible in the way many literary critics and social theorists assume on the basis of their own circumscribed research practices.

It is important to emphasise that those who insist that all historic evidence is inherently subjective are wrong. Archive documents have a reality and objectivity of their own. The names, numbers and expressions on the pages do not change, no matter who is looking at them, and irrespective of the purposes, ideologies and interpretations that might be brought to bear upon them. Historians are not free to interpret evidence according to their theories or prejudices. The evidence itself will restrict the purposes for which it can be used. This is true even of those documents for which all historians agree that varying interpretations are possible. In these cases, the range of possibilities is always finite and can be subject to debate. Ambiguity or lack of clarity do not justify a Derridean dissolution into nullity. Moreover, once it has been deployed, the documentary evidence is there, on the historic record, for anyone else to examine for themselves. Footnoted references and proper documentation are essential to the practise of the discipline. This means that the work of historians, like that of scientists, may be subject to both corroboration and testability by others in their field.

While it is true that historians often come to the task of writing history with the aim of pushing a certain kind of theory, of establishing a certain point, or of solving a certain problem, one of the most common experiences is that the evidence they find leads them to modify their original approach. When they go looking for evidence, they do not simply find the one thing they are looking for. Most will find many others that they had not anticipated. The result, more often than not, is that this unexpected evidence will suggest alternative arguments, interpretations and conclusions, and different problems to pursue. In other words, the evidence often makes historians change their minds, quite contrary to the claims of those who assert that the reverse is true. Although theories or values might inspire the origins of an historic project, in the end it is the evidence itself that determines what case it is possible to make.

Overall, then, historical explanations have a number of characteristics that deserve to be regarded as properly scientific. Although they are narratives of unique, unrepeatable events and are not involved in formulating general laws or making predictions, historical explanations share these characteristics with several other fields of study including evolutionary biology, geology and recent approaches to cosmology. Like these fields, the history of human affairs is defined by its study of the variance over time of its subject matter. Again, like them, its explanations are grounded in contingency. What happens in history is not random but is contingent upon everything that came before. Historical explanations may focus on either general or specific accounts of human affairs, but usually involve the interplay between the two. Historians adhere to a disciplined methodology that involves the construction of explanations from evidence. The evidence they use is not given but is something they must, first, discover and, second, analyse for authenticity and significance for the explanation. Only a minority of the evidence used by historians is that which has been deliberately preserved for posterity. Their biggest single source of evidence comprises the working records of the institutions of the past, records that were created, not for the benefit of future historians, but for contemporary consumption and are thus not tainted by any prescient selectivity. Most of these documents retain an objectivity of their own. Although much historical research may be inspired and initiated by historians' values and theories, the kind of documentation and reference citation used within the discipline means that their explanations can be tested, corroborated or challenged by others. Hence the *findings* made by historical explanations are the product of a properly scientific methodology.

History as a discipline

The concept of an academic discipline is being assailed these days on a number of fronts. This is especially true in the humanities and social sciences where, as Chapter One recorded, new movements in literary criticism and social theory want either to override the previous boundaries between disciplines or else to subsume some of the older fields within new ones. One of the authors discussed in this chapter, Anthony Giddens, has argued that there is no discernible difference any more between history and sociology and so both should be taken over by a creature of his own invention called 'structuration theory'. From a different perspective, the proponents of cultural studies, as we have seen, believe that they are the ones now best equipped to handle historical issues. What is perhaps of even greater concern is the fact that the major recent champions of traditional academic values and the greatest critics of the new theories have themselves not seen fit to couch their defence within a framework based on the value of academic disciplines. Both Alan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* and Roger Kimball in *Tenured Radicals* have upheld the value of 'the canon' of Western learning; that is, the generally recognised body of 'Great Books' that have stood the test of time and that, until recently, were acknowledged as central to a complete education. But their concept of preserving this canon has not extended to the intellectual disciplines within which most of these books were written. This is not, presumably, because Bloom and Kimball are against this idea. Let me give some reasons why they should have taken their argument one step further.

Rather than the production of a corpus of outstanding works, the basis of Western learning has been the organisation of the pursuit of knowledge into a number of distinct fields called 'disciplines'. Without decrying the stature of the Great Books, it is nonetheless true that their achievements were made possible by the contribution and the example of all those who laboured in the same intellectually coherent field of study. As Edward Gibbon, Isaac Newton and others openly acknowledged, the major figures have always stood on the shoulders of their peers. The history of Western knowledge shows the decisive importance of the structuring of disciplines. This structuring allowed the West to benefit from two key innovations: the systematisation of research methods, which produced an accretion of consistent findings; and the organisation of effective teaching, which permitted a large and accumulating body of knowledge to be transmitted from one generation to the next.

Intellectual disciplines were founded in ancient Greece and gained a considerable impetus from the work of Aristotle who identified and organised a range of subjects into orderly bodies of learning. The next major stimulus to the formation of disciplines was the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century when new disciplines proliferated and several older fields were revived. However, there had been a long, intervening period, from the early to the late Middle Ages, when most disciplines were obliterated by medieval scholasticism which insisted it could explain everything. The literature of this theological movement is characterised by an absence of differentiation between subject matter and by its lack of criteria for what type of arguments or evidence may be counted as relevant in any explanation. Obscurantism flourished and questions about the nature of the world were settled by appeal to the Bible and other religious texts. Cryptic deliberation reached such a point of absurdity that the fate of the Byzantine empire of the Orthodox church hinged on its dispute with the Latin church over whether the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father *and* the Son, as from one principle and one substance, or proceeds *by* the Son, being of the same nature and substance, or from the Father *and* the Son, by one spiration and production. To those who broke away from all this in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and who, by reviving the intellectual traditions of Greece and Rome, created the Renaissance, 'scholasticism' was a term of mockery and derision. One of the most striking things about the output of late twentieth century literary and social theory is how closely it

resembles — through its slavish devotion to seminal texts and its unrestrained flight across all subject matter — the scholasticism of the medieval clergy. Instead of the title that this movement has conferred on itself, 'the new humanities', a more fitting epithet would be 'the new scholasticism'.

A discipline has a common viewpoint on its subject matter plus a common method of study. Several disciplines can share the same subject matter: human society, for instance, is the subject of history, sociology, anthropology and economics. In this case, the difference between the disciplines is determined by the viewpoint with which the subject is approached and by the methodology used: history has always differentiated itself by its focus on the dimension of time and by an empirical, document-based research process. Disciplines are not fixed or static; they evolve over time, sometimes pursuing the logic of their founding principles into areas not imagined by their initial practitioners. Until recently, history itself was still evolving, as witnessed by the burgeoning of social history and 'history from below' in the 1960s and 1970s which added a valuable new dimension and insight to the field. But disciplines can also arrive at a point of crisis and suffer an irreparable breakdown. One could make a good case, in fact, that this is now the situation facing both sociology and anthropology. They were both founded as time-free studies of society and, now that it has dawned on them that it is impossible to investigate their subjects in this way, the inhabitants of these fields are on a desperate hunt for alternative territory. Hence their interest in occupying the ground that was once the sole province of narrative history.

Overall, it is fair to conclude that, despite all the claims to the contrary, history still retains its credentials as a discipline that demonstrates both the underlying merit of the Western scientific tradition and the fact that this tradition can be properly applied to the study of human affairs. The real test of intellectual value, of course, can only be demonstrated by the output of a discipline. Although they are being assailed on all sides, there is still enough work produced by empirical historians to confirm the worth of what they are doing and to establish that the complete victory of their opponents would amount to a massive net loss for Western scholarship. One of the best expressions of this comes from the now out-of-print and out-of-fashion 1960s manual by G. R. Elton cited earlier. Elton is one of the few commentators to have defended the discipline as a discipline, that is, as a joint effort by its practitioners who, through a process of research, dispute, claim and counterclaim, have made genuine advances in humanity's understanding of itself.

‘Anyone doubting this might care to take any sizeable historical problem — the decline of the Roman Empire, or the rise of industrial England — and study its discussion in the serious literature of the last fifty years. He will encounter a great deal of disagreement, much proven error, and probably a fair amount of plain nonsense; but if he is at all alert he will be astonished by the way in which the body of agreed knowledge has augmented and by the manner in which variations of interpretation come to be first increased and then reduced by this advance. Historians are so fond of parading their disagreements — and the study does, indeed, progress as often as not by the reopening of seemingly settled questions — that the cumulative building up of assured knowledge of both fact and interpretation is easily overlooked. Yet it is indeed impressive, the product of systematic, controlled, imaginatively conducted research.’

Colleen McCullough

The First Man in Rome

Arrow, 1991

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Essentially, this book is a one-woman band. I have done my own research, executed the maps and drawings myself and written my own glossary. However, there are two people I would like to thank by name, most sincerely. The first is Dr Alanna Nobbs, of Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, who has acted as my classical editor. The second is Miss Sheelah Hidden, who travelled the world in search of source materials and books, talked to many authorities in the field, and more. To the many others who shall be nameless due to lack of space, but no less highly regarded because of it, a warm and sincere thank you also. And thanks to my husband; to my literary agent, Fred Mason; my editor, Carolyn Reidy; Jean Easthope; Joe Nobbs; and the staff.

Rather than append a long scholarly dissertation in defence of my hypotheses, I have chosen to incorporate a minimum of this within the Glossary. For those with sufficient background to be sceptical about my treatment of the relationship between Marius and Sulla during these early years, about the identity of Sulla's first wife, and about the number of daughters Gaius Julius Caesar Nepos had, I suggest you consult the Julilla entry in the Glossary, wherein you will find my thoughts on these matters. To check the facts about Martha the Syrian's prophecies concerning Gaius Marius, see Martha in Glossary. And if you doubt the ancients knew what vintage wines were, look up wine. A discussion about the location of the Forum Piscinum and the Forum Frumentarium can be found under those entries. And so on. The Glossary is as full and accurate as space permits.

No bibliography is appended. First of all, because it is not usual to do so in the case of a novel. But more importantly, any bibliography would run to many pages. One hundred and eighty volumes of the Loeb Classical Library in my possession would be but a small beginning. I will only say, that where possible, I have gone to the ancient sources, and have treasured the modern works of many fine historians, including Pauly, Wissowa, Broughton, Syme, Mommsen, Munzer, Scullard, and others. My scholarship will be obvious enough to those qualified to judge, without a bibliography. However, should any reader be interested, he or she may write to me for a bibliography care of the publisher.

A word about the drawings. I am so tired of people thinking Cleopatra looked like Elizabeth Taylor, Mark Antony like Richard Burton, and so forth, that I decided to supply my readers with genuine Republican Roman faces. Where possible, these are authenticated likenesses; where no such identification has been made, I have chosen an anonymous Republican Roman head of the right age and type, and given it a historical name. In this book, there are nine drawings of persons. Only two are authenticated — Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Of the other seven, Catulus Caesar is based upon an atypical portrait bust of Caesar the Dictator, and Gaius Julius Caesar upon an equally atypical portrait bust of a Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. Aurelia is taken from the full-length statue of a crone of impeccably Republican date; though the statue is weather-worn, the lady's bones bore a strong likeness to those of Caesar the Dictator. Metellus Numidicus, Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, Publius Rutilius Rufus, and the young Quintus Sertorius are based upon anonymous portrait busts of Republican date. That

only one woman has been included is due to the dearth of Republican-era female portraits; what few do exist, I have had to ration out, and keep them to illustrate women in whom I can see a likeness to some authenticated Roman man. There are, after all, more books to come!

The next book in the series is tentatively titled *The Grass Crown*.

Jim Sharpe, Joan Scott

History from below / Women's History

New Perspectives on Historical Writing (ed Peter Burke)

Polity Press, 1991

Jim Sharpe

'History from below'

Our final point, therefore, must be that however valuable history from below might be in helping to establish the identity of the lower orders, it should be brought out of the ghetto (or peasant village, working-class street, slum or tower block) and used to criticize, redefine and strengthen the historical mainstream. Those writing history from below have not only provided a body of work which permits us to know more about the past: they have also made it plain that there is a great deal more, much of its secrets still lurking in unexplored evidence, which could be known. Thus history from below retains its subversive aura. There is a distant danger that, as happened with the *Annales* school, it may become a new orthodoxy, but at the moment it still cocks a snook at the mainstream. There will certainly be historians, both academic and popular, who will contrive to write books which implicitly or explicitly deny the possibility of a meaningful historical re-creation of the lives of the masses, but their grounds for so doing will become increasingly shaky. History from below helps convince those of us born without silver spoons in our mouths that we have a past, that we come from somewhere. But it will also, as the years progress, play an important part in helping to correct and amplify that mainstream political history which is still the accepted canon in British historical studies.

Joan Scott

'Women's History'

Most women's history has sought somehow to include women as objects of study, subjects of the story. It has taken as axiomatic the notion that the universal human subject could include women and provided evidence and interpretations about women's varied actions and experiences in the past. Since, however, in modern Western historiography, the subject has most often been embodied as a white male, women's history inevitably confronts (what the American legal theorist Martha Minow calls) 'the dilemma of difference.' This dilemma arises because difference is constructed 'through the very structure of our language, which embeds . . . unstated points of comparison inside categories that bury their perspective and wrongly imply a natural fit with the world.' 'Universal' implies a comparison with the specific or the particular, white men with others who are not white or not male, men with women. But these comparisons are most often stated and understood as natural categories, separate entities, rather than as relational terms. Hence to make a claim about the importance of women in history is necessarily to come up against definitions of history and its agents already established as 'true' or at least as accurate reflections of what happened (or what mattered) in the past. And it is to contend with standards secured by comparisons that are never stated, by points of view that are never expressed as such.

Women's history, implying as it does a modification of 'history,' scrutinizes the way the meaning of that general term has been established. It questions the relative priority given to 'his-story' as opposed to 'her-story,' exposing the hierarchy implicit in many historical accounts. And, more fundamentally, it challenges both the sufficiency of any history's claim to tell a whole story and the completeness and self-presence of history's subject — universal Man. Although all historians of women do not ask these questions directly, their work implies them: By what processes have men's actions come to be considered a norm, representative of human history generally, and women's actions either overlooked, subsumed, or consigned to a less important, particularised arena? What unstated comparisons are implicit in terms like 'history' and 'the historian'? Whose perspective establishes men as primary historical actors? What is the effect on established practices of history of looking at events and actions from other subject positions, that of women, for example? What is the relationship of the historian to the subjects s/he writes about?

Peter Burke

Overture

New Perspectives on Historical Writing (ed Peter Burke)

Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991

What is the New History?

The phrase 'the new history' is best known in France. *La nouvelle histoire* is the title of a collection of essays edited by the distinguished French medievalist Jacques Le Goff. Le Goff has also helped edit a massive three-volume collection of essays, concerned with 'new problems', 'new approaches' and 'new objects'. In these cases it is clear what the new history is: it is a history 'made in France', the country of *la nouvelle vague* and *le nouveau roman* not to mention *la nouvelle cuisine*. More exactly, it is the history associated with the so-called *ecole des Annales*, grouped around the journal *Annales: economies, societes, civilisations*.

What is this *nouvelle histoire*? A positive definition is not easy; the movement is united only in what it opposes, and the pages which follow will demonstrate the variety of the new approaches. It is therefore difficult to offer more than a vague description, characterizing the new history as total history (*histoire totale*) or as structural history. Hence there may be a case for imitating medieval theologians faced with the problem of defining God, and opting for a *via negativa*, in other words for defining the new history in terms of what it is not, of what its practitioners oppose.

The new history is history written in deliberate reaction against the traditional 'paradigm', that useful if imprecise term put into circulation by the American historian of science Thomas Kuhn. It will be convenient to describe this traditional paradigm as 'Rankean history', after the great German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), although he was less confined by it than his followers were. (Just as Marx was not a Marxist, Ranke was not a Rankean). We might also call this paradigm the common-sense view of history, not to praise it but to make the point that it has often — too often — been assumed to be *the* way of doing history, rather than being perceived as one among many various possible approaches to the past. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the contrast between old and new history might be summed up in the following points.

1. According to the traditional paradigm, history is essentially concerned with politics. In the confident Victorian phrase of Sir John Seeley, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, 'History is past politics: politics is present history.' Politics was assumed to be essentially concerned with the state: in other words it was national and international rather than local. However, it did include the history of the Church as an institution and also what the military theorist Karl von Clausewitz defined as 'the continuation of politics by other means', that is, war. Although other kinds of history — the history of art, for example, or the history of science — were not altogether excluded by the traditional paradigm, they were marginalized in the sense of being considered peripheral to the interests of 'real' historians.

The new history, on the other hand, has come to be concerned with virtually every human activity. 'Everything has a history', as the scientist J.B.S.Haldane once wrote; that is, everything has a past which can in principle be reconstructed and related to the rest of the

past. Hence the slogan ‘total history’, so dear to the *Annales* historians. The first half of the century witnessed the rise of the history of ideas. In the last thirty years we have seen a number of remarkable histories of topics which had not previously been thought to possess a history, for example, childhood, death, madness, the climate, smells, dirt and cleanliness, gestures, the body, femininity, reading, speaking, and even silence. What had previously been considered as unchanging is now viewed as a ‘cultural construction’, subject to variation over time as well as in space.

The cultural relativism implied here deserves to be emphasised. The philosophical foundation of the new history is the idea that reality is socially or culturally constituted. The sharing of this idea, or this assumption, by many social historians and social anthropologists helps explain the recent convergence between these two disciplines, referred to more than once in the chapters which follow. This relativism also undermines the traditional distinction between what is central in history and what is peripheral.

2. In the second place, traditional historians think of history as essentially a narrative of events, while the new history is more concerned with the analysis of structures. One of the most famous works of history of our time, Fernand Braudel’s *Mediterranean*, dismisses the history of events (*histoire evenementielle*) as no more than the foam on the waves of the sea of history. According to Braudel, economic and social changes over the long term (*la longue duree*) and geohistorical changes over the very long term are what really matter. Although there has recently been something of a reaction against this view and events are no longer dismissed as easily as they used to be, the history of structures of various kinds continues to be taken very seriously.

3. In the third place, traditional history offers a view from above, in the sense that it has always concentrated on the great deeds of great men, statesmen, generals, or occasionally churchmen. The rest of humanity was allocated a minor role in the drama of history. The existence of this rule is revealed by reactions to its transgression. When the great Russian writer Alexander Pushkin was working on an account of a peasant revolt and its leader Pugachev, Tsar Nicholas’ comment was that ‘such a man has no history.’ In the 1950s, when a British historian wrote a thesis about a popular movement in the French Revolution, one of his examiners asked him, ‘Why do you bother with these bandits?’

On the other hand, a number of the new historians are concerned with ‘history from below’, in other words with the views of ordinary people and with their experience of social change. The history of popular culture has received a great deal of attention. Historians of the Church are beginning to examine its history from below as well as from above. Intellectual historians too have shifted their attention away from great books, or great ideas — their equivalent of great men — to the history of collective mentalities or to the history of discourses or ‘languages’, the language of scholasticism, for example, or the language of the common law.

4. In the fourth place, according to the traditional paradigm, history should be based on the documents. One of Ranke’s greatest achievements was his exposure of the limitations of narrative sources — let us call them chronicles — and his stress on the need to base written history on official records, emanating from governments and preserved in archives. The price of this achievement was the neglect of other kinds of evidence. The period before the invention of writing was dismissed as ‘prehistory’. However, the ‘history from below’ movement in its turn exposed the limitations of this kind of document. Official records generally express the official point of view. To reconstruct the attitudes of heretics and rebels, such records need to be supplemented by other kinds of source.

In any case, if historians are concerned with a greater variety of human activities than their predecessors, they must examine a greater variety of evidence. Some of this evidence is visual, some of it oral. There is also statistical evidence: trade figures, population figures, voting figures, and so on. The heyday of quantitative history was probably the 1950s and 1960s, when some enthusiasts claimed that only quantitative methods were reliable. There has been a reaction against such claims, and to some extent against the methods as well, but interest in a more modest quantitative history continues to grow. In Britain, for example, an Association for History and Computing was founded in 1987.

5. According to the traditional paradigm, memorably articulated by the philosopher-historian R.G. Collingwood, ‘When a historian asks “Why did Brutus stab Caesar?” he means “What did Brutus think, which made him decide to stab Caesar?”’ This model of historical explanation has been criticized by more recent historians on a number of grounds, principally because it fails to take account of the variety of historians’ questions, often concerned with collective movements as well as individual actions, with trends as well as events.

Why, for example, did prices rise in sixteenth-century Spain? Economic historians do not agree in their answer to this question, but their various responses (in terms of silver imports, population growth and so on) are very far from Collingwood’s model. In Fernand Braudel’s famous study of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, first published in 1949, only the third and last part, devoted to the history of events, asks questions remotely like Collingwood’s, and even here the author offers a very different kind of answer, emphasising the constraints on his protagonist, King Philip II, and the king’s lack of influence on the history of his time.

6. According to the traditional paradigm, History is objective. The historian’s task is to give readers the facts, or as Ranke put it in a much-quoted phrase, to tell ‘how it actually happened’. His modest disclaimer of philosophical intentions was interpreted by posterity as a proud manifesto for history without bias. In a famous letter to his international team of contributors to the *Cambridge Modern History*, published from 1902 onwards, its editor, Lord Acton, urged them that ‘our Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, German and Dutch alike’ and that readers should be unable to tell where one contributor laid down his pen and another took it up.

Today, this ideal is generally considered to be unrealistic. However hard we struggle to avoid the prejudices associated with colour, creed, class or gender, we cannot avoid looking at the past from a particular point of view. Cultural relativism obviously applies as much to historical writing itself as to its so-called objects. Our minds do not reflect reality directly. We perceive the world only through a network of conventions, schemata and stereotypes, a network which varies from one culture to another. In this situation, our understanding of conflicts is surely enhanced by a presentation of opposite viewpoints, rather than by an attempt, like Acton’s, to articulate a consensus. We have moved from the ideal of the Voice of History to that of heteroglossia, defined as ‘varied and opposing voices’. It is therefore quite appropriate that this volume should itself take the form of a collective work and that its contributors should speak different mother tongues.

Rankean history was the territory of the professionals. The nineteenth century was the time when history became professionalized, with its departments in universities and its trade journals like the *Historische Zeitschrift* and the *English Historical Review*. Most of the leading new historians are also professionals, with the distinguished exception of the late Philippe Aries, who liked to describe himself as ‘a Sunday historian.’ One way to describe the achievements of the *Annales* group is to say that they have shown that economic, social and cultural history can meet the exacting professional standards set by Ranke for political history.

All the same, their concern with the whole range of human activity encourages them to be inter-disciplinary in the sense of learning from and collaborating with social anthropologists, economists, literary critics, psychologists, sociologists, and so on. Historians of art, literature and science, who used to pursue their interests more or less in isolation from the main body of historians, are now making more regular contact with them. The history-from-below movement also reflects a new determination to take ordinary people's views of their own past more seriously than professional historians used to do. The same is true for some forms of oral history. In this sense too heteroglossia is essential to the new history.

R M Crawford, Manning Clark, and Geoffrey Blainey,

Making History

R M Crawford et al

Mc Phee Gribble/Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1985

Manning Clark

The historian is like an actor on a revolving stage. He has a brief time in which to recite his words. He's got to hold the audience. He must also hope that he has used the time on the stage to teach and write about things that really matter. He musn't trivialize the human scene, he musn't sneer, he musn't mock. He must also hope that what he has seen and what he talks about will stir up a response in his audience, that they will say — and this is the only test — 'Yes, that's us.' He must also hope for something more: that he will find the strength to endure with dignity and with charity, and in silence, what he'll have to live through if he takes the enormous risk in Australia of ever letting people see the child of his heart.

Historians are often the one-time mockers who become mourners, the ones who have the eye of pity for all human beings. Historians are not annalists, they are lovers and believers.

Geoffrey Blainey

Firstly, a word about bias. At one time people used to say that historians weren't biased. Then, as so often happens, we've moved to the other extreme and bias is now accepted by many in the writing of history. I even notice an increasing tendency amongst historians to say that bias is inevitable. Let's accept it, they say, and by implication do nothing about it. We're all biased, whether prisoners of our experience, whether prisoners of our education, whether prisoners of our preferences, but we do have to live with our biases. Our biases can be sound guides; they can help us. But they are also dangerous. I sometimes find myself in the position where, having studied a problem and having come to conclusions and having written them out, I pick up what I've written and, looking at it half-neutrally, I say to myself: 'Well, I wish I hadn't said that.' In short, the conclusion I've reached on studying the evidence is different to what I instinctively feel.

Could I talk briefly about writing?

I think writing should firstly be clear. In our society and especially in universities, too much praise is given to writing simply because it's obscure. This folly, this misguided praise, applies especially in those intellectual disciplines that seem to be advancing most rapidly.

We live in a democracy, and the more widely vital or useful knowledge is spread, the more our democracy will flourish. There is no stronger impediment to the spreading of knowledge than to express something that is not conceptually difficult in prose that is difficult. It is hard to know what is the remedy for this foolish emphasis on pretentious, abstruse and muddy prose. I have often thought about the process of writing, and in the 1950s I made a living by writing history. To write is a lonely occupation. You sit down all day and you look for

excuses. You do anything rather than write. You make coffee and you answer the phone and you look up words you don't have to look up, and you can spend the day busily in the presence of your work without ever being busy. Students do that more than we do. My present view is that if we analysed writing, we would see that it consists of a number of distinct tasks. The more one separates those tasks, the easier they are. Writing is, firstly, deciding what you want to say (in the process of actually saying it you may decide to alter it). Secondly, it is deciding the sequence in which you want to say it. Thirdly, writing is actually saying it.

Writing is very different from television or from radio. It's possible on television or on radio to make two or three points at the one time. Simultaneous messages can be conveyed on radio or television. You can be watching the screen and in the top corner of the screen you can see an Indian riding his horse towards the hero; and the hero may have a look of pain on his face and that may also tell you something; and there may also be a message coming out of the hero's mouth. It's not difficult on stage or on television to express or imply three messages simultaneously. In writing, however, there can only be one message at a time. Writing is an Indian-file technique, and the words are guided one at a time through a narrow mountain pass, and it is absolutely important that you usher them through that mountain pass in the correct sequence.

In writing, then, the first task is deciding what to say. The second task, after deciding what one wants to say, is to determine the sequence in which one will say it. If you have solved those two basic problems before you begin to write, then the next problem — the saying it — is a much easier task.

If we employed, to analyse the task of writing, a Taylorite, one of those people who flourished in the United States during the First World War and looked at assembly lines and the way people went about their work, and if he looked at the way we all wrote essays or theses or books, he would notice that we often did our writing inefficiently. You see, if you are writing a thousand words of a book, if you are writing, in effect, three pages of a book, you are making at least a thousand decisions. Choosing each word is a decision, and you also have to make other decisions — deciding whether you use an additional adjective, what punctuation you use, whether you start a new paragraph, and so on. The more sensibly you make the major decisions before you even begin to write, the less it matters if you err in making the myriad of trivial decisions. The trivial decisions are easily corrected: to correct a major decision is perhaps to wreck days of writing.

I think that we were all born in the aftermath of that romantic glow where it was believed that all you had to do was to sit down with a clean sheet of paper in front of you. You had to sit there and wait until the lightning — the inspiration — struck you; and then you wrote for your life. That may be true of some kinds of writing or certain days of writing but it's not true of most kinds of writing. Writing is such a vital activity, especially to historians, that it's strange how rarely we discuss it.

R M Crawford

The study of History can teach students to look at those myths which they carry with them as unquestioned — indeed, unconscious — assumptions. When they are taught to go to evidence, and to look, as Geoffrey Blainey said earlier, not only for what is there but also for what is not there, for what is taken for granted, they do indeed come to see unquestioned inheritances against a mounting body of evidence as they go further and further into a subject.

The assumptions may be major or minor; but it is a training in setting those things you simply repeat because you heard them from your father and mother against the evidence.

I have seen students who came to us with minds rigidly fixed, or so it seemed, and have seen their minds open under the training given them, often by people who might be sympathetic to their particular assumptions but were historians first. Such a training in examining honestly the traces left by the past — knowing that they are imperfect, incomplete and open to different interpretations — this training does teach a certain honesty, even in looking at one's own assumptions. I have seen it happen so often with students who came to us in blinkers and learned to push them out a bit, without falling into cynicism or indifference.

The experience that historical training can do this is, I think, your answer. But it is for the most part an invisible influence, going from teacher to students, and from them to those whom they teach or influence in turn. And that is an influence which is renewed with every new generation of teachers and writers, and in it the true importance of historical study, teaching and writing lies.

Returning from influence to myth, the word is too shifting in meaning to allow quick answers, particularly to imperfectly heard questions. But if you approach the subject of myth, ask not only is it true or false, but also what does it tell you about those who hold it.

J H Hexter

On Historians

Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1979,

I never did see Braudel, Pocock, and Stone together in my mind's eye. Therefore I was not in the least tempted to imagine that they were or should be minds marching together in exemplification of the Main Trends in Contemporary Historiography. I was able to start where I ought, reading each book for the great enjoyment that was in it, with no thought beyond finding what it was about so I could write about it. For an inveterate splitter like myself (see chapter 5 for the definition of a splitter), that is where coming to grips with a major historical work and a major historian should start. It seems to me that books like these three ought to be licensed to put on their covers in bold type Pay attention! Listen to me! Follow along! Have fun! Books as lively, as intelligent, as clever, as bubbling with ideas as these deserve to be read for themselves and for the intellectual excitement they generate, and the first obligation of one who writes about them, both to himself and to his readers, is to catch and convey some of that excitement. He may believe that he has other obligations, but that one he must fulfil first or he will fulfil any others meagerly and poorly. If one is hooked on using history writing as a clue to the zeitgeist, it is better to use the dull historians who reflect only the zeitgeist because they have nothing to reflect in themselves. To use historians of true stature for historiographic games before one has taken the trouble to grapple with and grasp their work is a cheap kind of exploitation, a seizure of labor that good men have put their hearts into, a rip-off of bits of powerful minds in the hope that the bits can be squeezed into a silly puzzle and that no one will notice that the minds themselves are missing. It is the same spirit that makes small-minded historians collapse universal individuals into 'typical men'— St. Louis into 'the feudal monarch,' Thomas More into 'the medieval saint' or 'the protoliberal,' Edward Coke into 'the judicial herald of the triumphant middle class.' It is not the sort of thing one wants to do to great books, once one has really got to know them, or through them to know the minds of their authors.

So much for the historians this book is about and the history they have written. So much, too, for general rules about writing about other historians, prescriptive rules in historiography. A general rule is implicit in the previous section: if you cannot get yourself, your prejudices and preconceptions, out of the way of the historians whose works are historiography completely enough to avoid throwing your shadow on them, if you will not see the few freestanding ones as freestanding, then stay out of historiography; you lack the first indispensable aptitude for it.

Russel B. Nye

History, Meaning and Method

Scott, Foresman and Company, Glenview, Illinois, 1975

Foreword

Historians, it is said, are not completely confident that they can define precisely what history is. This is not a reflection on historians; rather, it means simply that history is as complex, variable, and puzzling as the people whose lives and acts it records. Like literature, philosophy, and the arts, history is a way of looking at human experience — at the lives of the individuals who are its parts and at the life of the society which is the sum. What is history's importance to the United States in the later twentieth century? What does it have to say of value to a world taut with tensions and shadowed by doubt?

First, it must be understood that history is a response to the eternal desire of human beings to know about themselves. For this reason it is fundamentally a humane study, emphasizing the importance of people, their individual choices, the values they hold, and the angles of vision by which they have looked at themselves and the world. This pervading interest in humanity is the vital link between history and other humanistic disciplines with which it shares tools and objectives. But because history deals primarily with the human race in time, it offers a way of looking at human experience that the other humanistic disciplines do not: History brings depth to the study of humanity, giving it a past perspective and a sense of the inevitability of change. Because history deals with the flow of things, it shows that nothing stands still, that experience is dynamic and continuous; it lets us know that while what is happening now is important, people have had problems before and have survived them. One of history's most valuable contributions to its reader and writer is that it puts the present in its proper place:

Second, history is concerned with societies as well as with individuals. Like social scientists, historians are interested in how — and hopefully, why — men and women have acted together as social beings. Because of its link with the social sciences, history uses the same hypotheses and findings to observe how people have developed their institutions, what they have used them for, and how they acted within the political, social, and cultural frameworks by which they order their lives. The purpose of the historian, as Marcel Proust once defined that of the novelist, is 'to rediscover, to grasp again and lay before us, that reality from which we have been so far removed by time . . . ,' that is, to recapture the reasons which lie beneath action by recovering the experience. Since history is interested in *causes*, it enlarges and clarifies our comprehension of the social process; it tries to provide a more disciplined view of some of the social problems that beset us. There is more than a little truth to Santayana's famous observation that 'those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it,' for to know how society has operated in the past may serve to remind us of the possibilities and alternatives inherent in the present. History cannot tell the present exactly what to do, but it may help it to avoid making the same mistakes over again. Today's society can distill something out of the past that may be useful for its guidance, for history has a kind of built-in early warning system for those who know how to listen to it.

Third, history emphasises the uniqueness of human experience, both individual and collective. As we read history, we begin to recognize that life is idiosyncratic and variable and that each

piece of it has its own integrity. However attractive the parallels between past and present may be, we soon learn that the past is not really repetitive, that history never does quite repeat itself. History warns us that we cannot trust reiteration, that we cannot say that what worked once, or failed once, will do so again. It serves as a corrective to too much self-confidence and too-easy answers, reminding us that we are very, very human. George Kennan, who turned to the study of history (and won a Pulitzer Prize in it) after a distinguished diplomatic career, once pointed out that in an era of spectacular scientific and technological change, when the planets themselves seem accessible to man, 'he needs to be reminded of the nature of the species he belongs to, of the limitations that rest upon him, of the essential elements, both tragic and hopeful, of his own condition. It is these reminders that history, and history alone, can give.'

Fourth, while all the humanities have the duty of conserving, transmitting, and interpreting experience, history has the special obligation to recall, reassess, and reinterpret the past, bringing it to bear on the present and translating it into a form each new generation can use. Historians deal, of course, in facts with an actual past, tied to a particular plane of reality and fixed immovably by the iron law of the documented date. But they deal not only in fact but in feel; they try to infuse facts with insights into the quality, tempo, temper, and meaning of the life in which they are rooted. Facts, despite the saying, do not speak for themselves; they say something only when chosen, arranged, and interpreted. Albert Bushnell Hart remarked a half-century ago, 'Facts as facts are no more history than recruits arrayed in battalions are an army.'

More than literature, philosophy, or the arts, history selects and judges. It sifts the whole of human culture again and again, finding new relevance in some segment of experience an earlier generation discarded, putting away for posterity something which for the moment has lost its usefulness but to which some future generation will give new meaning. What the historian must do, to use Samuel Eliot Morison's words, is 'to relate the past creatively to the present.' The purpose of the historian, then, is not merely to locate and understand the facts of human experience, but to transcend them by giving them values that are stimulating, suggestive, and newly pertinent to the historian's own time. That is why history is not only written but rewritten. It is what Emerson meant when in 1851 he wrote enigmatically in his journal, 'History is vanishing allegory.'

Anthony Burgess

Shakespeare, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970

Foreword

This is not a book about Shakespeare's plays and poems. It is yet another attempt — the *n*th — to set down the main facts about the life and society from which the poems and plays arose. If I discuss the content or technique of what Shakespeare and other men wrote, it is not with a view to providing literary history or literary criticism; it is because the people in this book are mostly professional writers, and what they attempted in their art often relates closely to what they did with their lives. But it is the lives that come first, and especially one particular life. I know that, as the materials available for a Shakespeare biography are very scanty, it is customary to make up the weight with what Dr Johnson would have termed encomiastic rhapsodies, but we are all tired of being asked to admire Shakespeare's way with vowels or run-on lines or to thrill at the modernity of his philosophy or the profundity of his knowledge of the human heart. Genuine criticism is a different thing, but that has become very highly specialised and there is certainly no room for it in a book of this kind.

What I claim here is the right of every Shakespeare-lover who has ever lived to paint his own portrait of the man. One is short of the right paints and brushes and knows one is going to end up with a botched and inadequate picture, but here I have real pictures to help me out. Or, put it another way, my task is to help the pictures.

I have already written two imaginative works on Shakespeare — a novel composed somewhat hurriedly to celebrate in 1964 the quatercentenary of his birth, and a script for a more than epic-length Hollywood film of his life. There is a great deal of verifiable fact in both these works, but there is also a great deal of guesswork, as well as some invention that has no basis even in probability. This present book contains conjecture — duly and timidly signalled by phrases like 'It well may be that ...' or 'Conceivably, about this time ...', but it eschews invention. There is, however, a chapter which attempts to reconstruct the first performance of Hamlet, and here I have silenced the little cracked fanfares of caution. Instead of saying that the actor Rice was probably, or possibly, a Welshman, I have asserted that he was, and even assigned parts like Fluellen and Sir Hugh Evans to him. The reader will recognise the fiction-writer at work and, I hope, will make due allowances. All other assertions, in other chapters, can be accepted as true.

I once wrote an article in which I said that, given the choice between two discoveries — that of an unknown play by Shakespeare and that of one of Will's laundry lists — we would all plump for the dirty washing every time. That Shakespeare persists in presenting so shadowy a figure, when his friend Ben Jonson is as clear as a bell and somewhat louder, is one of our reasons for pursuing him. Every biographer longs for some new gesture of reality — a finger-nail torn on May 7, 1598, or a bad cold during King James I's first command performance — but the gestures never materialise. We have Shakespeare's unlocked heart in the Sonnets, but these only prove that he fell in love and out of it, which happens to everybody. What we want are letters and doctor's prescriptions and the minutiae of daily life which build up to a character. It is maddening that Shakespeare gives us nothing when Ben is only too ready to accost us with his mountain belly and his rocky face. It is only among the unsound gossips in both past and present Warwickshire that we learn of Will's having no head

for drink and his doses of clap. But gossip denotes concern, even love, and it is encouraging to see Shakespeare sometimes emerging today as a living folk-spirit in lavatory graffiti and pub jokes. Unfortunately, this book has no place for such things. It is, with all its faults, all too sound!

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

The Communist Manifesto

in **The Western World**, vol 2: from 1700 (ed W E Adams)

Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1968

Introduction

Despite its brevity and simplicity, the Manifesto of Karl Marx (1818-83) and Friedrich Engels (1820-95) has sharply affected the course of modern history. The central theme has exercised a profound influence even upon many individuals who opposed the Marxist movement. Scholars rarely examine historical developments today without careful attention to economic causation.

At the Congress of a small association known as the Communist League, in 1847, Marx and Engels were commissioned to prepare a complete theoretical and practical party program. The pamphlet which they composed offered a thoroughly economic interpretation of history and heralded a new approach to human values. By applying Hegel's dialectical method to man's past development, Marx asserted that all historical phenomena had occurred as the result of class struggle. The historical process would culminate in a revolution and seizure of power by the proletariat, which would lead to a final synthesis — an idyllic classless society. How did Marx distinguish between Communists and other working-class parties? Into which languages was the Manifesto to be translated? Why? In Marxian terms, by what means and at the expense of which class had the bourgeoisie come to power? How did Marx characterize the position of professionals and artists, the condition of the family, and the status of women in bourgeois society? Why did Marx claim that the bourgeoisie was the most revolutionary class hitherto known to history? How did Marx explain colonization? According to Marx, how had the bourgeoisie forged the weapons of its own destruction? What effect did modern economic and productive trends have on the bourgeoisie? To what degree did Marxian views conform to the general pattern of nineteenth-century reform?

MANIFESTO OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where is the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?

Two things result from this fact:

- I. Communism is already acknowledged by all European powers to be itself a power.
- II. It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the spectre of communism with a manifesto of the party itself.

To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London, and sketched the following manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.

Bourgeois and Proletarians

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: It has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — bourgeoisie and proletariat.

From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed aside by the manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop.

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacture no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, modern industry, the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of

industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, an armed and self-governing association in the mediaeval commune; here independent urban republic (as in Italy and Germany), there taxable 'third estate' of the monarchy (as in France); afterwards, in the period of manufacture proper, serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy as a counterpoise against the nobility, and, in fact, corner-stone of the great monarchies in general — the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of modern industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative state, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages, which reactionaries so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all

that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, ie to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeois has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised means of production and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground — what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity — the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed. And why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons — the modern working class — the proletarians.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, ie capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed — a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work exacted in a given time, or by increased speed of the machinery, etc.

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overseer, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.

The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.

No sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer, so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.

The lower strata of the middle class — the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants — all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.

The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages.

At this stage the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeoisie. Thus the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie.

But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and

individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (trades unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that places the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the ten-hours' bill in England was carried. . .

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests; they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat....

In the conditions of the proletariat, [the social conditions no longer exist]. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests....

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum

of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air....

Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an overriding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.

The essential condition for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

Proletarians and Communists

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism.

All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favour of bourgeois property.

The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property....

To be a capitalist, is to have not only a purely personal, but a social, status in production. Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion.

Capital is therefore not a personal, it is a social power.

When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character....

You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society.

In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend....

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation....

Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty....

The bourgeois claptrap about the family and education, about the hallowed correlation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.

But you Communists would introduce community of women, screams the whole bourgeoisie in chorus.

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common; and, naturally, can come to other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production.

For the rest, nothing is more ridiculous than the virtuous indignation of our bourgeois at the community of women which, they pretend, is to be openly and officially established by the Communists. The Communists have no need to introduce a community of women; it has existed almost from time immemorial.

Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives.

Bourgeois marriage is in reality a system of wives in common and thus, at the most, what the Communists might possibly be reproached with is that they desire to introduce, in substitution for a hypocritically concealed, an openly legalised community of women. For the rest, it is self-evident, that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, ie of prostitution both public and private.

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

The workingmen have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word....

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end....

. . . In the most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable.

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal obligation of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country.
- IO. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc.

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class; if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all....

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Workingmen of all countries, unite!

Russel Ward

The Australian Legend

Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1958

THE LEGEND AND THE TASK

*'For I'm a ramble-er, a rollicking ramble-er,
'I'm a roving rake of poverty, and a son of a gun for beer.'*

In the last seventy-odd years millions of words have been written about Australian nationalism and the 'Australian character'. Most writers seem to have felt strongly that the 'Australian spirit' is somehow intimately connected with the bush and that it derives rather from the common folk than from the more respectable and cultivated sections of society. This book seeks, not to give yet another costly impressionistic sketch of what wild boys we Australians are — or like to consider ourselves — but rather to trace and explain the development of this national *mystique*.

Nearly all legends have some basis in historical fact. We shall find that the Australian legend has, perhaps, a more solid substratum of fact than most, but this does not mean that it comprises all, or even most, of what we need to know to understand Australia and Australian history. It may be, however, a very important means to this end, if only because we shall certainly be wrong if we either romanticise its influence or deny it.

National character is not, as was once held, something inherited; nor is it, on the other hand, entirely a figment of the imagination of poets, publicists and other feckless dreamers. It is rather a people's idea of itself and this stereotype, though often absurdly romanticized and exaggerated, is always connected with reality in two ways. It springs largely from a people's past experiences, and it often modifies current events by colouring men's ideas of how they ought 'typically' to behave.

According to the myth the 'typical Australian' is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing 'to have a go' at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is 'near enough'. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is 'the world's best confidence man', he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a 'hard case', sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and, above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong. No epithet in his vocabulary is more completely damning than 'scab', unless it be 'pimp' used in its peculiarly Australasian slang meaning of 'informer'. He tends to be a rolling stone, highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss.

In the following pages we shall find that all these characteristics were widely attributed to the bushmen of the last century, not, primarily, to Australians in general or even to country people in general, so much as to the outback employees, the semi-nomadic drovers, shepherds, shearers, bullock-drivers, stockmen, boundary riders, station-hands and others of the pastoral industry.

This was so partly because the material conditions of outback life were such as to evoke these qualities in pastoral workers, but partly too because the first and most influential bush-workers were convicts or ex-convicts, the conditions of whose lives were such that they brought with them to the bush the same, or very similar, attitudes.

In nineteenth-century Australia this particular social group developed a surprisingly high degree of cohesion and self-consciousness but, in isolating it for the purposes of study, some distortion may be inevitable. In fact, of course, pastoral workers were constantly influencing, and being influenced by, other sections of colonial society. A convict often spent months or years on government constructional work in the city before being assigned to the service of a country settler, or he might be returned to the city after some years 'up the country'. Small farmers and selectors often sought work as shearers on the western runs to supplement their incomes, and many a city wage-earner did the same for a few seasons, especially during bad times when work was scarce on the sea-board. Bullock-drivers, especially before railways began to creep farther and farther into the interior after about 1870, regularly flogged their teams from the colonial capitals and coastal ports to outback stations and back again. They carried news, gossip, manners and songs, as well as stores, wool and hides. One of them, Charles Macalister, wrote of Sydney in the 1840's:

‘A chief house of call for us country folk then was the old Blackboy Hotel, at the corner of George and King Streets. A kind of theatre or people's music-hall was kept in connection with this Hotel, where the leading comedians and singers were Jim Brown and 'Micky' Drew; but, as the platform of the Blackboy 'theatre' was somewhat free and easy, sometimes a strong sailorman, just off a six months cruise, would favour us with 'Nancy Lee' or other jolly sea-song; or an ambitious carrier or drover would 'rouse the possum' by giving some long winded ditty of the time.’

Drovers brought not only cattle and sheep to the city markets but also exotic styles of dress, speech and behaviour, wherewith to impress respectable citizens and newly arrived immigrants. And many a bushman from the interior settled down in the agricultural areas or the city, after a happy marriage or old age had terminated his roving habits. As Alan Marshall wrote, in 1955, of his father:

‘After he started work he drifted round from station to station horse-breaking or droving. His youth and early manhood were spent in the outback areas of New South Wales and Queensland, and it was these areas that furnished the material for all his yarns. Because of his tales, the saltbush plains and the red sand-hills of the outback were closer to me than the green country where I was born and grew to manhood.’

In some ways it is difficult to consider the pastoral workers apart from their employers, those who came to be known in and after the late 1830s as squatters. Right through the nineteenth century there is abundant evidence of class hostility between pastoral employers and employees. It culminated in the disastrous and bitter strikes between 1890 and 1894. This hostility was itself a very important factor in shaping the distinctive ideology of the pastoral employees and yet, except towards the absentee landlords who multiplied exceedingly towards the end of the period, the hostility was always qualified and conditional. The

differences between master and man were economic and often political, but not social in some cases. In the 1840s one squatter wrote of a neighbour:

‘He was a native-born white, and had been a stockowner all his life. His parents had given him a few cows and brood-mares at his birth, and he was now, by dint of time and industry, the owner of many thousands of cattle. But though fully possessed of the means, he had no wish to alter his style of living for the better, or to rest in any way from his hard and laborious employment . . .’

At least in the earliest pioneering stage, before the squatter's wife arrived to define more rigidly the barrier between 'the house' and 'the huts', conditions forced a certain degree of understanding between the occupants of both. As Samuel Sidney wrote in 1854: ‘Now, living in the Bush, and especially while travelling, there is not the same distance between a master and a well-behaved man, although a prisoner, as in towns . . .’

Moreover, although climate, economic factors and the effects of land legislation generally combined to make it difficult for a poor man to become a squatter, it was by no means impossible. An occasional unknown workman like James Tyson or Sidney Kidman by superior industry, temperance, or skill in cattle-duffing, became a 'shepherd king' and, especially in times of drought or depression like the early 1840s or 1890s, many a squatter was reduced to working for wages at one of the bush trades. The truth seems to be that the working hands, while feeling strongly opposed to their masters in general and in principle, were prepared to take each individual squatter as they found him. Also as the work of the dispossessed squatter's son, A. B. Paterson, no less than that of Furphy shows, 'there was a region, or so it seemed, where the thought and feeling of the station was identical with that of the shed.' The region was that in which the interests of both conflicted with those of absentee squatters, pastoral companies, banks, and other institutions domiciled in the cities or in Great Britain. The rather complex relationship between masters and men was thus described by an English visitor in 1903:

‘It is sometimes said that in Australia there are no class distinctions. It would probably be truer to say that in no country in the world are there such strong class-distinctions in proportion to the actual amount of difference between the 'classes'.... The 'classes' collectively distrust and fear the 'masses' collectively far more than is the case at home.... Individually, it is true, relations are for the most part amicable enough between capitalists and workmen; and the lack of deference in the tone of employees, their employers, being unable to resent, have grown to tolerate, and even perhaps in some cases secretly rather to like....’

Up to about 1900 the prestige of the bushman seems to have been greater than that of the townsman. In life as in folklore the man from 'up the country' was usually regarded as a romantic and admirable figure. The attitude towards him was reminiscent, in some interesting ways, of that towards the 'noble savage' in the eighteenth century. We shall see that, in general, he had more influence on the manners and *mores* of the city-dweller than the latter had on his. The tide turned somewhere between 1900 and 1918. Even today the tradition of the 'noble bushman' is still very strong in both literature and folklore, but, at least since the publication in 1899 of *On Our Selection*, it has been counterpoised by the opposing tradition of 'Dad and Mum, Dave and Mabel.' True, Dad and Dave were not pastoral workers, bushmen proper, but poor selectors, 'stringybark cockatoos', who were sneered at by the men from farther out long before it became fashionable for townsmen to regard them as figures of fun. It is also true that the original creations of A. H. Davis ('Steele Rudd') were real comic characters and not the semi-moronic, burlesque puppets which they have since become in popular imagination. Nevertheless their appearance in literature fifty years ago was symptomatic of a real change in Australian attitudes towards the 'bush'. Since the early days of federation the capital cities have grown rapidly both in prestige and in their relative share of state populations, and

bushmen are now usually willing to be taken for city-dwellers where formerly the reverse was the case.

In making generalizations about the bush-worker a difficulty springs from the fact of separate origins of the colonies which later became the federated states of the Commonwealth. There have always been, and still are, differences between them in speech, manners, tradition and outlook. But compared with similar differences in, say, Canada or the U.S.A., they are slight indeed, tending to be differences of degree and emphasis rather than of substance. They are more noticeable among middle-class than among working-class people, and in and near the state capitals than in the back country. We shall see that the convict-derived bush ethos grew first and flourished in its most unadulterated form in the mother colony of New South Wales, but that it early spread thence, by osmosis as it were, to become the most important basic component of the national mystique. .

Two recent newspaper reports will indicate how strong the tradition still is today, and also the extent to which it has been regionally modified.. A semi-editorial article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 July 1953 declared:

‘One of the ugly features of Australian city life is the refusal of bystanders to help, in fact their inclination to hinder, a policeman in trouble. There have been some bad cases in Sydney. Melbourne is no better, judging by an incident last week. A man who turned out to be an escaped mental patient had kicked one policeman unconscious and was struggling with another. A gathering crowd yelled, “Why don t you give him a go, you big mug?”

‘Only onlooker to intervene was a New Australian, Steve Ovcar, who secured the escapee's hands with a tie. Said Ovcar afterwards, “People are terrible here. They just watched. They were all against the policeman.”

A report in the *Adelaide Advertiser* of 12 December 1953 modified the picture slightly:

‘The attitude of the police to the public in such matters as traffic control did much to establish the regard in which the Police Department was held in the community, Mr John Bonython, a director of the *Advertiser*, said yesterday.... Mr Bonython said that the public's attitude to the police in S.A. was such that he was sure a recent incident in Sydney where members of the public failed to assist two constables who were being attacked, could not happen here....’

Many South Australians may feel that Mr Bonython was overstating his case. Inter-colonial and inter-state population movements have gone far towards establishing a general Australian outlook which, in this as in other ways, naturally derives mainly from traditions which early struck root in New South Wales, the oldest colony and, except during the last half of the nineteenth century, the most heavily populated. As R W Dale wrote in 1889:

‘The development of the typical Australian character has at no time been subjected to any violent disturbance. Among the people of New South Wales I thought that I found those qualities of life and temperament which distinguish all the colonies from the mother country, and I did not observe those secondary characteristics which belong to the special types exhibited in Victoria and South Australia.’

The fact that no convicts and relatively few Irishmen emigrated directly to South Australia explains some real differences in outlook which are still discernible, especially in Adelaide and the thickly-settled agricultural districts near it. But the dry, pastoral interior of the state is separated from the station country of New South Wales and Queensland by nothing but a line on the map. Since occupation of the interior began a hundred and fifty years ago almost every observer of outback life has been forcibly struck by the extreme mobility of the pastoral

population, and especially of the wage-earning part of it in which we are interested. This mobility has naturally resulted in a diffusing of attitudes and values throughout the interior regardless of state boundaries, and it is to be doubted whether Mr Bonython's remarks are as true of South Australian station-hands as they are of the solid citizens of Adelaide. The songs of the bushmen graphically reflect both their nomadic habits and their disrespect for policemen and the law they were employed to enforce. As one version of *The Overlander* has it:

*No bounds have we to our estates
From Normanton to Bass's Straits;
We're not fenced in with walls or gates —
No monarch's realms are grander.
Our sheep and cattle eat their fill,
And wander blithely at their will
O'er forest, valley, plain or hill,
Free as an Overlander.*

*We pay no licence or assess,
Our flocks — they never grow much less —
But gather on the road I guess,
As onward still we wander.
We vote assessments all a sham,
Nor care for licences a flam,
For free selectors, not a d—n
Says every Overlander.*

South Australia and Western Australia were most completely insulated, by distance as well as by their lack of convict origins, from the social attitudes emanating from 'Botany Bay'. Yet, even in these colonies, almost from the moments of their founding, the manners and mores reflected in the convicts' and pastoral workers' ballads rapidly gained strength among the lower orders.

In part this was no doubt due to like conditions having like effects. The early labour shortage in Western Australia, for example, unalleviated by convicts, would alone have been enough to evoke in working men the saucy and independent attitude so much deplored by their masters on the other side of the continent. The Advocate General and Judge of the Colony's first Civil Court complained constantly that masters there were such only in name, being actually 'the slaves of their indentured servants'. He wrote:

'In my absence, ——— does nothing, and if I speak to him — exit in a rage. I could send him to gaol, but I do not like this extremity, and yet I cannot afford to lose the advantage of his time, and pay thirty pounds, besides diet, to another in his place.'

But when we hear that, within two years of the first landing at Fremantle, workmen had 'got into the habit of demanding' a daily rum ration, we may suspect that manners were being directly influenced by those of early New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. At the end of the following year, 1831, the Judge Advocate noticed:

'Great visitings among the neighbouring servants; seven or eight of them patrolling about; and all this is sure to end in drunkenness and mischief — they talk of forming a *club!* They have too much control over their masters already; and club-law would be a terrible exercise and increase of their power.'

And 'a man who had come from Van Diemen's land' seems to have been largely responsible for 'trouble' with the Aborigines. Relations had been fairly good until early in 1833 when this man saw some unoffending natives in the way: "Damn the rascals," said he, "I'll show you how we treat them in Van Diemen's Land", and immediately fired on them.'

Samuel Sidney recorded in 1852:

'The timber of Australia is so different from that of Europe that English workmen are very helpless until instructed by bush hands. The first South Australian colonists could not even put up a fence until the overlanders and Tasmanians taught them how.'

Even before they set foot on the mainland some South Australian pioneers were taught, in 1836, how to bake a damper by two 'frontiersmen' — sealers named Whalley and Day who had lived with kidnapped Aboriginal women on Kangaroo Island since 1818. In the early 1840 George French Angas found that bush men to the south-east of Adelaide and, even more surprisingly, in the doubly isolated wilderness of Eyre's Peninsula, had already acquired a perfect familiarity with Australian slang, which was largely convict-derived, and with the art and terminology of bush cooking. Bush slang was also established, at the same early date, on the then pastoral frontier of Western Australia south of York.

Nineteenth-century observers were no less struck by the essential mobility of the outback pastoral workers than they were by their unity. Anthony Trollope travelled extensively in the outback and spent some months in 1871 and again in 1875 staying on sheep stations, including that of his son Frederick, in western New South Wales. To him it seemed that:

‘. . . the nomad tribe of pastoral labourer — of men who profess to be shepherds, boundary-riders, sheep-washers, shearers and the like — form altogether one of the strangest institutions ever known in a land, and one which to my eyes is more degrading and more incurious even than that other institution of sheep-stealing. It is common to all the Australian colonies . . . ‘

Trollope thought that these itinerant workmen were degraded by their customary right to receive free rations and shelter for the night in station 'huts', but he was not blind to their virtues. As Harris had noted of them half a century earlier when the convict element still predominated among them, though they might cheat and rob respectable people, they were honest and loyal to each other. Also they were still, as in the time of Harris, very capable at performing practical bush tasks, and very prone to vary long periods of hard work by short bouts of tremendous drunkenness. As Trollope further wrote:

‘The bulk of the labour is performed by a nomad tribe, who wander in quest of their work, and are hired only for a time This is of course the case in regard to washing sheep and shearing them. It is equally so when fences are to be made, or ground to be cleared, or trees to be ‘rung’.... For all these operations temporary work is of course required, and the squatter seldom knows whether the man he employs be married or single. They come and go, and are known by queer nicknames or are known by no names at all. They probably have their wives elsewhere, and return to them for a season. They are rough to look at, dirty in appearance, shaggy, with long hair, men who, when they are in the bush, live in huts, and hardly know what a bed is. But they work hard, and are both honest and civil. Theft among them is almost unknown. Men are constantly hired without any character but that which they give themselves; and the squatters find from experience that the men are able to do that which they declare themselves capable of performing. There will be exceptions, but such is the rule. Their one great fault is drunkenness — and yet they are sober to a marvel. As I have said before, they will work for months without touching spirits, but their very abstinence creates a

craving desire which, when it is satisfied, will satisfy itself with nothing short of brutal excess.'

A just understanding of the distinctive ethos of the 'nomad tribesmen' is of cardinal importance for the understanding of many aspects of Australian history, both in the last century and subsequently. The pastoral industry was, and still is, the country's staple. Its nature, the nature of Australian geography, and the great though decreasing scarcity of white women in the outback, brought into being an itinerant rural proletariat, overwhelmingly masculine in composition and outlook. In the United States the cattle industry, during the stage of 'the open range', produced in the cowboys a not dissimilar social group, but its existence was brief and, relative to the total population, its numbers were small. Throughout the nineteenth century as a whole the typical American frontiersman was a small individualist agricultural proprietor or farm labourer, not a cowboy or ranch-hand. In Canada and New Zealand, too, the farmer was the typical frontiersman. In South Africa the pastoral industry, though not relatively as important as in Australia, was the staple, but the working hands were Hottentots or Bantus, whose culture was so different from that of their Boer and British masters that any useful comparison between their life and influence, and those of the pastoral workers in Australia, is scarcely possible. For these reasons it is not too much to say that those whom Trollope designated the 'nomad tribe' constituted a singular social group possessing an ethos which, though similar to those of certain other communities distant in time and place, was in some ways unique.

Among the influences which shaped the life of the outback community the brute facts of Australian geography were probably most important. Scanty rainfall and great distances ensured that most of the habitable land could be occupied only sparsely and by pastoralists. In combination with nineteenth-century economic conditions, climatic factors ensured too that the typical station should be a very large unit employing many casual 'hands', but owned by a single man or company of substantial capital. If Australia had been occupied by the French or any other western European people, it is likely that somewhat the same kind of pastoral proletariat would have been shaped by the geographical and economic conditions. Still, there would have been important differences.

As it happened, the interior was occupied by British people who naturally brought with them much cultural luggage. Moreover, in the early period of the 'squatting rush', when the nomad tribe was forming, the vast majority of its members were British people of a certain type. At first convicts and ex-convicts tended the flocks of the advancing 'shepherd-kings', and at least until 1851 these pioneers predominated in influence and prestige, if not in numbers. But the germ of the distinctive 'outback' ethos was not simply the result of climatic and economic conditions, nor of national and social traditions brought with them by the 'government men' who first opened up the 'new country' beyond the Great Divide. It sprang rather from their struggle to assimilate themselves and their *mores* to the strange environment. We shall find much evidence to suggest that the main features of the new tradition were already fixed before 1851. A considerable number of the gold-seekers and of the later immigrants who found their way to the western plains differed from most of their predecessors in having a middle-class background. They influenced the 'bush' outlook in certain ways, but in the upshot its main features were strengthened, modified in certain directions perhaps, but not fundamentally changed.

Although the pastoral proletariat formed a recognisably distinct social group it was obviously not, as has been said, completely isolated from the rest of colonial society. From 1813 when Blaxland, Lawson, young Wentworth and their convict 'hands' struggled back across the Blue Mountains, there was a constant coming and going of men, and resulting exchange of manners and ideas, between the coastal cities and the hinterland. But the strength of outback

influence is indicated by the very phrase used, in the first half of the nineteenth century, to describe Sydney roughs. These rowdy, 'flash' plebeians took some pains to stress the differences between themselves and respectable immigrants. Many were Australian born and all liked to behave in what they considered truly 'Currency' or colonial ways. This involved their imitating 'up-country' manners, for the bushman was axiomatically more Australian, and hence differed more from the Simon Pure Briton than the flashest Currency Lad in the whole of Sydney Town. Life in a bark hut on the Bogan necessarily changed a newcomer's manners and ideas more rapidly than life in a George Street cottage. Hence the roughs of early Sydney, affecting outback styles of dress and behaviour, were known as the 'Cabbagetree Hat Mob'.

The cabbage-tree palm (*Livistona australis*) grew only in the rain-forests between the Great Dividing Range and the Pacific, being very common in the Illawarra district which was one of the earliest 'frontier' areas. The heart or bud at the growing tip of the palm was a substitute for cabbage among the early settlers and cedar-getters, and the pinnate fronds were woven into broadbrimmed, flat-crowned, 'cabbage-tree hats'. When the 'squatting rush' to the interior began in the late 1820s, this indigenous hat had already become standard wear among bushmen and, like the stockwhip, a potent symbol of outback values. Thus the cabbage-tree hat migrated with the frontier to the western plains, many hundreds of miles from the nearest source of the raw material from which it was made. Plaiting these hats was a favourite pastime among shepherds, whose occupation was an extraordinarily lazy and lonely one. They remained standard wear for stockmen and others until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, though by about 1880 a cabbage-tree hat might cost up to five pounds.

From the beginning then, outback manners and mores, working upwards from the lowest strata of society and outwards from the interior, subtly influenced those of the whole population. Yet for long this was largely an unconscious process recorded in folklore and to some extent in popular speech, but largely unreflected in formal literature. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the occupation of the interior had been virtually completed, it was possible to look back and sense what had been happening. Australians generally became actively conscious, not to say self-conscious, of the distinctive 'bush' ethos, and of its value as an expression and symbol of nationalism. Through the trade union movement, through such periodicals as the *Sydney Bulletin*, the *Lone Hand*, or the *Queensland Worker*, and through the work of literary men like Furphy, Lawson or Paterson, the attitudes and values of the nomad tribe were made the principal ingredient of a national *mystique*. Just when the results of public education acts, improved communications, and innumerable other factors were administering the *coup de grace* to the actual bushman of the nineteenth century, his idealised shade became the national culture-hero of the twentieth. Though some shearers are now said to drive to their work in wireless-equipped motor-cars, the influence of the 'noble bushman' on Australian life and literature is still strong.

G R Elton

The Practice of History

Fontana, 1987

History deals in events, not states; it investigates things that happen and not things that are. As against this, archaeology, for instance, can only uncover and describe states, conditions and circumstances symptomatic of a particular way of life; it is unable to handle the fact of life, which is movement. Archaeological states follow jerkily one upon another, without description or explanation of the movement, and it matters nothing whether the transformation is gradual (undatable), as it usually is, or catastrophic. When the archaeologist attempts to incorporate events in his analysis, he either has to confine himself to the bare fact essentially equal to the description of a state ('this site was destroyed by fire') or to resort to historical statements that do not arise from his archaeological evidence and methods, and which, if he is studying a period for which no historical account is possible, may have to be purely imaginary. Anthropology or sociology, on the other hand, may well display interest in the event — in a circumcision ceremony or a wedding, in the building of a school or the formation of an opinion — but this will not be for the sake of the event but for the sake of extracting static conclusions from moving elements. The historian may well interest himself in the state of things, the condition of society, the principles underlying a system of government or a system of thought. But if he is to understand historically and practise historical writing, he will have to think of such analyses as steps in a chain of events, as matters explanatory of a sequence of happenings. He will have to concentrate on understanding change, which is the essential content of historical analysis and description. History treats fundamentally of the transformation of things (people, institutions, ideas, and so on) from one state into another, and the event is its concern as well as its instrument. To suppose that causal relationships are the main content of history is an error, for they form but a particular case of the general principle that history deals in movement from state *a* to state *b*. If *a* can be said to have caused *b* the relationship happens to be causal; but it is none the less properly historical if *a* and *b* are linked by coincidence, coexistence or mere temporal sequence, all relations very often encountered in history, however less intellectually satisfying they may be.

As for history's preoccupation with the particular, that must be seen in its proper light. It is often asserted that the special distinction of the historical method is to treat the fact or event as unique. But frequent assertion does not create truth, and this statement is not true. No historian really treats all facts as unique; he treats them as particular. He cannot — no one can — deal in the unique fact, because facts and events require reference to common experience, to conventional frameworks, to (in short) the general before they acquire meaning. The unique event is a freak and a frustration; if it is really unique — can never recur in meaning or implication — it lacks every measurable dimension and cannot be assessed. But to the historian, facts and events (and people) must be individual and particular: like other entities of a similar kind, but never entirely identical with them. That is to say, they are to be treated as peculiar to themselves and not as indistinguishable statistical units or elements in an equation; but they are linked and rendered comprehensible by kinship, by common possession, by universal qualities present in differing proportions and arrangements. The historical event is like the modern physicist's atom, composed of analysable and repeatable ingredients but so composed as to be itself complex and in a measure unpredictable...

PURPOSE

Saving the social scientist from himself (and society from the social scientist) may be a worthy reason for studying history, but not many historians are likely to regard themselves simply as specialized nursemaids and Samaritans. Some feel that they must discover that in the past which will help men to understand their present and future. The words, 'the purpose of history', have strictly two meanings: they can refer either to the purpose of the historical process, or to the purpose to be served by the historian in studying it. In practice, however, the meanings are close to each other and tend to merge. The historian who thinks that he has discerned the future towards which the past is moving conceives it his duty to instruct his readers accordingly. It becomes the purpose of his study to elucidate and demonstrate the purpose of the historical process. At the same time, it is true that even historians who do not claim to see anything significant in the way things have happened are bound to have had a purpose in mind when they entered upon their studies. No one reads or writes history in a fit of total absentmindedness, though a fair amount of history has been written by people whose minds seem in part to have been on other things.

Is there a purpose in history? Mr Carr grows very scornful at the expense of an honest man like H. A. L Fisher, who in a famous sentence explained that he could see none. Mr Carr is surely right to denounce the theory of the pure accident, the theory that history is just one damn thing after another. Though in a sense, of course, the sequence of events is just that, it becomes history only when marshalled by the interpretative human intelligence. This is not to overlook the importance of accidents, which do happen (though Mr Carr would seem to suppose that they can be written out of history), but to stress that in the understanding of the past the accident is just another point to be explained, considered and accommodated. Accidents may affect the course of events, but the historian, in his analysis, must not be accident-prone. No historian, including Fisher, has in fact ever treated his subject as though it were entirely without meaning; if he had, he would have been unable to write. What is really at issue is whether one may discern a larger purpose, whether things produce effects that are continuous and, up to a point, predictable. When Mr Carr, and others, seek a purpose in history, they are trying to fill the vacuum created when God was removed from history. Even historians who hold that God reveals himself in history would not today feel entitled to use him by way of explanation, but the temperament which demands a certain guidance from the past by way of illumination for the future — the religious temperament — continues to exist among historians and produce theories of the course of history which seek this prophetic purpose.

There are in the main two ways of subordinating history to prophecy, the circular and the linear; and both have an ancient, respectable, and largely pre-professional history. The first supposes that societies grow and decay, to be replaced by others which follow much the same pattern. The other view supposes that the sum total of the past moves in a straight line of progress; though it will often allow that lapses, back-trackings and lateral movements may interrupt the main line of advance, it nevertheless insists that such a main line can be discovered and plotted. Linear theories are not necessarily optimistic, but their vocabulary (progress, advance) tends to inculcate a conviction that things not only move along a line but move towards an improvement.

To-day's best known cyclical theory is that developed by A. J. Toynbee, and it is not necessary at this date to demonstrate once again how little his vast edifice has to do with the face of the past. Linear theories are certainly common, and Mr Carr as well as Professor J H Plumb have recently entered eloquent pleas for a return to the allegedly discredited notion of progress, the notion that things get better in sum, however much the detail may get worse at

times. They both want historians to write to this purpose because they seem to regard it as the scholar's function not only to describe change but also to advocate it; the historian should be the prophet of an intelligent radicalism. Both abominate nostalgia about the past and wish to use history to teach men reliance on their powers to better themselves and their world. Mr Carr seems to think this right because he believes that this is the lesson of history; Dr Plumb adds a fear that unless historians will attend to this task of propaganda they will cease to be read and cease to play any part in their societies. Both manifestly confuse the problem of why men should be made to learn about history with the problem of the meaning of the past ; or rather, to them only the particular meaning they extract from the past justifies the pursuit of history as an activity of the scholar and teacher.

Let it be said at once that the underlying convictions behind the demands are in part sound. Historians cannot exist in a vacuum; they live in the society of men, influence it whether they like it or not, and should therefore be conscious of what they are about. But they should also be conscious of the dangers they run. It is all very well to regret the day when history was 'philosophy teaching by example', the day when historians thought themselves the moral preceptors of a ruling class and, aping Plutarch, used their science to instil high principles in their pupils. We cannot return to the attitude which produced a *Mirror for Magistrates* to show, by using historical instances, how those who offend against the divine order always came to a bad end; and if we could return to it I doubt if many of us would. Yet such schoolmasterly ambitions are at the back of Dr Plumb's mind. When we take our more sophisticated history into the market place and the pulpit, we assume a task of some danger and must be almost pedantically careful of our integrity. Few, I daresay, would wish to deride the conviction, expressed by that not uneminent American historian, Conyers Read, who some years ago [1949] told the American Historical Association that 'the social responsibilities of the historian' involved him in the defence of 'values'. But how many would agree with him that those values must be those of American civilization and democracy, that the historian plays a part in 'total war'? Since no man in society, said Read, can escape some form of social control, the historian must 'accept and endorse such controls as are essential for the preservation of our way of life'. Calling, in a fiery peroration, for the suppression of inconvenient facts, he cried that if the historian will not offer 'assurance that mankind's present position is on the highway and not on some dead end, then mankind will seek for assurance in a more positive alternative, whether it be offered from Rome or from Moscow'.

Conyers Read was expressing too frankly what others might wish to think, though it should be recorded that he was fully and firmly answered by a fellow-historian from a sounder American tradition. Yet he was neither fool nor knave, and he had thought as hard about his professional purpose as Dr Plumb, with his more radical predilections, has done. Read's case makes plain that the historian's function in society cannot be reduced to that of a preacher, whether he preaches the excellence of all that is, or the necessity of reform, or the desirability of revolution. If he is to be a good preacher he must rest his case upon a faith; but if he is to be a good historian he must question his own faith and admit some virtue in the beliefs of others. If he allows the task of choosing among the facts of the past to deteriorate into suppression of what will not serve the cause, he loses all right to claim weight for his opinions. An historian may be an ex-businessman, as Read was, or like Gibbon an ex-captain of grenadiers, but when he pronounces upon economics or strategy we have a duty to judge him as an historian, and only as an historian. And there the simplicities of the preacher's call at once collapse.

The trouble with all these theories about 'the meaning of history' is twofold: the great range of contemporaneous events and the shortness of historical time permit of no convincing demonstration one way or the other. It is never difficult to see purpose or direction in a

sequence of historical events if one confines oneself sufficiently, especially if one limits one's gaze to the winners in any conflict.

RESEARCH

The study of history, then, amounts to a search for the truth. But whether in fact such a thing as historical truth can exist has been a much debated problem; in particular, some philosophers, who show no sign of ever having tried to write history, like to arrive at the conclusion that, since historical knowledge cannot, strictly speaking, exist, there is no way of establishing truth in history. These denials follow, as a rule, one of two lines of argument. They either maintain that the past, being dead and irrecoverable, cannot be known about in any meaningful sense; or that the impact of the historian upon his material renders all the history supposedly known a matter of private choice and interpretation, so that in the end there is nothing but subjective opinion, the very opposite to truth. Both these superficially cogent arguments betray an essential lack of acquaintance with the principles and practice of historical research, and it matters nothing that such relativist, even nihilist, views can sometimes be held by men generally regarded as historians. These opinions also show some ignorance of the matter studied by the historical discipline and forget that inability to know all the truth is not the same thing as total inability to know the truth.

The Possibility of Historical Truth

The problem of whether the past can be known at all — since it is not now here in the presence of the observer and cannot be brought back for study — arises from the attempt to make history seem a science, comparable in purpose and method to the natural sciences. The natural sciences have, it would seem, virtually abandoned the concepts of truth and falsehood; phenomena once regarded as objectively true are now seen to be only a statistical abstraction from random variables, and the accusing finger of the uncertainty principle further insists that, since observation alters a phenomenon, nothing is capable of being studied except after it is changed from the state in which it was meant to have been investigated. Practising scientists have therefore permitted the philosopher to remove the word 'true' from their vocabulary and to substitute some such phrase as 'more probable', 'more accurately descriptive', 'more aesthetically' or 'intellectually satisfying'. This has not stopped scientists from continuing their efforts to investigate and understand nature, and in so far as it has reduced their positivist pride in the possession of the only strictly based truth the new philosophy may be thought of as gain. But historians have always been inclined to doubt the value, even the possibility, of their studies; they require not the new humility preached in the wake of Heisenberg, but some return to the assurance of the nineteenth century that the work they are doing deals with reality.

As a matter of fact, in a very real sense the study of history is concerned with a subject matter more objective and more independent than that of the natural sciences. The common argument that, unlike the scientist, the historian cannot verify his reconstruction by repeating the experiment at will can be turned round to give him greater assurance of objectivity. Let it be granted that verifiability is the basis of the method employed by the natural sciences, and that in any acceptable sense it is clearly impossible for the historian. He can reconstruct in the mind, but he cannot re-enact. However, the fundamental reason for this disability ensures that his subject matter is to a remarkable extent quite independent of him. All scientific experiments are essentially constructs, and this applies to both the physical and the biological sciences. The scientist poses his problem, designs his experiment, and — if successful — can repeat problem, experiment and solution as often as he likes, just because he has himself determined the form in which the experiment is cast. Of course, he obtains his problem by asking questions of nature — of something outside himself — but his method enables him to

treat nature wilfully and to compose for himself the argument which he wishes to resolve. Scientific experiments — dissection in taxonomic studies, for example, or the treatment of cells for purposes of study in biochemistry, or even the dropping of a stone from the tower of Pisa — are artificial; these things would not have happened but for a deliberate act of will on the part of the experimenter; the matter studied may be taken from nature, but before it is studied it is transformed for the purposes of the investigation. It is not going too far to assert that nearly all scientific study deals with specially prepared artificial derivatives from what naturally occurs.

The historian's case is very different. True, he may select his problems to suit himself. He may ask the questions he likes or believes capable of being answered; he may, and probably will, include himself in the equation when he explains, interprets, even perhaps distorts. But he cannot invent his experiment: the subject of his investigation is outside his control. When the problem of truth is under consideration, his essential difference from the natural scientist works in his favour. He cannot escape the first condition of his enterprise, which is that the matter he investigate has a dead reality independent of the enquiry. At some time, these things actually once happened, and it is now impossible to arrange them for the purposes of experiment. It may well be true that, for one reason or another, exactly what happened, or when and how and why, cannot now be known; no historian would suppose that his knowledge can be either total or finite. But this does not alter the fact that it is knowledge of a reality, of what did occur, not of something that the student or observer has put together for study. Just because historical matter is in the past, is gone, irrecoverable and unrepeatable, its objective reality is guaranteed: it is beyond being altered for any purpose whatsoever. Let it be noted that what is in question here is the subject matter of history, the events of the past, not the evidence they have left behind or the product of the historian's labours. However biased, prejudiced, incomplete and inadequate that product may be, it embodies an account of events that happened quite independent of the existence of him who now looks at them. Anyone who approves the tedious opinion that history is bunk does so because he prefers to ignore the reality of the past: but it is commandingly there, and the historian is not a free or purely wilful agent.

It follows from the that the historian's study is capable of concerning itself with a truth which is more absolute than mere truthfulness. Verifiability is the enemy of objective truth because it consists of the operation of the observer and experimenter upon the subject matter studied. The historian cannot verify; he can only discover and attempt to explain. In the work of discovery he has the assurance that he is looking for something that once had existence and is therefore, in theory, discoverable. We may not know precisely why William the Conqueror decided to invade England; we do know that he did invade and had a reason for doing so. We may argue over his invasion and its motive; we cannot argue them away. Nine hundred years ago they had existence; and just because they are irrecoverable in the flesh now, they are indestructible in the past reality. Thus while history will rarely be able to say: this is the truth and no other answer is possible; it will always be able to say: this once existed or took place, and there is therefore a truth to be discovered if only we can find it.

Whether the truth of these past realities is in fact discoverable is a question that shall be discussed later. So far, I have been concerned only to deny the charge that because the past cannot be re-enacted therefore there is, by definition, no such thing as historical truth. This leaves the second argument against the possibility of its existence, the argument that the past has neither meaning nor purpose, being merely a random accumulation of things and events, until subjectively ordered, by selection and arrangement, in the historian's mind.

What is here in question is not the truth, once again, of the historian's reconstruction, but his alleged inability ever to know a truth about the past because all he knows has had to pass

through a cognitive process in his mind which inevitably involves selection, interpretation and perversion. An older, rather naive, trust in the absoluteness of 'historical facts' has now been replaced by a general supposition that the facts of history are only historian's constructs, elevated among many other possible constructs to a special place of honour and importance. Mr Carr, in particular, who usefully reviews opinions on this issue, has made a very pretty distinction between facts as such and facts of history. Though they are relevant, it would be only cruel to consider the really weak parts of his argument, especially his ignorance of the many things that can be discovered in ancient or medieval history. It is also unnecessary to do more than draw attention to the fundamental error he commits when he confuses the actuality of an event with the accident of the evidence surviving for it. But there is one passage in his discussion which summarises his view of what makes a fact of history, and since this view, or something like its relativism, commands quite wide implicit approval it is worth a little analysis.

Mr Carr holds that there is a 'process by which a mere fact about the past is transformed into a fact of history.' He quotes the case of a man who was killed by a rioting mob in 1850 and says that this event, once no fact of history at all, is on the way to becoming one because it has been mentioned in one book. It will achieve full status when it gets into one or two more historical accounts. The difference between facts about the past and facts of history hangs upon 'the element of interpretation' which the historian adds to the former in order to create the latter, though general acceptance of the interpretation offered is required before the fact's new status is secure.(...)

Writing

More serious trouble arises for the historian for whom events take place in a setting of the purely impersonal. Ever since economics started impinging on historians we have heard of forces; since statistics were added to their equipment, we have met trends. That both these concepts are ugly and often dull may be no good reason for avoiding them; but what of their meaning? Do the 'forces' so readily resorted to by some historians have any reality? The pressures of the market, the influences of inflation, even the mental climate of an age, are not without independent and significant existence. Trends, too, do exist: that is to say, it is possible to extract from a sequence of facts a general movement or a general condition which suggests direction, upwards, downwards or see-saw. It would be quite improper to condemn every use of these or similar words, every reference to abstractions from human activity. The trouble arises when they are used improperly, when forces are made to act without agents, and trends — statistical definitions of a movement in events — are themselves made to act. Abstractions describe; they must not be personified into activators. That there was a trend to this or that is something the historian may say, though as a rule he will do well to find a better choice of words. That a trend ever decided or did anything is, given the real meaning of the word, palpable nonsense, and people cannot therefore ever be said to have done, said or suffered anything because of a trend.

All this accumulation of factors, forces and trends — others will be able to add their own dislikes to the list — reflects a form of mental indolence. In briefly summing things up to himself, the historian may employ such terms because it saves time to do so, because it may define main lines of the pattern for him, and because he is (or should be) carefully aware of the inadequacies of such language. In explaining things to others, he has little right to use them because then they only represent one of two things: his inability to think clearly, or his ignorance. To use these evasions by way of explanation is to explain nothing and to reveal one's failure to understand. It is a more subtle form of that sort of mysticism which uses unfilled concepts like national characteristics or the spirit of the age as though they held a meaning precise enough to explain phenomena. There is a perfectly simple cure for these

besetting sins of vaporous abstraction. History does not exist without people, and whatever is described happens through and to people. Therefore let us talk about people, by all means imposing on them and abstracting generalisations from them, but not about large miasmatic clouds like forces or busy little gnomes like trends.

There remains the question of bias in the historian, an ancient topic of debate and a somewhat tired one. To me, the understandable reaction against claims to 'ultimate history', free of all personal preconceptions, has gone too far. No one now supposes that what the historian is in himself does not affect his writing, but (as we have seen) most people who express themselves on this point seem a little too ready to see the historian and forget the history.

As long as discussion continues, and especially as long as the issues discussed are alive, the obvious or hidden preferences of the historian will intervene but are quickly discovered and allowed for; what remains are the positive products of scholarship, originally often directed in its search by some bias, products which endure only if thanks to scholarship they have risen above the mere expression of prejudice. This is not to deny that prejudiced views are sometimes difficult to combat (the influence of so-called left wing attitudes in English economic history is a fair example); misleading interpretations can have a long life. Constant vigilance is needed, both towards others and, what is much more difficult, towards oneself. But the corrective exists, in the proper training of the professional historian.

Historians' personalities and private views are a fact of life, like the weather; and like the weather they are not really worth worrying about as much as in practice they are worried over. They cannot be eliminated, nor should they be. The historian who thinks that he has removed himself from his work is almost certainly mistaken; what in fact he is likely to have proved is the possession of a colourless personality which renders his work not sovereignly impartial but merely dull. But though dullness is no virtue, neither is self-conscious flamboyance. The historian need not try either to eliminate or to intrude himself; let him stick to the writing of history and forget the importance of his psyche. It will be there all right and will no doubt be served by his labours, but really it matters less to the result than critics lament or friends acclaim, and it matters a great deal less than does his intellect.

Style

History, then, can be written; historians pursue a humanly possible task. Indeed, for purposes of discussion, history does not exist until it has been reconstructed and written down by the historian. It lives by the word, and the historian's first concern must be to respect and regard words. Styles and methods of expression differ and there is room for many of them in the capacious mansions of historical writing. However, there is room only for those that fulfil the conditions set by the fact that no one writes except to be read. It is in this sense that history is an art. No matter how scientific the process of research may be, that of presentation requires skills of exposition, explanation and persuasion which all turn upon the right use of words. I am far from supposing that a single manner is appropriate to all forms of historical writing, or even to any single form of it, and I know of no worse prescription than that which advises the beginner to form his style upon some eminent model. What the writer is, both as a man and as an historian, will appear in the style of his writing. This is not to say that one cannot learn from others, both from their excellences and their mistakes, but one cannot copy the style of a Macaulay, a Gibbon, or a Maitland except to write pastiche which in history is not worth the effort. However, no matter what writing comes naturally to the historian, it must be readable and may be judged by that standard.

Readability is not the same thing as meretriciousness. Some widely read historians, criticized by the less successful, come to believe that they are blamed for lack of scholarship when the

hidden charge is that they attract readers. At one time there was something in this complaint, and in some parts of the world there still is. In the earlier part of this century, a good many scholars seem to have thought that the more readable their colleagues were the less they merited consideration. Difficult things, 'real problems', could not be dealt with in lucid or attractive language but required obscure technical terms and a style which reflected the agonising processes of thought that had gone into their analysis. Any historian who expressed himself well and showed some respect for the remarkable possibilities of the English language was automatically assumed to have achieved ease of expression by sliding over the difficulties of the matter. Perhaps he was not even aware of them; perhaps he had deliberately sacrificed depth and accuracy to his ambition to become a publishers' dream: it was hard to say which failing deserved the more censure. The work of a so popular an historian as G. M. Trevelyan gave some substance to this embittered attitude: he, and some others, too often achieved literary distinction by an easy saunter around any problem of intellectual gravity and by superficial methods of explanation which left the serious and involved student gasping. Only Maitland was free from this censure, and what made him exceptional was his manifest willingness to tackle the most recondite and technical problems without any concession to the reader's supposed ability to grasp them, yet in language so splendidly lucid that he invariably did grasp them.

In those years, it seems to have been the fashion to think that only a particularly austere and even repulsive style of writing could entitle the historian to the name of scholar, and some men appeared to reserve a special vocabulary and syntax for the occasions on which they wished to claim that distinction. That eminent medievalist, James Tait, who taught at the University of Manchester for nearly forty years, is reported by those who heard him to have been a singularly lucid and brilliant lecturer. No trace of this comes through in his writing which is obscure and painful; his one major work, a study of *The Medieval English Borough*, is quite as tiresome to read as (to judge from the length of time it took to appear) it was to produce. That very competent scholar, A. F. Pollard, wrote biographies which all could read and many read with pleasure; but when he turned his hand to a learned article, fluency turned to a stammer and proper precision to pernickety obscurity. Scholars took pride in writing only for other scholars. This should not have absolved them from the demands of art, but since those others could not escape reading what was offered, the manner of presentation was at best thought a point of little importance. The attitude extended, however, beyond the needs of scholars. A. W. Ward, who dominated the *Cambridge Modern History* after Acton's death and edited the *Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy* in the 1920s, was one of the most influential men in the profession. Allegedly an interesting talker, he wrote without colour and drained the colour from others, too. On one occasion he explained the difficulties he had with a contributor's chapter by saying that 'it's a bit lively There, from the mouth of one who at Manchester had taught not only history but also English language and literature, spoke the voice of the profession. The learned dullness of those histories stand as a monument to a mistaken puritanism. This guild attitude to scholarship promoted real delight in involution, in being comprehensible only to what were sometimes called one's peers. The stumbling solemnity that often hung about that attitude reflected a measure of uncertainty about the activity engaged in: mumbo-jumbo, private language, the barriers of technicality are not so much intended to keep the mob out as to pretend that there is something of value inside the zareba. Intellectual enterprise which prefers to hide behind obscurity and mere clumsiness cannot be very sure of itself or its own ultimate worth Even justified contempt for the intellectual softness of many popular writers does not excuse this attitude. The historian must not always write just for a small circle of his fellows; the way to combat bad popular history is to write good popular history, not to retreat from the world.

In England this rather tiresome pose has been in retreat for the past twenty years. It is not dead, any more than helpless bad writing is dead, nor has the determination to write so as to

be read always led to happy results. One or two historians have publicly replied to valid scholarly criticisms of their work by citing their sales charts. Others, less innocent, may be less candid but are too often willing to adjust to the market. Yet neither the desire to shock nor the desire to pander to modern understanding are very good fairies to attend at the production of historical research. However, the general level of historical writing has clearly risen. Not only has the expansion of higher education called forth an increasing number of well-presented historical accounts; not only is there something of a boom in history for the intelligent layman, a fair amount of it being 'real' history; but it is, at least, my impression that those expressions of scholarship which can never have a wide audience are to-day less hedged about by poor, obscure or lifeless writing than once they were. In such respects, America has still to follow suit. There one still encounters the old double standard; men who express themselves very prettily in conversation or, occasionally, on the platform, pull out some special dictionary of polysyllabic jargon when they come to write, in the conviction that the fraternity will not otherwise recognize them as scholars. The rank growth and the high repute of the social sciences seem to overwhelm too many American historians with a desire to sound learned. Of course, generalizations of this order carry with them any number of exceptions, but on the whole it looks as though English historians are now better able to fulfill the claims of history as an art, without losing their scholarly rigour and the right to scholarly regard, than are those of America, or for that matter those of Germany. At least, one no longer hears a man derided just because he writes well.

But signs of improvement do not equal the millennium, nor is deliberate art used to disguise an inferior product the same thing as good writing. Unless the substance is good, the appearance, painted even an inch thick, will not please. However, we cannot spare time here for skilful writing pretending to be good history. We are concerned only with history sufficiently good to have the compliment of good writing paid to it. And it has to be admitted that much of what appears as the result of genuine labour and real thought is still hidden in dull and bad writing. What makes writing dull and bad? Rising high above all other faults is lack of life which results from an unwillingness to think and a readiness to repeat other people's thoughts parrot-fashion. There is not much to be done about this by anyone except the writer himself: he alone can distil the necessary elixir from his own brain and bones. But there are two main technical pitfalls on which it is worth offering advice: the use of jargon in place of real words, and incompetence in the use of real words themselves.

One must distinguish between jargon and technical terms. No one can, and no one should, discuss medieval law without such words as *dower* or *novel disseisin*, the Reformation without referring to justification by faith alone or the spiritual presence in the eucharist, the growth of industrial economies without admitting profit margins and interest rates to his discourse. History necessarily comprehends many studies and disciplines that are highly technical in themselves and must therefore have a technical vocabulary. But history is not itself a technical study in this sense, which is why those bewitched by the spurious precision and the law-discovering unrealities of the so-called social sciences dislike and despise it. It should explain itself in terms accessible to all men, not to experts only, and if it is obliged to use technical terms, because in the circumstances they are the right ones, it must both understand and explain them. What is not permitted to the historian is the use of technical terms borrowed for no specific reason, used to suggest a non-existent profundity or a spurious scientific framework, and manifestly not expanded in terms of plain language. This rule unhappily eliminates those usefully vague metaphors taken from biology — the institutions that 'evolve', the bodies of opinion that 'mature'. It particularly inhibits recent developments in social history where phrases like *class struggle*, *social mobility*, *demographic curve* and the like are bandied about without being given the real content that historical method and understanding require. It even invalidates such seemingly harmless evasions of the historian's task to explain as the use of words like 'inevitable' or 'predetermined', for words like these, at

home in logic and theology, have no accurate meaning in a study which at best can say that *y* was the result of *x*, never that only *y* could have been the result of *x*.

The rule which distinguishes technical terms from jargon is simple enough in theory though a good deal, more difficult to apply in practice. Technical terms become jargon when they are used out of the context in which they are technical, or when they are used as substitutes for an explanation. The test by which jargon can most commonly be detected is this: take a piece of writing full of seemingly weighty phrases and try to transcribe it into English. If it then appears as a genuine argument, all is well. If the transcript produces tautology or nonsense, you have been exposed to jargon.

Strictures of this sort are unacceptable unless they are backed by examples, but here to give examples is manifestly to add to one's list of enemies. Still, the risk must be run. I will take a book which, I believe, contains some valuable insights and analysis, but which I also believe is marred by the faith in jargon that destroys style: C. H. and K. George's *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation* (Princeton, 1961). On p 4 we read:

'Theology constituted the fundamental intellectuality of the seventeenth-century *Weltanschauung*.'

Weltanschauung means an intellectual view of life; therefore this sentence says that in the seventeenth century theology formed the intellectual foundation of the fundamental intellectual attitudes of the time. Tautology. On p 248:

'There is, in fact, a curious vein of social atavism in the clerical commentary on the mores of the aristocracy.'

This (to judge from the context) is intended to say that the authors are surprised to find preachers nostalgically praising chivalric virtues, later called, naturally enough in this pompous language, 'prowess at arms and *gloire*'. The surprise, in fact, rests on preconceived notions which the evidence shows to be false; the jargon could serve to disguise the poverty of the thought and the lack of historical discernment. On p 396 they say:

'In this disproportion between institution and belief — the somewhat schizoid quality of the English Church — there undoubtedly exists a tension-producing capacity which is fully exemplified in the presbyterian agitation'.

Translated, this reads (if I have got it right): 'because the Church of England claimed general authority as an institution but permitted variety of belief, an extreme attack on it as an institution, namely presbyterianism, could be promoted from within it'. Here we have both tautology and the trite, made to appear portentously significant by misapplied technical terms, schizoid and tension-producing. The authors are not ascribing the phenomenon they discuss to the vagaries of group or individual psychology but to aspects of organization. Those terms, though deplorably ugly, have their place in psychology; there is no occasion for them here.

These examples, intentionally taken from a work of real merit, may suffice to explain the issue. *Weltanschauung*, atavism, schizoid are all quite proper and possibly useful terms in their technical meaning. This does not entitle the historian to use them out of their technical context or by way of avoiding thought. If he does, he will produce obscurity masquerading as profundity, emptiness pretending to be significance.

But technical terms are not the only ones to get misused; far too often one finds careful and competent historians paying too little heed to the manner in which they employ the ordinary

language. The conventional rules of style are no less weighty for being familiar: say exactly what you mean, no more and no less; prefer the concrete to the abstract, the active to the passive mood, directness to circumlocution; attend to the rules of grammar and syntax. Everybody will have his pet hates; mine include pendant participles ('being given to dubious behaviour, the divine wrath struck down Sodom and Gomorrha . . .') and the confusion of 'who' and 'whom'. Again, the rule ought to be simple: make sure that you have said exactly what you meant to say, observing the accepted usages and canons of the English language. However, everybody who has to read a lot of history knows how readily even respectable writers fall into clumsiness and muddle, sometimes to the point of real obscurity. The cause may be only tiredness or an inadequate training, or it may be an incurably bad ear, but the results are distressing. A recent article quoted, apparently with approval, a short passage from a doctoral dissertation which will illustrate the point. Dissertations do not need to be masterpieces of writing; indeed, dullness is probably unavoidable in a work which is required to spell out everything and comes from a beginner in the craft. On the other hand, the beginner should also from the first be trained to write reasonably well and clearly; no more than any other kind of historian should he be allowed to commit solecisms or employ bad grammar to produce ambiguity.

The passage in question reads:

'Collective references or designations of political alignments were usually made with regard to the respective sides of the House, to administration and opposition, and, less frequently, to the majority and the minority. Little use was made of the terms whig and tory. On infrequent occasions a member might assert he was expounding whig doctrines: never did any claim to be a tory, but the term was sometimes used as a method of reproach.'

This perpetrates more minor howlers than one would suppose possible in a few lines. It avoids the clarity of directness with determined success, is grammatically obscure, and misuses words. The first sentence has to be read more than once to discover its meaning, which turns out to be that certain expressions were commonly used to describe the two sides of the House of Commons. 'On infrequent occasions' is a flabby circumlocution, and the omission of 'that' after 'assert' throws out the rhythm of the sentence. 'Never did any claim' is an unsuccessful attempt at brightening the writing which adds ambiguity: one stumbles over 'any' for an appreciable moment before one is sure that the word belongs to 'member' and not to 'claim'. Finally, a term cannot become a method. The passage could be rewritten as follows:

'When men wished to give collective names or descriptions of political alignment to the two sides of the House, they usually spoke of administration and opposition, more rarely of the majority and the minority. They almost never used the words whig and tory. Very occasionally a member might assert that he was expounding whig doctrine; none ever claimed to be a tory, though the term was sometimes used by way of reproach.'

This is a plain statement of fact, interesting in the context of the question posed; it needs no 'fine' writing, but that does not mean that the writing can be forgiven for being slipshod, tired and unrevised.

How, then, can one avoid these far from uncommon faults? Not all history can be written vividly and with the drive of verbal passion; the subject matter may not permit it. Nevertheless, all historical writing should approach the ideal in two respects: no one should ever write a sentence which he has not personally thought through, and one should always remember that what is said did actually happen. The historian who says things not just because others have said them before him but because he has re thought each point or issue afresh will not, in most cases, come up with a new answer; but it will be *his* answer,

assimilated in *his* mind, expressed in *his* words, and it will thereby renew its freshness. And the historian who remembers that his material has a true life, a past life of its own, that the things he discusses happened to and through live people, should have gone a long way towards giving vitality to his writing. He who thinks all the time and is thoroughly aware cannot go to sleep; by the same token, he will not inflict sleep on others.

Audience

The writer of history wishes others to read the history he writes. Does this mean that in writing he should keep his audience constantly in mind? This would certainly seem to be the usual advice. Books should differ with the people to whom they are addressed. One writes in one way for schoolboys, in another for one's colleagues, in yet a third for those 'general readers' whose avid desire for agreeable history it is the ambition of authors and publishers to satisfy. On the face of it, this sounds like a counsel of sense; yet I believe it to be both wrong-headed and rather pernicious. It leads to a subtle arrogance in the writer and to that guild-spirit which at times bids fair to drive the life from the work of the profession. What right has anyone to say, 'this is too much for little minds; this I must reserve for others as able, as gifted, as profound as myself'? And is it any wonder that a man convinced that he is dealing in mysteries too deep for the generality will in the end just tend that feeble flame in the inner sanctuary, forget the world, and live in the sinful pride of the initiate?

Whether it is worse for the historian to retreat into the exclusiveness of the sect or to proclaim his sectarian arrogance by a vast condescension in writing for the multitude may be a moot point; speaking for myself, I can respect austerity, but I know nothing worse than the sort of book which on every page announces that of course these matters are very difficult for the reader and (if not ostentatiously omitted) had better be explained in simple (and inaccurate) language, by means of so-called modern parallels, by reference to the supposed commonplace concerns of the reader, by images and metaphors and slang (usually slang just out of date) supposedly current in the world in which history has to make its way against a main preoccupation with mundane things. I can feel regretful respect for the historian who decides that the world has nothing to do with him and that he will wear his hair-shirt exclusively in the pages of the *English Historical Review*; but I feel much less happy about one who, mounting the pulpit, addresses his inferiors in terms suitable for them. No audience, in any case, will respond favourably to being treated as unintelligent; why should it? It is, obviously, the task of the practitioner to explain the difficult things, not to push them inconsiderately out of sight, and there must always be a suspicion that any historian who supposes that he has things to tell which only the expert can understand has not yet himself succeeded in understanding them.

There is really no need for these coy and displeasing attitudes. One can, in such matters, speak only from personal experience, and I must say that in writing and lecturing I endeavour to give no thought to the supposedly differing needs and standards of readers or listeners. Of course, I want to explain myself to them, but my concern has been to expound what I believe to be the truth, or at least what I believe to be the real problems, in the language appropriate to the subject, not perhaps to the audience. Regard your audience as intelligent though possibly uninstructed, and they will indeed prove intelligent and (one hopes) depart better instructed. No problem of historical study that I have come across, in my own work or that of others, has seemed to me incapable of being explained with full clarity to any person of reasonable intelligence, and no person of insufficient intelligence will anyhow be in the way of reading or hearing historical analysis and description. If the historian has really explained things to himself, he can explain them to others; and nothing whatsoever justifies him in supposing that the others need a different treatment, a different language, a lower intensity of thought than himself. In all writing, three dignities must be observed: the dignity of the historian who

must play neither the high priest nor the clown, the dignity of the audience who must actively and intelligently cooperate, and above all the dignity of the matter treated. This is no call for pomposity; there has to be respect for the rights of all involved without superior condescension, deliberate simplification, or ostentatious pity. Of course the type of audience addressed may determine the length and detail of the explanation; it may affect the amount of technical language used. But there can be no reason for it to determine the amount of technical matter or the degree to which the problems receive explanation.

However, historical writings manifestly differ in some quite fundamental ways — in length, in subject matter, in structure and purpose, and in the line of approach. What, then, should decide these differences if not the audience addressed? The answer is simple enough: the questions to be asked and answered. What and how the historian writes depends not on the capacity of those for whom he writes but solely on what he is trying to do about history. What he is there trying to do, he must attempt with a full equipment, a full understanding, a total involvement, and a best use of language, all these qualities being deployed simply to one purpose — to answer his question. Only in this way can he serve the true purpose of history, its contribution to the intellectual improvement of mankind. If instead he decides to entertain, to preach or make propaganda, to persuade people that all is progress or all is disaster, to attract an audience by playing down to them, to follow in fact any purpose other than the sovereign demand of historical study, he not only betrays his calling and his integrity, but he will be found out. When it comes to these matters of high principle it is always well to have some mundane sanctions in hand; and the sort of historian who prides himself simply on selling a lot of his books, or on pleasing an audience, should sometimes listen to what he likes to think are the voices of envy proceeding from less successful colleagues. There is absolutely nothing wrong with selling a lot of books or delighting an audience: solitude guarantees no virtue, nor is there vice in the pleasure of communicating with many. But it is fatal to elevate these considerations above all others. The reactions of one's fellows offer a reasonably true barometer by which to measure one's own sense of standards; and if their criticism were to grow not only contemptuous but justifiably so, the larger multitude, too, will not be long in discovering the truth. Those who barter their soul are especially to be pitied if in the process they lose the world as well.

Thus, the real differences evident in historical writing derive from the differences inherent in what one wants to say. And here, at last, there are hierarchies, or at least there is a line drawn between the higher and the lower. All pursuit of historical truth is, as I have said, respectable, but some forms are less respectable than others. To elucidate this statement it is necessary to classify historical writings by their manner, content and purpose.

Categories

Historical works belong to one of three categories: description, analysis, and narrative. Though the first two are in practice rarely divorced, and both are often involved in the third, one may for purposes of classification treat them separately. Description attempts to display a manifestation of the past without giving it the dimension of a change in time; for example, an account of a defunct government department or of a medieval village which simply explains the details of their composition and constitution. Analysis is still fundamentally static but sets the situation or thing described in a wider context of adjoining situations and things, studies interrelations, and attempts to establish causal connections and motives. To take an example: in 1536, the English government created a new office, the Court of Augmentations, to administer new revenues coming to the crown. A descriptive account would explain the structure of the Court, set out its officers and their duties, list its income and expenditure, describe its dissolution. Analysis would add such matters as the place of the Court in the

general scheme of government, the reasons for a new court, problems of patronage and influence in the appointment of officers, success or failure in terms of administrative purpose and efficiency, the reasons for its abolition. Narrative tells the story, and it is not material how long the time span may be. Thus both a history of the Court of Augmentations which goes chronologically through the fortunes of the seventeen years of its existence, and a narrative of the sixteenth century in which the Court is mentioned as part of a story of government activity, would rightly be classed as narrative history.

The distinction here is one of purpose and manner, not of quality. Description and analysis are likely to arrange the available material by topics, running repeatedly over the same period of time; narrative uses time as the main backbone of its structure and may have to refer repeatedly to the same point or issue as they reappear in the course of the story. Differences in quality exist but do not provide a useful analytical tool; within the range of historical writing, the good and better, the poor and worse, legitimately share the same categories. However, a real qualitative distinction can be made within these three types, or at any rate in the first and last, for it can be maintained that in analysis there are only varieties of competence. Description and narrative, on the other hand, have two guises, one of them higher than the other. Their lower forms are antiquarianism and chronicle; their higher the meaningful description of the past (into which analysis enters almost invariably) and narrative history properly so called.

The main danger inherent in the analytical method is that it fragments the unity of the historical process. I am not here thinking of Professor Hexter's 'tunnel history', the use of categories like political, economic or intellectual history to circumscribe the work done. Nobody can write universal history — everything that happened or has been thought—in one piece; the processes of writing will not permit it. These 'tunnels' are necessary mechanisms, and history so divided up can in each case yield to both the analytical and the narrative approach. The point is that, within the necessarily circumscribed section of history which the historian can manage, analysis still runs the danger of fragmentation.

Up to a point, this is inescapable. Topics do not occur in isolation, but if they are to be discussed in turn they are liable to give that impression. The first rule to be observed is that an analytically organized book must still be a book, not a series of articles. There must be a common theme to hold the topics together, and chapters must appear to run on naturally one from another. The order in which these more or less parallel topics are introduced is vitally important: it should have a discernible logic in it. Every device, however superfluous it may seem, should be employed to underline coherence and continuity. Each new topic should be linked to its predecessor by lead-over and pick-up sentences, and the general question of the book should be kept constantly in mind and frequently before the reader. Thus, suppose one were to write a book on the Industrial Revolution in England (a not uncommon thing to do). This is a theme which cries out for the analytical treatment, as all the various elements in the story (agricultural reform, technological advance, changes in population and labour force, capital market and rate of interest, and so on) pass before the historian's mind. No one could possibly assemble them into a useful single narrative. But a mere series of chapters on these topics would be neither a good book nor a real exposition and explanation of the phenomenon studied. If the task is to be properly discharged, each element, as it is analysed in turn, must contribute directly to an understanding of a major movement which must at the same time become comprehensible in its passage through time. This suggests that the historian should isolate for himself a main thread in a story he does not propose to tell as a story. He may choose what thread he pleases — for instance, increase of production, or the role of the entrepreneur. Having chosen it, he cannot profitably abandon it: he will have to write each section not as a self-contained account of that part of the panorama he happens to be dealing with, but deliberately as part of an account of his main theme. Swapping horses in midbook

destroys books The analytical historian is composing not a mosaic but a painting in which the canvas is covered several times over with different pigments and patterns, until an amalgam of colour and design emerges from the repeated process. The metaphor has its dangers because it does not permit the introduction of a movement through time which should also be apparent from the book, but it will give a hint of the right idea.

Analysis can be very static and prevent an understanding of change: this is one major danger to guard against. In the example I chose, of the Industrial Revolution, the danger is not great because each element in the story clearly calls for some progressive treatment. But analytical books, even good ones, often fall into this trap which is sprung by failure to realize that evidence taken from a given period of time must be evaluated against the background of change involved in temporal progress To use, for instance, evidence from the beginning and end of a long period as though it necessarily belonged to one and the same order of fact is to run into trouble. How seriously this can affect the best work is demonstrated by Christopher Hill's fine book on *The Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford, 1956). Its arrangement is entirely analytical: four topic-chapters on 'The State of the Clergy', six on the financial problems, four on the work of Archbishop Laud. No other arrangement could have brought out so well the condition of Church and clergy or the situation faced by them, and no other could have provided such thorough discussion of problems like tithe or pluralism. But a treatment which collects its facts indiscriminately from a period of sixty years, as though in that time such things as Puritanism or the complaints against the hierarchy had not passed through profoundly changing attitudes, purposes and ambitions, creates a very misleading air of sameness by the simple device of assuming that nothing changed. The analysis itself is distorted because the transformations of the historical situation are ignored; people's thoughts and actions are seen in unreal isolation from changing circumstances. This is by no means an indictment of the analytical method (though it forms a legitimate, if limited, criticism of this book), but it constitutes a warning to remember the story when dissecting components To be satisfactory, analysis must incorporate narrative That is to say, while the fundamental organization of any book asking 'what was it like' should be by topics and sections, each topic must not only be organically linked to the rest but must also run through time and remember change.

However, if the question obviously posed by the purpose of a book is 'what happened', then analysis must not be allowed to usurp the place of narrative. It is here that the present dislike of story-telling as a historic method introduces real perils. The historian faced with the task of writing an account of some large piece of history — the history of a country, a continent, or an age — cannot avoid a basic structure which concentrates on the chronological, even chronicle, element, the passage through the years Otherwise he cannot possibly convey the essential feel of time passing, men succeeding each other, lives being lived and deaths being died. He may well come to the conclusion that of some topics he has to treat separately; he may require analytical chapters, though whether he should surrender to the supposed need is something to be discussed in a moment.. But he cannot allow himself a mainly analytical structure. To take, once again, by way of example, a book good enough to stand such critical regard: Christopher Brooke's *Europe in the Central Middle Ages* (London, 1964). This is one volume in a general cooperative history of Europe and covers the years 962 to 1154. Nearly two hundred years, a time of much change; and Europe is a sufficiently large area. There can be no question of a single main problem being here dissected into its parts. Yet of Professor Brooke's eighteen chapters, no fewer than ten are strictly analytical and the rest, embodying sections of narrative, follow in the main an analytical approach. The difficulties of narrating the confused and multiple history of those years are indeed formidable; yet it is hard to be satisfied with a treatment which by some 100 pages separates chapters on certain emperors and certain popes whose lives were spent in conflict with each other. The result is that the book lacks a main thread. Quite possibly the feeling that things happen higgledy-piggledy,

here, there and everywhere, reflects a reality; it could well represent the feelings of such contemporaries as were alert enough to think of their world at all. But the historian's task is to explain — make plain — and in order to do so he has to discover and elaborate his theme. I am not expert enough on that age to suggest one with confidence, but one can imagine a book working out the emergence of a particular civilization, dominated by a reformed and aggressive Church on the one hand and locally ascendant monarchies on the other, which would firmly organize its narrative of kings, popes, emperors and thinkers to that end.

To say this, however, is at once to call up the retort that to write a narrative of emperors and popes is to do very little justice to the realities of history. The current preference for what is called social history demands a progressive analysis and account of societies (politically and socially identifiable groups of people) at all their levels and in their multifarious appearances, not only as agents of political action but also as producers of wealth, harbourers of internal conflict, promoters of intellectual enterprise; and it is not perhaps much of an answer that hardly any such books in fact exist. How can narrative possibly manage to render the complexities of such a story, and is it not therefore inevitably condemned to superficiality, for ever recalling the simple chronicle from which it grew? While history confined itself to the doings of governments, so runs the argument, narrative was a proper and satisfactory method, but we have left all that behind. The long ascendancy of Ranke, primarily concerned with international relations and diplomacy, themes thoroughly amenable to the narrative method, has been replaced by such influences as that of the French *Annales* school which wishes to understand a whole society in every detail, in all its interrelations and activities, and therefore insists on analysis. Compare a work like Prescott's *History of the Reign of Philip II* with Fernand Braudel's *La Mediterranee et le monde mediterraneen a l'epoque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), and the change becomes very apparent. The second book offers some splendid understanding of the circumstances which contributed to the shaping of policy and action; the only things missing are policy and action. There is a clear and admirable sense of life, but how those lives passed through history is much less clear. To me, at least, the *Annales* method — certainly until it lost itself in rhetoric and self-adulation — represents a valuable, perhaps necessary, stage in the development of historical writing, one which attacked genuine deficiencies and did a good deal to remedy them, but it must not be regarded as in some way the sole consummation of the historian's duties. In many fields of history it is either clearly insufficient or has already done its work. Legitimate in itself, and in such hands as Bloch's or Braudel's remarkably successful, it can no more answer all the important questions of history than can any other method.

Unhappily, any attempt to restore narrative to a respectable place in the historian's armoury runs into the reformer's most awkward problem: the friends he makes and the unwanted allies that surround him. It cannot be denied that a good deal of the occasional clamour against 'technical' and analytical history, or the sort of praise for story-telling one encounters in the worthier lay periodicals, arises from intellectual indolence and a desire for popular success. It is perfectly possible to feel respect and liking for the writings of the serious popular historians without believing that theirs is the highest form of history or the model to follow. Among them are notable practitioners of a far from easy skill; it would not be difficult to bias the argument by looking at the lesser lights; but even the best lack the searching depth of investigation, the establishment of solid truths, and the accumulation of fruitfully illuminating explanations which professional history must and can provide. However hard it may be to write flowing narrative or to evoke people and places, it should not be doubted that the intellectual effort involved in real analysis and its presentation is markedly greater. In addition, much narrative history helps itself by ignoring unsolved questions, accepting ready-made explanations, repeating stale arguments at second hand; and narrative that depends on art superficially imposed on simplicity or ignorance does indeed merit the

strictures of the austerer scholars. The question is whether other forms of narrative are possible, and I think they are.

The defender of historical narrative as a profound form of writing history faces one further handicap in the prevalence of biographies. Though biography is really a separate art, with rules and problems of its own, most people seem to think of it as simply a form of history; yet, in so far as it is history, it tends to underline the potential weakness of narrative. It is certainly historical, and it is bound to be narrative in its main structure. Since it deals with an individual's life it possesses a given beginning and a known end between which the sequence of events runs clearly in one direction. The biographer thus has his first problem solved for him: neither the limits of his study nor its basic structure are open to choice. Now in England, at least, biographies are innumerable; their production forms one of the country's most flourishing industries, and they are well liked by readers. Whatever may be true of the bulk of them, quite a few are admirable. What matters here is that even at its best biography is a poor way of writing history. The biographer's task is to tell the story, demonstrate the personality, and elucidate the importance of one individual; he should not be concerned with the history of that individual's times except in so far as it centres upon or emanates from him. In measure as he deserts his proper subject for what concerns the historian, that subject's age, he fails in his own task. Very occasionally, a 'great man's' life may prove a tool useful for opening a problem of history — some kings or statesmen can serve this purpose — but even when the tool is useful it is not the best available. The limits of one man's life rarely have any meaning in the interpretation of history; even if his death marks a period (and how rarely this happens) his birth will not. However influential he may have been, no individual has ever dominated his age to the point where it becomes sensible to write its history purely around him. And, above all, those parts of his career that may carry the greatest historical significance are not likely to be those on which a biographer should mainly concentrate. He should give much weight to those private relationships and petty concerns which have little to tell the historian; in particular, if he is to understand his subject's personality, he should deal thoroughly with those formative years during which the history of the age is likely to be quite unaware of the growing man. None of this speaks against biography as a form of writing, but it does mean that biography is not a good way of writing history. The historian should know the histories and characters of many men, as he should know much else, but he should not write biography — or at least should not suppose that in writing biography he is writing history. The low esteem in which biography is often held — without reason — therefore offers no argument at all against narrative history: the two are different things.

What, then, should narrative do to avoid the charges of superficiality, intellectual weakness, inability to deal with the real questions — charges that are often raised against it by professional historians? If a narrative form could be found which would enable the historian to offer real explanations of problems and to accommodate more than the traditional political story, the genre would again become respectable, especially if at the same time it could preserve its special distinction as literary art. In this endeavour, the narrative historian confronts two technical problems: the definition of a theme, and the discovery of a structure which amalgamates with this theme historical points and problems not directly arising from it.

In defining his theme, the historian must first of all establish meaningful limits, points in time which give to his narrative a true sense of coherence. Any old bit cut out of the interminable flow of time will still be history, but it will not be good history because it will lack purpose and so will not enable the writer to create a work of thought and art. In practice, the limits may well be provided by the main theme chosen. The narrative historian necessarily decides to tell the story of something — of a nation, a political organization, a Church, a government, a business, or whatever may come to mind among the activities of men, or of some phase in that story which interests him. When he has chosen his theme, its limits should come to him

as a matter of course, but it is still worth saying that he should from first to last be aware of the need to have real limits and should so construct his story that it naturally runs from one to the other. Few themes do in fact run from one clearly defined point in time to another, but this does not permit the writer to delay the opening of his narrative with long scene-setting chapters or to drag it out into lengthy perspectives and forecasts at the end. If scenes are to be set and consequences be made plain, this should be done inside the narrative; narrative history at its most effective demands that no clearly defined sections be blatantly analytical.

The kind of theme chosen may also pose serious problems. If the history is to deal with a restricted body of men, things may be easy. A history of the East India Company or Imperial Chemical Industries, of the king's Chancery or the Methodist Church, will naturally be written along a main line defined by the fortunes of those organizations. But narrative history often has to deal with groups of men expressing themselves in different ways or living side by side in entanglement and separateness, as it might be a nation which has a political, social, economic, religious and intellectual history; or it deals with an age in which a number of such societies can all claim to have lived such varied lives. Here the historian must choose a main theme, often a very hard choice but not one to be avoided by running a number of themes alongside each other in separate chapters. The historian may suppose that his choice depends on his own preference, and to some extent this enters into it. But there are two chief considerations that really determine the main theme: the availability of evidence, and the need to find a theme sufficiently dominant to carry the others along with it.

In practice, it has to be admitted, this means that the main theme even today will be nearly always 'political': it must consist of the actions of government and governed in the public life of the time. For all ages before about 1800 the vast bulk of the surviving evidence bears on such topics, and even thereafter that kind of evidence predominates. And secondly, since narrative is necessarily a record of events succeeding each other, it is necessarily the record of action (and suffering); and the most manifest, continuous and purposeful action is that which guides a community through its life and relations with other communities. Thus political narrative — the doings of the rulers and the reactions of the ruled at all levels — still stands out as the probable main thread of any narrative. The history of Tudor England can be written as the history of sheep-farming, or of vernacular poetry, or of maritime enterprise, or of doctrinal debate; other themes could be found. But none of these lines runs clean down the middle because they do not involve a large enough part of the people living at the time nor a large enough part of the evidence. None of them make it easy to accommodate the others in the same story. As main themes they are therefore inferior to politics — the activities of government — for which the evidence is thickest and to which other themes most readily relate.

However, it is perfectly true that mere political history is not enough. A plain tale of wars and treaties, elections and reforms, the fortunes of the great, however well it may be told, can no longer satisfy our conception of history or accommodate our knowledge of it. In order that action may be understood, its setting, circumstances and springs must be made plain, and these are found not only in the psychology of individuals and crowds but especially in the details of administration, the economy, the intellectual preoccupations of the time, and all other so-called 'factors'. The narrative historian comes up against separate problems that either have been solved and must be absorbed, or that have to be solved by him, before he can continue his story. It is his task to accommodate such matters, which require analytical treatment, in such a way that the narrative seems hardly to be interrupted at all. This means that he should not treat of them as plainly separate entities, in separate chapters or sections clearly marked off. Rather they should be erratic boulders carried along in the glacial flow — paragraphs, sometimes sentences, which seem to come naturally at some point of the narrative and slip readily into its continuation, so that the reader is barely aware of the change of pace.

(In itself, a change of pace is desirable in any prolonged account.) To be satisfactory and in order to avoid the charge of superficiality, historical narrative must, as it were, be thickened by the results of analysis. This requires the historian to gather together every aspect and every turn of the subject matter, digest it comprehensively in the mind, and use to elaborate the points of his narrative.

While it would help to illustrate these probably obscure prescriptions, I feel unable to do so without displaying the conceit involved in citing my own example. This kind of narrative is what I attempted in my *Reformation Europe* (London, 1963). The book avoids the customary scene-setting at the start. Instead it goes straight into the story of Luther's rebellion, which naturally calls for some description of the man; this introduces, as a matter of course, the points of theology over which he rebelled. Once the narrative is well under way, it demands some understanding of Luther's success in the circumstances of time and place, which necessitates a long — possibly by these rules too long — discussion of 'the state of Germany'. Because this comes after the narrative has begun, and not by way of introducing Luther's action, it seems to me to avoid the appearance of a separate and unintegrated chapter, though in this I may, of course, be quite mistaken. Smaller problems are more easily accommodated. The account of Charles V's wars with the French can be arrested for a couple of paragraphs to analyse the military practice of the time; his involvement with the Turks can be used to slip in a description of that despotism. And so on. It is perfectly true that those aspects of the age which yield best to thoroughly analytical treatment will not come across in such detail as another approach might provide; the point is that I was trying to write the kind of narrative in which analytical chunks are somehow embedded without destroying the sense of action, movement, time passing, across the whole range of problems. Certainly I did not succeed completely: if I had, I should have been able to do without a chapter on 'The Age' — parts of which, it now seems to me, could have been treated in the course of the narrative. There are some other passages where analysis seems to me to threaten the narrative, or at least to hold it suspended for rather too long. I cite this example only because I did try to practice what here I preach, and I think I had some measure of success with it; I managed to discuss and argue points not usually encountered in books treating narratively and concisely of controversial and intellectually complex periods. The method is possible, but it still needs a great deal of thought and work to improve it.

In actual fact, it need not be doubted that the ideally pure form of this sort of narrative can never be written. The complexities of every story are too great, and the historian must lose his worth if either through ignorance or by design he solves his problem by leaving out the awkward things. To some, a traditional method, alternating narrative and analytical chapters, may seem preferable, because it is more easily done and less likely to omit matters, but I do not like it so well. I am, however, inclined to think that large-scale history cannot be written without *some* patently analytical sections which I regard as inescapable setbacks in a battle that must on balance be won. If the question is 'what happened', the answer must tell a story, and however 'thickened' or interrupted that story turns out to be it must continuously keep the reader moving through the years. People must palpably be born, grow up and die; institutions, organizations, societies must be seen to change and vary; events must clearly follow one upon another. Everything must most manifestly be taking place in time. And yet the deeper insight into problems, the discussions of unsettled or doubtful points, the hard intellectual digging which analysis alone can provide must also be ever present as the tale proceeds: not only present to the historian, but by him also communicated, integrated in the flow of time, to all who read.

Narrative of this sort, however short of the ideal, is not, of course, easy to write. It challenges the constructive skills of the writer as well as his ability to hold together a great number of traces that keep pulling apart. It is much harder to do than analytical history which, in turn,

may well require more concentrated and intensive thought. Neither is, however, superior to the other, and he who dissects problems need not look down upon the narrator as a mere teller of tales, nor need the story-teller despise the concerns of his analysing colleague as absence of imagination. The complete historian, in any case, is both. Both are truly important forms of intelligent and intellectual activity, proper to be reckoned among the more respected occupations of the human mind. Within the single task of understanding and recreating the past, they serve different and complementary purposes. Still, I confess to a personal hankering after the sort of narrative I have described. I find it more difficult to accomplish than the analysis of historical problems, and therefore more exciting to do. It needs even more art, more transformation of the raw material. But personal preferences should not be mistaken for general rules, even by him who holds them.

It should be plain by now that though I believe in the independence of history and the possibility of discovering a right truth by the techniques of scholarship, I do not hold that these facts result in historical writing independent of the writer. Quite often this dependence does not interfere with the statement of manifest and incontrovertible truth; there are a good many problems in history, large and small, for which nobody now manages to work up any bias or prejudice. At other times it does interfere. Add the uncertainties of historical writing — the gaps in the evidence, the frequent obscurity of what does survive, the need to read and interpret with a controlled imagination, the demands of order and sense — and it is plain enough that no work is free of the tentative, the doubtful, the correctable. Yet what of that? Why should this limit the historian's desire to know and to write, or his claim to be listened to? Only those to whom the insufficiencies of the human existence are anathema could ever suppose that it should, and people of that cast of mind have no cause to concern themselves with men or their history.

The historian fulfils his function properly if, aware of the unsolved and insoluble problems, conscious that he is not a machine and can be moved by love, anger, contempt and vanity, he concentrates on honesty and integrity. He must become a scholar, which is to say that he must add a dimension to his humanity, not remove one. And he will be wise to cultivate the sceptic mind, a reserved and questioning attitude to all claimed certainties, for as long as he can. He needs to be learned, balanced, imaginative, able to see all points of view and yet to assess them from one of his own. Imagination will give life to his learning, learning will direct the sweep of his imagination. Over all should rule a searching intelligence, asking that fundamental question of the sceptic: just what do you mean by that? And if that question is asked with a real desire to know and understand, if the imagination is centred upon people - dead people once alive — and sympathy and judgment are controlled by scholarship and by a mind of quality, the work can be done. All the deficiencies of knowledge and writer notwithstanding, the historian can rest assured that he can fulfil his ambition to know and tell about the past. His can never be the last word, an ambition in any case bred out of vanity, but he can establish new footholds in the territory of truth.

[...]despite some rather desperate attempts here and there, no one has yet succeeded in training academic historians as teachers, and that accomplishment is left to be acquired by natural aptitude, imitation of exemplars, and experience. I am not myself persuaded that this is a bad thing, or that formal teacher-training would be profitable. But the craftsmanship of historical scholarship can be tested, and therefore it can and should be taught. The young man who has obtained his doctorate has proved only one thing: that he has the basic equipment to pursue a life of scholarship. He may claim credence for his work because he has convinced experienced elders that he has absorbed the canons of rational research and controlled judgment. Whether he is an historian, or what sort of an historian he may be, he will, one hopes, go on to show thereafter. His dissertation is not, or should not be, the same thing as

the books he will presumably go on to write, any more than the tool-chest made by the apprentice carpenter for his masterpiece represents the norm of his later production.

The teaching of research students must therefore concentrate on the competences which a newly fledged historian is supposed to possess. I suggest that these are: a thorough knowledge of the materials, primary and secondary, available for the study of his chosen area of operations; ability to use these materials, both in the sense of discovering and understanding them, and in the sense of being able to evaluate them critically; ability to formulate meaningful questions and relevant answers; ability to present a sound reconstruction of a piece of history, founded with painful accuracy on the evidence; ability to present this reconstruction according to the conventions of historical writing, as for instance in the proper drafting of footnotes and references. I do not believe that at this stage of his career he should be required to prove a wide knowledge of history in general or a superior ability to write on the grand scale. These are skills that come with further learning and experience; a technically competent standard of scholarship is a sufficiently demanding test for the apprentice; and in any case, it is the craftsmanship rather than the art which the young historian must learn first and must prove himself possessed of if he is to be taken seriously as a scholar.

Henry Steele Commager

The Nature and the Study of History

Charles Merrill Publishing Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1965

Let us consider history as memory.

For a people to be without history, or to be ignorant of its history, is as for a man to be without memory — condemned forever to make the same discoveries that have been made in the past, invent the same techniques, wrestle with the same problems, commit the same errors; and condemned, too, to forfeit the rich pleasures of recollection. Indeed, just as it is difficult to imagine history without civilization, so it is difficult to imagine civilization without history. As Frederic Harrison has written:

‘Suppose that all knowledge of the gradual steps of civilization, of the slow process of perfecting the arts of life and the natural sciences, were blotted out; suppose all memory of the efforts and struggles of earlier generations, and of the deeds of great men, were gone; all the landmarks of history; all that has distinguished each country, race, or city in past times from others; all notion of what man had done or could do; of his many failures, of his successes, of his hopes; suppose for a moment all the books, all the traditions, all the buildings of past ages to vanish off the face of the earth, and with them the institutions of society, all political forms, all principles of politics, all systems of thought, all daily customs, all familiar arts; suppose the most deep-rooted and sacred of all our institutions gone; suppose that the family and home, property, and justice were strange ideas without meaning; that all the customs which surround each of us from birth to death were blotted out; suppose a race of men whose minds, by a paralytic stroke of fate, had suddenly been deadened to every recollection, to whom the whole world was new. Can we imagine a condition of such utter helplessness, confusion, and misery?’ (*The Meaning of History and Other Historical Pieces*, New York, 1914, p. 5.)

Clearly the concept of history set forth here embraces rather more than most historians would claim: the total record of the past — literature, law, art, architecture, social institutions, religion, philosophy, all indeed that lives in and through the memory of man. We need not embrace this imperial definition of History in order to agree that man without memory would be bewildered and bereft. But memory, as we all know, is fitful and phantasmagoric. History is organized memory, and the organization is all important. As organized memory, history takes almost innumerable forms, serves almost innumerable purposes. Let us consider some of the forms which it assumes and some of the purposes which it serves.

First, and if not most important, then most elementary, history is a story. That was its original character, and that has continued to be its most distinctive character. If history forgets or neglects to tell a story, it will inevitably forfeit much of its appeal and much of its authority as well. With the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* storytelling and history are so inextricably commingled that we do not to this day know whether to classify them as literature or as history; they are of course both. ‘The Father of History,’ Herodotus, had a story to tell — the struggle between the Greeks and the Persians — and he told it with immense verve. So, too, his great successor Thucydides, who gave us the story of the Peloponnesian War. Livy and Tacitus, the greatest of the Roman historians, were both superb storytellers, as are most of the leading modern historians, Voltaire and Gibbon, Carlyle and Macaulay, Prescott and Motley and Parkman.

For, as Lord Macaulay wrote, ‘the art of history is the art of narration, the art of interesting the affections and presenting pictures to the imagination . . . by skillful selection and disposition without indulging in the license of invention.’

Here we come to the second quality of history. History is a story, to be sure, but it is not a made-up story; history draws on and excites the imagination, but it is not a flight of the imagination. It is a story of what happened in the past, or what the historian is able to recover and reconstruct of what actually happened. In short, history is a record. It collects and organizes such facts as are available and relevant, provides some kind of framework for them, and lays down the guidelines for the presentation. It supplies order, harmony, direction, for what might otherwise be a chaotic assemblage of miscellaneous facts.

It is interpretation — the third step in the organization of the record — which is most nearly individual and which therefore makes the highest demands upon the historian. Industry will go far towards solving the first problem, that of collecting the materials; common sense and judgment will contribute much to the second, the organization of the materials. But intelligence of a high order is required for the interpretation of the facts. The greatest of historians, certainly in modern times, have been the interpreters; and all the major modern historians have tried to be interpreters — that is they tried to extract some meaning out of the inchoate raw materials of history, or to impose some philosophy upon it. Thus the great English historians: Clarendon and Gibbon and Hume, Macaulay and Froude and Lecky, Buckle and Freeman, Maitland and Lord Acton, and in our own day Namier and Butterfield, and Father David Knowles and Veronica Wedgwood, and Denis Brogan and Winston Churchill. Thus in France, Montesquieu and Voltaire and Michelet and Taine and Tocqueville and Aulard; thus in Germany, Niebuhr and Ranke, and von Sybel and Treitschke and Lamprecht, and Burckhardt, and more recently, Meinecke and Rothfels. Thus in the United States Francis Parkman and John Lothrop Motley, Henry Adams and Vernon Parrington, Lawrence Gipson, S. E. Morison, and Allan Nevins.

Yet while interpretation depends on the accumulation of facts and their skilful organization, even the most prodigious industry and the most painstaking analysis do not guarantee a profound interpretation. That requires judgment, originality, imagination, and art. And this brings us to the third form, or character, of history — history as art. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has said:

‘All the elements of artistic form are as organic in historical as in any other kind of literary composition. There are limits on the historian’s capacity for invention, but there need be none on his capacity for insight. Written history, after all, is the application of an aesthetic vision to a welter of facts; and both the weight and the vitality of an historical work depend on the quality of the vision.’ (*The Historian as Artist*)

This is another way of saying that history is a branch of literature and that it serves some of the purposes and is governed by some of the principles of literature. Certainly most of the historical writing which we call great, and put into the category of the ‘classics,’ has literary distinction.

Literary history is not just a matter of fine writing. That can easily be overdone, and often is; the best style is plain and straightforward, as with Lincoln or Churchill in the realm of politics, or Trevelyan and Brogan among English historians, Douglas Freeman and Allan Nevins among American. Literary style is a matter rather of the tone, the color, the movement of the narrative; it is a matter of symmetry of structure, concentration of effort, architectural unity and harmony, and the imagination which suffuses the whole. Listen to an example from

a master of literary style who was also a master of historical fact, Francis Parkman, calling to our attention one of the paradoxes of Franco-American history:

‘The French dominion is a memory of the past; and when we invoke its departed shades, they rise upon us from their graves in strange, romantic guise. Again their ghostly campfires seem to burn, and the fitful light is cast around on lord and vassal and black-robed priest, mingled with wild forms of savage warriors, knit in close fellowship on the same stern errand. A boundless vision grows upon us: an untamed continent; vast wastes of forest verdure; mountains silent in primeval sleep; river, lake, and glimmering pool; wilderness oceans mingling with the sky. Such was the domain which France conquered for civilization. Plumed helmets gleamed in the shades of its forests, priestly vestments in its dens and fastnesses of ancient barbarism. Men steeped in antique learning, pale with the close breath of the cloister, here spent the noon and evening of their lives, ruled savage hordes with a mild parental sway, and stood serene before the direst shapes of death. Men of courtly nurture, heirs to the polish of a far-reaching ancestry, here, with their dauntless hardihood put to shame the boldest sons of toil. (*Pioneers of France in the New World*, preface.)

While it is true that unless history is reasonably accurate and fair it should not be read, it is equally true that unless history is well written it will not be read. ‘The world at large,’ writes Allan Nevins, himself a distinguished practitioner of literary history,

‘will sooner forgive lack of scientific solidity than lack of literary charm. The great preservative in history, as in all else, is style. A book of consummate literary art may abound in passages of bad history, but nevertheless carry generation after generation before it. It is useless to protest that Lord Clarendon was far too biased on the English Civil War; he will be read for centuries by all who savor a close-packed, pithy, eloquent style, full of graphic sketches of men and events. Motley is unscientific in his treatment of Spanish misrule in the Netherlands, but the world will continue to read Motley. If an historian were compelled to take his choice, fame might urge him to select the winged pen, rather than the Aristotelian mind, to choose Apollo against Minerva; but he may choose both. (*The Gateway to History*, Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962, p 379.)

Justice Holmes used to say, finely, that ‘life is painting a picture, not doing a sum.’ So we may say that writing history is painting a picture, not taking a photograph. It is not enough to give photographic exactness; not even a photograph by Brady carries the impact of a painting by Goya, the ‘Massacre’ for example. It is not enough to compile statistics; if it were, the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* would be, each year, our best historical volume. It is not enough to pile up mountains of historical and social details; if it were, the raw materials of newspapers would suffice for historical literature. It is not enough to put together strings of episodes and anecdotes, no matter how dramatic; picture magazines which do this dull rather than excite the mind. History must rest on statistics, embrace details, exploit drama, but it should control all of these ingredients as an artist controls the ingredients of his materials and the elements of his subject — control them, master them, penetrate them with meaning and suffuse them with imagination.

Yet we must keep ever in mind that literary history, or history as literature, is not merely a matter of style — the winged word, the happy phrase, the brilliant epigram, the dramatist’s art. The historian does not enroll, automatically, in the literary school when he writes well, nor suffer expulsion from that school when he writes in a flat or wooden style. Literary history is something more than a matter of style; it is something more than a matter of emphasis; it is a matter of philosophy.

The literary historian is primarily interested in recreating the past. He is, in a sense, a painter, and who can deny a Rembrandt, a Goya, a Longhi or Canaletto, a Reynolds, a George Catlin a place among historians? He is, in a sense, a dramatist, and who would deny Shakespeare or Moliere or Holberg the title of historian? The literary historian employs his talents to conjure up what was once real and is now no more, and to excite the imagination of the beholder to see the past through his eyes. Like the painter, or the dramatist, he seeks to capture, for a moment, a brilliant, a famous, an endearing scene, to recreate a picturesque tableau, to paint a familiar portrait. He is Motley admitting us to the bedside of the dying Philip II of Spain; he is Prescott making us spectators of the bold attack across the causeway on Montezuma's great city; he is Michelet bringing us to our knees as we look on the tragic scene of the burning of the Maid of Orleans; he is Carlyle involving us in the heat of the battle of Rossbach.

All this is a far cry from the more prosaic and realistic purposes of the scientific historian. The gap between the literary and the scientific is not stylistic; it is deeper and more fundamental, a difference in the philosophy of history itself. The scientific historian is not really interested in recreating the past for its own sake, nor at pains to stir the imagination of the reader; indeed he is rather inclined to distrust the picturesque or the dramatic and even the individual. It is reason he wants to excite, not imagination, and as for the past he does not want to recreate it but to explain it. A great 'technical' historian — Frederic Maitland, for example, who 'turned the dust of archives into gold,' or a Hastings Rashdall who made the medieval university as familiar as the contemporary, or Father Knowles, or S. E. Morison, can write with a style that sings and soars. But their primary purpose is not to stir the imagination but to solve problems. Was the 'Mirror of Justices', upon which Lord Coke relied, authentic? How did St. Bernard triumph over the Cluniacs? Why did the students of medieval Bologna and Padua organize into Nations? Were the Puritans really hostile to music and the arts? Each of our historians has illuminated these problems with literary grace, but it was the problem that was important, not the grace.

Let us see how two distinguished historians, one 'literary,' the other 'scientific,' deal with the same situation. Here is Van Wyck Brooks, of all historians of American literature the most evocative, conjuring up for us the image of Nathaniel Hawthorne confronted by the spectacle of the New England Puritan in Rome:

'Was Hawthorne right in feeling that 'it needs the native air' to give a writer's work reality? Rome had provided him with a fairy setting for the last of his own romances,— the last he was ever to finish,— the tale of Hilda, Miriam and Donatello, the dusky Miriam of the shrouded past and the delicate wood-anemone of the Western forest. This dance of Yankee girls and fauns and spectres was like a Pompeiian fresco or something immobilized on a Grecian urn. A bituminous light suffused it, as of an afternoon in the realm of shades. One caught in the shifting groups the magical, mythological grace of Poussin. One heard Mignon's song rising from the depths in the fitful measure of a wind-harp. Hawthorne had drawn enchantment from the Roman air; and yet, for all the spell of *The Marble Faun*, it was hardly comparable with *The Scarlet Letter* or *The House of the Seven Gables*. The orchidaceous existence of most of the exiles seemed to bear him out in his distrust. One could dream forever in these Roman gardens, under the cypress and ilex, while all one's mental muscles atrophied. Norton, with his acute social conscience, his sense of a mission at home, probed under the surface of Italian life. The repressive political system disturbed him, and he had understood, from his own observation, the sorrows of Petrarch, Dante and Alfieri, who had mourned over their country and its degradation. Norton's critical faculties were alert; he had ridiculed the old romantic guidebooks and the cold and pretentious work of the German painters who were dominant in modern Rome. He had cared for the realities of Italian life, as Greenough and Margaret Fuller had cared before him. The others did not wish to care. It was to escape from the prose of existence that they had left America. If their writing lost all grip

and bottom, was not this the reason and the explanation?' (*The Flowering of New England*, New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1936, p. 477.)

Here is what Francis Matthiessen has to say in his brilliantly written interpretation of the *American Renaissance*:

'The danger of Brooks' impressionism is even more marked in the half paragraph which . . . is the only space he has left for *The Marble Faun*. When he says that Rome had provided Hawthorne with "a fairy setting," and speaks of "the dusky Miriam of the shrouded past, the delicate wood-anemone of the Western forest," the flower that he envisages has nothing to do with Hawthorne's maturely bitter fruit... As a result of letting his attention be deflected from the work itself, he has made one of our few major artists seem less male and robust, much less concerned with important issues, than he was. Of all Hawthorne's heroines, Miriam leaves an impression least like the fragility Brooks describes... Her quick response to Kenyon's statue of Cleopatra (which is Hawthorne's response to Story's) is owing to her feeling within herself the operation of qualities equally fierce and turbulent. . . .She is more deeply involved in a background of ambiguous guilt than any other of Hawthorne's characters, and his method of conveying this should be observed as a final aspect of his tragic technique, since it leads directly into the practice of James and Eliot. (*American Renaissance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1941 p. 352.)

The differences here go to the very heart of the problem of the nature of history. Why does the literary historian want to salvage, to resurrect, to recreate the past? It is because he is interested in the past for its own sake, interested in the drama, the spectacle, the pageant, interested in the actors and actresses. His is the view expounded by George Macaulay Trevelyan: 'It is not man's evolution but his attainment that is the greatest lesson of the past and the highest theme of history.'

The scientific historian is not interested in history for its own sake. He studies it because it is part of the evolutionary process, and it is that process which concerns him. He behaves, as Herbert Butterfield observes, 'as though only those things are worthy of attention which gain importance from the fact that they led to something else.' Like a good scientist, the technical historian wants to solve problems.

If the scientific historian has done much to illuminate the processes of history, it is the literary historian who has done most to expand its boundaries. For if we are to conjure up the past, not only its drama and its heroisms but its everyday simplicities, we cannot ignore the commonplace. To be sure, literary historians do yield to the seduction of the dramatic — witness a Prescott or a Motley, or, in our own time, a Guedalla or a Rowse. But Carlyle — who was himself irresistibly tempted by the dramatic — warned against this a century ago: 'Mournful it is to behold what the business called "History" in these so enlightened and illuminated times, still continues to be. Can you gather from it . . . any dimmest shadow of an answer to that great question: how men lived and had their being?, were it but economically, as what wages they got and what they bought with them?' Carlyle did try to tell this, and so did his contemporary, John R. Green; somewhat later, so did the Dane Troels-Lund and the German Karl Lamprecht and the Frenchman Eli Halevy, and so did the American John Bach McMaster, who wrote clumsily enough. But we conclude as we began: 'literary' history is not a matter of fine writing; it is a matter of the center of intellectual and historical gravity.

History is art; history is also philosophy. Lord Bolingbroke put it for all time when, drawing on the ancients, he defined History as 'philosophy teaching by examples.' So almost all the great historians have thought, from Thucydides to Toynbee. History was philosophy in the Old Testament stories; it was philosophy in Thucydides, Polybius, Plutarch, Livy, and Tacitus

among the ancients. Most modern historians accepted the Bolingbroke dictum as a matter of course: Montesquieu in his *Spirit of the Laws* and *The Grandeur and Decadence of Rome*, Voltaire in the *Age of Louis XIV*, Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the Abbe Raynal in his many-volumed *History of the Indies*, designed, really, as an 'instrument of war' against the Church and the Empire, and David Hume in his *History of England*. It is only recently that historians have attempted to discard this traditional function of history, and without much success. For philosophy, ousted from the front door, creeps back in through the side door. The public still wants philosophy with its history, and it is no accident that the most popular historians of our time — H. G. Wells and Winston Churchill and Arnold Toynbee, Georg Brandes and Oswald Spengler, Benedetto Croce and Andre Malraux, Salvadore de Madariaga and Raymond Aron, all wrote history as philosophy.

Yet few historians have been philosophers in any formal sense. They have relied on history, most of them, to teach simple moral lessons: the superiority of Christianity over other religions; the dangers of infidelity; the triumph of virtue over vice, or, in more sophisticated times, the futility of religious intolerance, the wickedness of kings, the depravity of man and the necessity of restraints upon his passions, the rise and fall of empires and the causes thereof — these and other lessons equally simple and equally dubious.

No one can seriously question the claim of history to be story, record, literature, and philosophy. What of her claim — or the claim of some of her more infatuated disciples — to be a science? History is invariably embraced in that loose term, 'the social sciences,' but we do not know what that term really means. Are the social sciences in fact sciences at all, or is the word 'science' used here rather in its original sense as 'knowledge'?

It was the Victorians who first asserted that history was a science; that generation, so confident of its ability to create a science of man, embraced within this concept the science of society, economy, politics, law, and history. Thomas Buckle was sure that he had reduced history to a science by bringing it under the dominion of 'one glorious principle of universal and undeviating regularity' — the law of Nature; while across the Channel August Comte announced that 'History has now been for the first time systematically considered, and has been found like other phenomena, subject to invariable laws.' And at the turn of the century two Regius Professors at Cambridge University, Lord Acton and J. B. Bury, intimated that if history was not yet a science it would inevitably become one. No modern Regius Professors now speak in such confident tones, yet the habit of thinking and speaking of history as a science is deeply engrained.

Clearly history is not a science in the sense that chemistry or biology are sciences. It cannot submit its data to scientific experiments; it cannot repeat its own experiments; it cannot control its materials. Wanting these, it will be said that of course history is not a science in any useful sense of the word. Yet it is equally clear that history uses or aspires to use the scientific method. That is, it tests all things which can be tested, and holds fast to what it finds to be true, in so far as it is able to make any findings at all. But how does history 'test' things? What are the techniques of testing? How does it know when it has arrived at 'truth' or even when it has achieved agreement of 'facts'? The chemist does not inject his personality, his beliefs and prejudices, into the chemicals which he uses in his experiments; how does the historian rid his materials of such foreign ingredients? Indeed can the term 'scientific method' ever mean the same thing in history that it means in the exact sciences? Should it perhaps give place to a more realistic term such as 'critical method,' and should 'scientific' history yield to 'technical' history?

For there is this further, and sobering, consideration that the scientific method is valid — if at all — only in what might be called the formal and somewhat elementary realms of history,

never in the really fundamental realms. Thus we can prove — scientifically if you will — that John Wilkes Booth did in fact shoot President Lincoln in Ford's Theater in Washington, on the night of the fourteenth of April, 1865. So far so good — but how far, and how good? For beyond that our science does not take us. Why did Booth do it? Who, or what, was responsible for his action? What were the consequences of the act? These, the really interesting questions, cannot be answered scientifically; they can hardly be answered at all.

Disillusioned with the claims of scientific history, some modern historians settled for what we might call Technical History — a term coined by Professor Herbert Butterfield of Cambridge University. Let us not aspire too high, let us not try to formulate laws of history, let us not try to don the mantle of science! Let us rather take problems, one by one, as a biologist or a philologist takes problems one by one, the smaller the better, and works them out. If enough historians work tirelessly at enough problems, we may in time obtain a firm foundation upon which future historians can somehow rear the grand fabric of history.

The stigmata of technical history are by now sufficiently familiar. It distrusts the dramatic and prefers to catch history in a chemical solution, as it were, in a moment of arrested development, and to analyze it and dissect it. It eschews the narrative and turns instead to Problems, though it does not really believe that any problems can be finally solved. It detests generalizations and is revolted by Laws; it delights in the minute and the specific, and its characteristic form is the monograph. It has little interest in ideas and none at all in individuals, looking upon them as aberrations from some norm to be arrived at by the study of statistics, or distractions from the consideration of impersonal institutions. It is impatient with the notion of history as literature and rejects out of hand the idea of history as philosophy. And it has an irresistible fascination for the academic mind.

WRITING HISTORY

So much for reading. What of the writing of history?

Let it be said at once that there is no mystery about writing history, nothing esoteric or cabalistic. There is no formula for historical writing. There are no special techniques or special requirements, except the technique of writing clearly and the requirements of honesty and common sense. It is useful to have special training, as it is useful to have special training for almost anything you wish to do well — driving a car, or cooking, or painting — but special training is by no means essential, and most of the great historians have been innocent of formal training. Professional history is, indeed, a very recent affair — it came in with 'technical history' in the nineteenth century — and, except in Germany, the near monopoly of historical writing by academicians is even more recent. Almost all the great historians of the past were men involved in one way or another in public affairs — Thucydides, Livy, Tacitus, Plutarch and, in modern times, Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Hume, Macaulay, Bancroft, Guizot, Grundtvig. Most of them, too, were amateurs, at least in the sense that they were not professional teachers: thus in the United States Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, Parkman, and Henry Adams. The amateur tradition is now almost a thing of the past, but it lingers on in Europe more tenaciously than in America: witness the contributions of such public figures as Croce, Madariaga, Malraux, De Gaulle, George Lukacs, and Winston Churchill.

Integrity, industry, imagination, and common sense — these are the important, indeed the essential, requirements. They are by no means familiar commonplace qualities. The requirement of integrity is of course implacable, in history as in all other forms of scholarship or science, and there is no need to elaborate upon it. Yet here, too, it must be admitted that standards of 'integrity' are not universal, and that honest men differ on the nature of truth in

history as in all other realms of thought. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that the historian must be honest according to his lights; that he should never consciously distort his evidence, even by literary artistry; that he should be ever on guard against religious, racial, class or national preconceptions; that he should try to see every problem from all possible points of view; that he should search diligently for all the evidence, and not be content until he has exhausted the available resources; that he should always remember that he is not God and that final judgment is not entrusted to him.

The requirement of industry, too, is elementary and rigorous. You need not, perhaps, emulate the great historian of ancient Rome, Theodore Mommsen, who customarily worked eighteen hours a day and complained that on his wedding day he managed only twelve hours work, or that other German phenomenon, Leopold von Ranke, who kept working and writing well into his eighties, and who at the age of eighty-five launched a *History of the World*, seven volumes of which appeared in the next five years of his life. But, as with most things that are important, the writing of history requires patience, devotion, and indefatigable industry, much of it tiresome. You will have to accustom yourself to spending long hours and days tracking down some source which as often as not will prove quite useless, reading through newspapers or journals which as often as not yield only a scanty return, working patiently through ill-scrawled manuscripts in the hope, often vain, of hitting on something that is relevant to your inquiry, fighting your way stubbornly through the jungles of verbiage in the *Congressional Globe* or the *Reports* of royal commissions, or the decisions of courts. If you are going to come up with something that is new, original, fresh, and valuable, you cannot avoid these exercises; if you are not prepared for them, you will do well to abandon history for something less arduous.

As for imagination, that is in all likelihood something that cannot be cultivated; either you have it or you do not. If you do not have it you may be a worthy compiler of facts, a good analyst, a safe guide through the labyrinths of the past, but you will never be able to recreate that past, never set the blood coursing through the veins of your readers, or ideas tumbling over each other in their heads. As for 'common sense' — alas it is by no means as common as the phrase implies. It is an all-inclusive term which embraces such disparate qualities as moderation, balance, judiciousness, critical intelligence, open-mindedness, tolerance, proportion, and good humor, and doubtless other qualities as well. Without it the most scholarly and interesting works misfire — for example as with William Crosskey's two learned volumes designed to prove that the Founding Fathers meant something quite different from what they said and wrote, or Otto Eisenschiml's elaborate proof that Secretary Stanton masterminded the plot to assassinate Lincoln, or Charles Tansill's well documented volumes designed to prove that Franklin Roosevelt instigated the Second World War, or — to take a more extreme example — those many volumes dedicated to the proposition that Lord Bacon or the Earl of Oxford, or somebody else wrote the plays hitherto attributed to Shakespeare.

Let us turn, then, to some practical considerations in the writing of history: first, the choice of a subject. That seems almost too elementary a matter to justify comment, but alas it is not. Again and again otherwise sensible neophyte historians come a cropper when they select a subject for their investigation. Here is where common sense comes in. Your subject should not be too ambitious, or too petty. It should not be too hackneyed, or too esoteric. It should be something you can manage within the time you have available, the time and the space. It should be something which has not been chewed up by generations of historians; at the same time it should not be something so strange and rare that it will be of interest only to you. Take care, too, that the materials you will need to use are not only available but available to you. Do not select some subject for which the materials are scanty and unreliable, or the essential documents inaccessible — some chapter in the history of the Secret Service, for example, or the CIA — or in the possession of a family which preserves them for its own purposes, or in

the archives of Spain or Australia — unless indeed you happen to be bound for Spain or Australia. If you live in Montana do not select a subject which has to be studied in the files of eastern newspapers; if you live in New York City do not select a subject which has to be studied through materials scattered throughout a dozen western historical societies. If your command of languages is shaky, avoid subjects which require a knowledge of half a dozen foreign languages; if your eyesight is poor avoid subjects which are to be studied in seventeenth or eighteenth century manuscripts or — for that matter — in the manuscripts of Horace Greeley or Charles Sumner or others whose handwriting was notoriously indecipherable.

All of this is purely negative — this elimination of subjects that do not lend themselves to orderly treatment. There is one affirmative consideration equally basic and imperative: select a subject the way you would select a friend or, perhaps, a spouse. It is something you are going to live with for a long time, perhaps for years; select therefore a good companion for the journey. Ideally you should find a subject which so interests and excites you that you cannot resist it. On the whole it is desirable to choose a subject which enlists your sympathy, though that is by no means essential. You can write effectively about the Massacre of St. Bartholomew even though you disapprove in principle of religious intolerance; you can write perspicaciously of Hitler without approving of Nazism; yet it is perhaps best to avoid the first if you are of Huguenot descent and the second if you are Jewish.

For biographical subjects it is particularly important to find a figure who enlists your sympathy as well as your interest. As you would not want to live intimately with someone you heartily disliked, so you will not want to live on terms of intimacy with some historical character whom you heartily dislike. There are examples of biographers who have disliked — or come to dislike — their subject: Froude certainly appeared to dislike Carlyle — though in fact he did not — and Lytton Strachey had no use for his Eminent Victorians, while Paxton Hibben scarcely tried to conceal his contempt for William Jennings Bryan. But these are exceptions. The best biographers confess admiration and sympathy for their subjects, and some of them deep personal affection — Boswell's famous biography of Dr. Johnson, for example, or William Dean Howells' tender interpretation, *My Mark Twain*, or George Otto Trevelyan's spirited biography of his uncle, *Lord Macaulay*.

Once you have found a sympathetic subject, and ascertained that there is something new to be said about it and that the materials on which to base your study are ample and readily available, you can get started. And from now on common sense really does take charge.

Even here there are some practical observations that are relevant. The first is this: do not waste time and energy in what is amiably called 'reading around' a subject. Reading around, or reading for background, is more often than not an excuse for not getting on with the job: it is pleasant, it is edifying — and it is inexhaustible. A chemist concerned with a specific problem does not stop to 'read around' chemistry; a lawyer dealing with a specific case does not 'read around' the law. Plunge into the subject itself; get your problem by the throat and grapple with it. The closer you come to it, and the deeper your understanding of it, the more surely you will become familiar with all the surrounding landscape. Gradually everything will fall into place. That, after all, is the natural way: you come only gradually to know the background of a friend, and even children do not fill in the background of parents and grandparents until they themselves have children. In short, start with the particular, not with the general; read deeply in the history of the particular, and you will find that the general takes care of itself.

A second practical rule is to begin almost at once collecting the essential materials for your essay or monograph and organizing them into some coherent pattern. Granted you do not

really know what is ‘essential,’ or just what the pattern is to be; the sooner you get started, the sooner you will find answers to these questions. Do not think you have to read everything, take notes on everything, track down every reference, look at every piece of manuscript before you begin to write. The sooner you begin the better, for only as you write will you discover the lacunae in your knowledge, and fill them.

There is a third practical consideration here that has to do with the compilation of your materials. For most purposes that means ‘taking notes’ — that arduous and never-ending process which can, unless you are careful, become something of an opiate, a pleasant substitute for the real work of thinking and writing. Not long ago taking notes meant precisely that; the scholar painfully, and painstakingly, copied out mountains of passages which he hoped would one day prove useful, or hired someone to do it for him. Now all of that has changed; note-taking has been mechanized, like so many other things, and the happy researcher now sends his materials off to be Photostated, Xeroxed or microfilmed — all much better than in the bad old days. Now you can get ten times as much copied, nay a hundred times as much; now you can be sure of accuracy; now you can save time and go everywhere and see everything! Fortunate scholars; now we may expect them all to write twice as much as any former generation. How odd that they write only half as much!

We are all immensely indebted to modern techniques of mechanical reproduction, but do not be carried away by them to the point where you think that history itself has become mechanized. It is all very well to have machines do your copying for you, but remember that they cannot think for you. Something is to be said for doing things yourself — even for copying documents yourself. The great literary historian Van Wyck Brooks, author of the most interesting of literary histories of America, did all his own copying and, what is more, did it all by hand. He could, of course, have employed copyists, or bought himself a copying machine. He preferred to do his own work because he knew what every scholar comes to know: that if you copy things yourself, you remember them. He knew, too, another important lesson: that the byproduct of copying is often more important than the product, namely the ideas you get as you go. No machine can get those ideas for you, and there is no substitute for the inspiration which comes from your own direct, fresh, and uncomplicated relation with your materials.

When it comes to writing history, keep in mind that there are almost as many ways of writing as there are historians. There is no formula; you will have to find your own formula. There is no pattern; you will have to work out your own pattern. But this is not to suggest that there are no models. There are models by the score. You will doubtless be influenced by them, just as a painter is influenced by Rembrandt or Goya, Whistler or Picasso. That does not mean that you can successfully adopt for your own the lordly style of a Gibbon, the rhetorical style of a Carlyle, the balanced cadences of a Macaulay, the strong masculine style of a Mahan, the brilliant style of a Parrington, the epigrammatic style of a Philip Guedalla, the allusive style of a Denis Brogan, the intimate style of a Paul Hazard. All of these are available, but in writing, as in other matters, the style reflects the man and your style must reflect you.

But style is not a single or a static thing; you will want to vary your style, to adapt it to the subject matter. You would not think of using the same pattern of organization, the same style of presentation, for all subjects, any more than you would clothe all men and women alike at all times. A style suitable, let us say, to a history of the Tariff of 1890 is not a good style for a history of the conquest of Peru or for a biography of Herman Melville. Each subject makes its own claim upon you; each one demands individual treatment. Practiced historians know this almost instinctively, and vary their styles, as do professional couturiers or photographers. Thomas Beer, for example — he was a novelist as well as an historian — used very different styles in his biography of *Stephen Crane* and his essay on *The Mauve Decade*; John Morley

varied his style to suit the different requirements of *Voltaire* and of *Gladstone*; Henry Adams had one style for the *History* and a quite different one for the *Education*, more subtle, more allusive, though not more brilliant.

THE TROUBLE WITH FACTS

These are some of the limitations on the historian. But there are limitations inherent in the facts of history, as well.

Poor, despised facts, they have a hard time. Nobody believes in them; nobody has any faith in them. With almost a single voice historians say that there are no facts, none that can be relied upon anyway; there are only some agreed-on assumptions which we choose to call facts so we can get on with the job. But do not be misled by them, do not take them seriously, or they will betray you. Facts are subjective, they exist in the mind of the historian, they change their character with each historian. The facts of the Franco-Prussian War are one thing to a French historian, another to a German; the facts about the creation of the state of Israel read very differently in the eyes of Jews and Arabs. Facts are like the Cheshire cat, in *Alice in Wonderland*; as we look at them they fade away, all but the grin.

What is the trouble with facts?

First, a paradox. There are too few facts, and there are too many. There are far too few facts about immense areas of past history. How little we know, after all, about most of mankind — about the people of Asia, of Africa, of pre-Columbian America; how little we know about lost people like the Carthaginians and the Etruscans, the early Celts and the Basques. How little we know about the remote past, as contrasted with the recent past. How do we dare reconstruct the ancient world with any assurance, when our knowledge is confined to small areas around the Mediterranean; yet we confidently call this Ancient History. How can we write with any assurance about the history of the American continents when — except for what ethnology and archeology may tell us — our knowledge embraces only five centuries out of a possible twenty-five thousand years? How little we know — even in modern times — of the lives of the poor, of those vast majorities of each generation about whom we have no reliable facts.

And, at the other end of the spectrum, we know almost too much about the modern history of the west — America, Britain, France, Germany, Italy in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. We are overwhelmed by mountains of evidence; it accumulates faster than even computers can record it, and we still have to process the material from the computers. We do not and cannot have all the facts about the Second World War, but it is safe to conjecture that historians will never get through the miles of filing cases of historical records now resting in warehouses throughout the country. Inevitably our vision of the past is distorted by this disproportion in our evidence; inevitably we translate this disproportion into historical distortions...

A document, then, may mean many things. Its meaning is to be understood in the light of its own contemporary history; it is to be understood in the light of the reason, temperament, and prejudices of the historian who uses it; it is to be arrived at and interpreted through the symbolism it communicates. Even that is not the end of it. For the historian has to communicate with each individual reader and each one will read the document or the analysis in his own way, just as each individual looks at a Whistler painting or listens to a Mozart sonata in his own way.

The facts of history are fragmentary, elusive, and subjective. But that is true of most of these studies which engage the minds and the passions of men — art and letters, morals and ethics, even law and politics, as every judge and statesman knows. We must not expect things to be easier for the historian than they are for those many others who try somehow to reconcile the heritage of the past — its laws and principles and monuments — with the imaginations, the passions, the emotions, and the facts of their own time. It is not of history, but of the whole cargo of thought and character and habit that William Vaughn Moody wrote those moving lines:

*This earth is not the steadfast thing
We landsmen build upon;
From deep to deep she varies pace,
And while she comes is gone.
Beneath my feet I feel,
Her smooth bulk heave and dip;
With velvet plunge and soft upreel
She swings and steadies to her keel
Like a gallant, gallant ship.*

(‘Gloucester Moors’)

Yet though we admit the limitations and difficulties of history, item by item, if we take them too hard, we will find ourselves out of a job. If the limitations really are so severe, and the facts really are so elusive, we may be forced to give up history altogether. If we are to get on with the job, we must agree upon some kind of factual foundation or framework for our histories, if only that Washington was in fact the first President of the United States, or that the United States did in fact fight a war with Mexico which brought her Texas and California, or that Lincoln was in fact assassinated. For, treacherous as they no doubt are, facts are like syntax and grammar; we need them as a framework and a mechanism if we are to make ourselves clear. There is nothing sacred about grammar, and a wide latitude is permitted in its usage, but if we are perpetually to stop and question the authority of our grammar we will never finish what we are saying or writing...

INTERPRETATION—AND BIAS

Let us admit at once that history is neither scientific nor mechanical, that the historian is human and therefore fallible, and that the ideal history, completely objective and dispassionate, is an illusion. There is bias in the choice of a subject, bias in the selection of material, bias in its organization and presentation, and, inevitably, bias in its interpretation. Consciously, or unconsciously, all historians are biased: they are creatures of their time, their race, their faith, their class, their country — creatures, and even prisoners.

JUDGMENT IN HISTORY

To judge or not to judge, that is the historical question. Should the historian sit in judgment over the great drama of the past and the men and women who performed on that vast and crowded stage, exposing evil and celebrating virtue and damning and praising famous men? Or should he observe the historical processes with scientific detachment, and record them as automatically as a tape-recorder, rigorously excluding personal, national, or religious

considerations? Is he competent to perform either of these functions — the function of the judge, or the function of the impartial reporter?

The problem is difficult and perhaps insoluble. It raises hard questions about the purpose of history, the duties and responsibilities of the scholar, the nature of historical judgment, and the distinctions, if any, between what might be called moral and secular judgment. It raises questions, too, about the competence of any historian to judge the past, and the sanctions, if any, behind such judgments as are rendered. And it requires us to weigh the dangers implicit in moral neutrality against those inherent in moral arrogance and intellectual parochialism.

What are we to say to all this? Why should the young study history? Why should their elders read history, or write it?

This is a question which recurs again and again: What use is history? Let us admit at once that in a practical way history has no use, let us concede that it is not good for anything that can be weighed, measured, or counted. It will not solve problems; it will not guarantee us against the errors of the past; it will not show nations how to avoid wars, or how to win them; it will not provide scientific explanations of depressions or keys to prosperity; it will not contribute in any overt way to progress.

But the same can be said, of course, of many other things which society values and which men cherish. What use, after all, is a Mozart sonata or a painting by Renoir, or a statue by Milles? What use is the cathedral of Siena or the rose windows of Chartres or a novel by Flaubert or a sonnet by Wordsworth? What use, for that matter, are a great many mundane things which society takes for granted and on which it lavishes thought and effort: a baseball game, for example, or a rose garden, or a brocade dress, or a bottle of port?

Happily, a civilised society does not devote all of its thought and effort to things whose usefulness can be statistically demonstrated. There are other criteria than that of usefulness, and other meanings to the term 'useful' than those acknowledged by the Thomas Gradgrinds of this world.

History, we can confidently assert, is useful in the sense that art and music, poetry and flowers, religion and philosophy are useful. Without it — as without these — life would be poorer and meaner; without it we should be denied some of those intellectual and moral experiences which give meaning and richness to life. Surely it is no accident that the study of history has been the solace of many of the noblest minds of every generation.

The first and doubtless the richest pleasure of history is that it adds new dimensions to life itself, enormously extending our perspective and enlarging our experience. It permits us to enter vicariously into the past, to project our vision back over thousands of years and enlarge it to embrace all the races of mankind. Through the pages of history we can hear Pericles deliver his Funeral Oration, look with wonder as Scipio and Hannibal lock forces on that desperate field of Zama, trek with the Crusaders to the Holy Land, sail with Columbus past the gates of Hercules and to a new world, sit with Diderot as he edits the *Encyclopedie*, share the life of Goethe and Schiller at the little court of Weimar. stand and listen to those stirring debates in those dusty prairie towns which sent Douglas to the Senate and Lincoln to the White House, share the agony of General Lee as he surrenders the Army of Northern Virginia at McLean's Court House, stand beside Winston Churchill as he rallies the people of Britain to their finest hour. History supplies to us all those elements which Henry James thought essential to the life of the mind: density, variety, intricacy, richness, in the pattern of thought and of action, and with it 'the sense of the past.'

This immense enlargement of experience means, of course, that history provides us with great companions in our journey through life. This is so familiar a consideration that it needs no elaboration. Wherever the historian or biographer has been, he has given new depth and range to our associations. We have but to take down the books and we are admitted to the confidence of Voltaire and Rousseau, Johnson and Boswell, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, Justice Holmes and William James. We can know them with more of an intimacy than their contemporaries knew them, for we can read their letters, journals and diaries. This is not just one of the pleasures of history, it is one of the indispensable pleasures of life.

A third, and familiar pleasure of history is the experience of identifying the present with the past, and thus adding a new dimension to places and events. It was Macaulay who observed that 'the pleasure of History is analogous in many respects to that produced by foreign travel. The student is transported into a new state of society. He sees new fashions. He hears new modes of expression. His mind is enlarged by contemplating the wide diversities of laws, of morals, and of manners'.

Barbara W Tuchman

Practising History

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History began to exert its fascination upon me when I was about six, through the medium of the Twins series by Lucy Fitch Perkins. I became absorbed in the fortunes of the Dutch Twins; the Twins of the American Revolution, who daringly painted the name *Modeerf*, or 'freedom' spelled backward, on their row boat; and especially the Belgian Twins, who suffered under the German occupation of Brussels in 1914.

After the Twins, I went through a G. A. Henty period and bled with Wolfe in Canada. Then came a prolonged Dumas period, during which I became so intimate with the Valois kings, queens, royal mistresses, and various Ducs de Guise that when we visited the French *chateaux* I was able to point out to my family just who had stabbed whom in which room. Conan Doyle's *The White Company* and, above all, Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs* were the definitive influence. As the noble Wallace, in tartan and velvet tam, I went to my first masquerade party, stalking in silent tragedy among the twelve-year-old Florence Nightingales and Juliets. In the book the treachery of the Countess of Mar, who betrayed Wallace, carried a footnote that left its mark on me. 'The crimes of this wicked woman,' it said darkly, 'are verified by history.'

By the time I reached Radcliffe, I had no difficulty in choosing a field of concentration, although it turned out to be History and Lit rather than pure history. I experienced at college no moment of revelation that determined me to write historical narrative. When that precise moment occurred I cannot say; it just developed and there was a considerable time lag. What Radcliffe did give me, however, was an *impetus* (not to mention an education, but I suppose that goes without saying). Part of the impetus came from great courses and great professors. Of the three to which I owe most, two, curiously enough, were in literature rather than history. They were Irving Babbitt's Comp Lit II and John Livingston Lowes's English 72, which included his spectacular tour de force on the origins of 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan.' He waved at Wordsworth, bowed briefly to Keats and Shelley, and really let himself go through twelve weeks of lectures, tracing the sources of Coleridge's imagery, and spending at least a week on the fatal apparition of the person from Porlock. What kept us, at least me, on the edge of my seat throughout this exploit was Lowes's enthusiasm for his subject.

This quality was the essence, too, of Professor C. H. McIlwain's Constitutional History of England, which came up as far as Magna Carta. It did not matter to McIlwain, a renowned scholar and historian, that only four of us were taking his course, or that he had already given it at Harvard and had to come over to repeat it to us (yes, that was the quaint custom of the time). It did not matter because McIlwain was conducting a passionate love affair with the laws of the Angles and the articles of the Charter, especially, as I remember, Article 39. Like any person in love, he wanted to let everyone know how beautiful was the object of his affections. He had white hair and pink cheeks and the brightest blue eyes I ever saw, and though I cannot remember a word of Article 39, I do remember how his blue eyes blazed as he discussed it and how I sat on the edge of my seat then too, and how, to show my appreciation, I would have given anything to write a brilliant exam paper, only to find that half the exam questions were in Anglo-Saxon, about which he had neglected to forewarn us.

That did not matter either, because he gave all four of us A's anyway, perhaps out of gratitude for our affording him another opportunity to talk about his beloved Charter.

Professor Babbitt, on the other hand, being a classicist and antiromantic, frowned on enthusiasm. But his contempt for zeal was so zealous, so vigorous and learned, pouring out in a great organ fugue of erudition, that it amounted to enthusiasm in the end and held not only me, but all his listeners, rapt.

Although I did not know it or formulate it consciously at the time, it is this quality of being in love with your subject that is indispensable for writing good history — or good anything, for that matter. A few months ago when giving a talk at another college, I was invited to meet the faculty and other guests at dinner. One young member of the History Department who said he envied my subject in *The Guns of August* confessed to being bogged down and brought to a dead stop halfway through his doctoral thesis. It dealt, he told me, with an early missionary in the Congo who had never been 'done' before. I asked what was the difficulty. With a dreary wave of his cocktail he said, 'I just don't like him.' I felt really distressed and depressed — both for him and for the conditions of scholarship. I do not know how many of you are going, or will go, to graduate school, but when you come to write that thesis on, let us say, 'The Underwater Imagery Derived from the Battle of Lepanto in the Later Poetic Dramas of Lope de Vega,' I hope it will be because you care passionately about this imagery rather than because your department has suggested it as an original subject.

In the process of doing my own thesis — not for a Ph.D., because I never took a graduate degree, but just my undergraduate honors thesis — the single most formative experience in my career took place. It was not a tutor or a teacher or a fellow student or a great book or the shining example of some famous visiting lecturer — like Sir Charles Webster, for instance, brilliant as he was. It was the stacks at Widener. They were *my* Archimedes' bathtub, my burning bush, my dish of mold where I found my personal penicillin. I was allowed to have as my own one of those little cubicles with a table under a window, queerly called, as I have since learned, carrels, a word I never knew when I sat in one. Mine was deep in among the 942s (British History, that is) and I could roam at liberty through the rich stacks, taking whatever I wanted. The experience was marvellous, a word I use in its exact sense meaning full of marvels. The happiest days of my intellectual life, until I began writing history again some fifteen years later, were spent in the stacks at Widener. My daughter Lucy, class of '61, once said to me that she could not enter the labyrinth of Widener's stacks without feeling that she ought to carry a compass, a sandwich, and a whistle. I too was never altogether sure I could find the way out, but I was blissful as a cow put to graze in a field of fresh clover and would not have cared if I had been locked in for the night.

Once I stayed so late that I came out after dark, long after the dinner hour at the dorm, and found to my horror that I had only a nickel in my purse. The weather was freezing and I was very hungry. I could not decide whether to spend the nickel on a chocolate bar and walk home in the cold or take the Mass Avenue trolley and go home hungry. This story ends like 'The Lady or the Tiger,' because although I remember the agony of having to choose, I cannot remember how it came out.

My thesis, the fruit of those hours in the stacks, was my first sustained attempt at writing history. It was called 'The Moral Justification for the British Empire,' an unattractive title and, besides, inaccurate, because what I meant was the moral *justifying* of empire by the imperialists. It was for me a wonderful and terrible experience. Wonderful because finding the material, and following where it led, was constantly exciting and because I was fascinated by the subject, which I had thought up for myself — much to the disapproval of my tutor, who was in English Lit, not History, and interested only in Walter Pater — or was it Walter

Savage Landor? Anyway, it was not the British Empire, and since our meetings were consequently rather painfully uncommunicative, I think he was relieved when I took to skipping them.

The experience was terrible because I could not make the piece sound, or rather read, the way I wanted it to. The writing fell so far short of the ideas. The characters, who were so vivid inside my head, seemed so stilted when I got them on paper. I finished it, dissatisfied. So was the department: 'Style undistinguished,' it noted. A few years ago, when I unearthed the thesis to look up a reference, that impression was confirmed. It reminded me of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, when Cecily says that the letters she wrote to herself from her imaginary fiance when she broke off their imaginary engagement were so beautiful and so badly spelled she could not reread them without crying. I felt the same way about my thesis: so beautiful — in intent — and so badly written. Enthusiasm had not been enough; one must also know how to use the language.

One learns to write, I have since discovered, in the practice thereof. After seven years' apprenticeship in journalism I discovered that an essential element for good writing is a good ear. One must *listen* to the sound of one's own prose. This, I think, is one of the failings of much American writing. Too many writers do not listen to the sound of their own words. For example, listen to this sentence from the organ of my own discipline, the *American Historical Review*: 'His presentation is not vitiated historically by efforts at expository simplicity.' In one short sentence five long Latin words of four or five syllables each. One has to read it three times over and take time out to think, before one can even make out what it means.

In my opinion, short words are always preferable to long ones; the fewer syllables the better, and monosyllables, beautiful and pure like 'bread' and 'sun' and 'grass' are the best of all. Emerson, using almost entirely one-syllable words, wrote what I believe are among the finest lines in English:

*By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.*

Out of twenty-eight words, twenty-four are monosyllables. It is English at its purest, though hardly characteristic of its author. Or take this:

*On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.*

Imagine how it must feel to have composed those lines! Though coming from a writer satisfied with the easy rhythms of 'The Raven' and 'Annabel Lee', they represent, I fear, a fluke. To quote poetry, you will say, is not a fair comparison. True, but what a lesson those stanzas are in the sound of words! What superb use of that magnificent instrument that lies at the command of all of us — the English language. Quite by chance both practitioners in these samples happen to be Americans, and both, curiously enough, writing about history.

To write history so as to enthrall the reader and make the subject as captivating and exciting to him as it is to me has been my goal since that initial failure with my thesis. A prerequisite, as I have said, is to be enthralled one's self and to feel a compulsion to communicate the

magic. Communicate to whom? We arrive now at the reader, a person whom I keep constantly in mind. Catherine Drinker Bowen has said that she writes her books with a sign pinned up over her desk asking, "Will the reader turn the page?"

The writer of history, I believe, has a number of duties vis-a-vis the reader, if he wants to keep him reading. The first is to distill. He must do the preliminary work for the reader, assemble the information, make sense of it, select the essential, discard the irrelevant — above all, discard the irrelevant — and put the rest together so that it forms a developing dramatic narrative. Narrative, it has been said, is the lifeblood of history. To offer a mass of undigested facts, of names not identified and places not located, is of no use to the reader and is simple laziness on the part of the author, or pedantry to show how much he has read. To discard the unnecessary requires courage and also extra work, as exemplified by Pascal's effort to explain an idea to a friend in a letter which rambled on for pages and ended, 'I am sorry to have wearied you with so long a letter but I did not have time to write you a short one.' The historian is continually being beguiled down fascinating byways and sidetracks. But the art of writing — the test of the artist — is to resist the beguilement and cleave to the subject.

Should the historian be an artist? Certainly a conscious art should be part of his equipment. Macaulay describes him as half poet, half philosopher. I do not aspire to either of these heights. I think of myself as a storyteller, a narrator, who deals in true stories, not fiction. The distinction is not one of relative values; it is simply that history interests me more than fiction. I agree with Leopold von Ranke, the great nineteenth-century German historian, who said that when he compared the portrait of Louis XI in Scott's *Quentin Durward* with the portrait of the same king in the memoirs of Philippe de Comines, Louis' minister, he found 'the truth more interesting and beautiful than the romance.'

It was Ranke, too, who set the historian's task: to find out *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*, what really happened, or, literally, how it really was. His goal is one that will remain forever just beyond our grasp for reasons I explained in a "Note on Sources" in *The Guns of August* (a paragraph that no one ever reads but I think is the best thing in the book). Summarized, the reasons are that we who write about the past were not there. We can never be certain that we have recaptured it as it really was. But the least we can do is to stay within the evidence.

I do not invent anything, even the weather. One of my readers told me he particularly liked a passage in *The Guns* which tells how the British Army landed in France and how on that afternoon there was a sound of summer thunder in the air and the sun went down in a blood-red glow. He thought it an artistic touch of doom, but the fact is it was true. I found it in the memoirs of a British officer who landed on that day and heard the thunder and saw the blood-red sunset. The art, if any, consisted only in selecting it and ultimately using it in the right place.

Selection is what determines the ultimate product, and that is why I use material from primary sources only. My feeling about secondary sources is that they are helpful but pernicious. I use them as guides at the start of a project to find out the general scheme of what happened, but I do not take notes from them because I do not want to end up simply rewriting someone else's book. Furthermore, the facts in a secondary source have already been pre-selected, so that in using them one misses the opportunity of selecting one's own.

I plunge as soon as I can into the primary sources: the memoirs and the letters, the generals' own accounts of their campaigns, however tendentious, not to say mendacious, they may be. Even an untrustworthy source is valuable for what it reveals about the personality of the author, especially if he is an actor in the events, as in the case of Sir John French, for

example. Bias in a primary source is to be expected. One allows for it and corrects it by reading another version.

I try always to read two or more for every episode. Even if an event is not controversial, it will have been seen and remembered from different angles of view by different observers. If the event is in dispute, one has extra obligation to examine both sides. As the lion in Aesop said to the Man, 'There are many statues of men slaying lions, but if only the lions were sculptors there might be quite a different set of statues.'

The most primary source of all is unpublished material: private letters and diaries or the reports, orders, and messages in government archives. There is an immediacy and intimacy about them that reveals character and makes circumstances come alive. I remember Secretary of State Robert Lansing's desk diary, which I used when I was working on *The Zimmermann Telegram*. The man himself seemed to step right out from his tiny neat handwriting and his precise notations of every visitor and each subject discussed. Each day's record opened and closed with the Secretary's time of arrival and departure from the office. He even entered the time of his lunch hour, which invariably lasted sixty minutes: 'Left at 1:10; returned at 2:10.' Once, when he was forced to record his morning arrival at 10:15, he added, with a worried eye on posterity, 'Car broke down.'

Inside the National Archives even the memory of Widener paled. Nothing can compare with the fascination of examining material in the very paper and ink of its original issue. A report from a field agent with marginal comments by the Secretary of War, his routing directions to State and Commerce, and the scribbled initials of subsequent readers can be a little history in itself. In the Archives I found the original decode of the Zimmermann Telegram, which I was able to have declassified and photostated for the cover of my book.

Even more immediate is research on the spot. Before writing *The Guns* I rented a little Renault and in another August drove over the battle areas of August 1914, following the track of the German invasion through Luxembourg, Belgium, and northern France. Besides obtaining a feeling of the geography, distances, and terrain involved in military movements, I saw the fields ripe with grain which the cavalry would have trampled, measured the great width of the Meuse at Liege, and saw how the lost territory of Alsace looked to the French soldiers who gazed down upon it from the heights of the Vosges. I learned the discomfort of the Belgian *pave* and discovered, in the course of losing my way almost permanently in a tangle of country roads in a hunt for the house that had been British Headquarters, why a British motorcycle dispatch rider in 1914 had taken three hours to cover twenty-five miles. Clearly, owing to the British officers' preference for country houses, he had not been able to find Headquarters either. French army commanders, I noticed, located themselves in *towns*, with railroad stations and telegraph offices.

As to the mechanics of research, I take notes on four-by-six index cards, reminding myself about once an hour of a rule I read long ago in a research manual, "Never write on the back of anything." Since copying is a chore and a bore, use of the cards, the smaller the better, forces one to extract the strictly relevant, to distill from the very beginning, to pass the material through the grinder of one's own mind, so to speak. Eventually, as the cards fall into groups according to subject or person or chronological sequence, the pattern of my story will emerge. Besides, they are convenient, as they can be filed in a shoebox and carried around in a pocketbook. When ready to write I need only take along a packet of them, representing a chapter, and I am equipped to work anywhere; whereas if one writes surrounded by a pile of books, one is tied to a single place, and furthermore likely to be too much influenced by other authors.

The most important thing about research is to know when to stop. How does one recognize the moment? When I was eighteen or thereabouts, my mother told me that when out with a young man I should always leave a half-hour before I wanted to. Although I was not sure how this might be accomplished, I recognized the advice as sound, and exactly the same rule applies to research. One must stop before one has finished; otherwise, one will never stop and never finish. I had an object lesson in this once in Washington at the Archives. I was looking for documents in the case of Perdicaris, an American—or supposed American—who was captured by Moroccan brigands in 1904. The Archives people introduced me to a lady professor who had been doing research in United States relations with Morocco all her life. She had written her Ph.D. thesis on the subject back in, I think, 1936, and was still coming for six months each year to work in the Archives. She was in her seventies and, they told me, had recently suffered a heart attack. When I asked her what year was her cut-off point, she looked at me in surprise and said she kept a file of newspaper clippings right up to the moment. I am sure she knew more about United States-Moroccan relations than anyone alive, but would she ever leave off her research in time to write that definitive history and tell the world what she knew? I feared the answer. Yet I know how she felt. I too feel compelled to follow every lead and learn everything about a subject, but fortunately I have an even more overwhelming compulsion to see my work in print. That is the only thing that saves me.

Research is endlessly seductive; writing is hard work. One has to sit down on that chair and think and transform thought into readable, conservative, interesting sentences that both make sense and make the reader turn the page. It is laborious, slow, often painful, sometimes agony. It means rearrangement, revision, adding, cutting, rewriting. But it brings a sense of excitement, almost of rapture; a moment on Olympus. In short, it is an act of creation.

I had of course a tremendous head start in having for *The Guns of August* a spectacular subject. The first month of the First World War, as Winston Churchill said, was ‘a drama never surpassed.’ It has that heroic quality that lifts the subject above the petty and that is necessary to great tragedy. In the month of August 1914 there was something looming, inescapable, universal, that involved us all. Something in that awful gulf between perfect plans and fallible men that makes one tremble with a sense of ‘There but for the Grace of God go we.’

It was not until the end, until I was actually writing the Epilogue, that I fully realized all the implications of the story I had been writing for two years. Then I began to feel I had not done it justice. But now it was too late to go back and put in the significance, like the girl in the writing course whose professor said now they would go back over her novel and put in the symbolism.

One of the difficulties in writing history is the problem of how to keep up suspense in a narrative whose outcome is known. I worried about this a good deal at the beginning, but after a while the actual process of writing, as so often happens, produced the solution. I found that if one writes *as of the time*, without using the benefit of hindsight, resisting always the temptation to refer to events still ahead, the suspense will build itself up naturally. Sometimes the temptation to point out to the reader the significance of an act or event in terms of what later happened is almost irresistible. But I tried to be strong. I went back and cut out all references but one of the Battle of the Marne, in the chapters leading up to the battle. Though it may seem absurd, I even cut any references to the ultimate defeat of Germany. I wrote as if I did not know who would win, and I can only tell you the method worked. I used to become tense with anxiety myself, as the moments of crisis approached. There was Joffre, for instance, sitting under the shade tree outside Headquarters, all that hot afternoon, considering whether to continue the retreat of the French armies to the Seine or, as Gallieni is pleading, turn around now and counterattack at the Marne. The German right wing is sliding by in front

of Paris, exposing its flank. The moment is escaping. Joffre still sits and ponders. Even though one knows the outcome, the suspense is almost unbearable, because one knows that if he had made the wrong decision, you and I might not be here today — or, if we were, history would have been written by others.

This brings me to a matter currently rather moot — the nature of history. Today the battle rages, as you know, between the big thinkers or Toynbees or systematizers on the one hand and the humanists, if I may so designate them — using the word to mean concerned with human nature, not with the humanities — on the other. The genus Toynbee is obsessed and oppressed by the need to find an explanation for history. They arrange systems and cycles into which history must be squeezed so that it will come out evenly and have pattern and meaning. When history, wickedly disobliging, pops up in the wrong places, the systematizers hurriedly explain any such aberrant behavior by the climate. They need not reach so far; it is a matter of people. As Sir Charles Oman, the great historian of the art of war said some time ago, ‘The human record is illogical . . . and history is a series of happenings with no inevitability about it.’

Prefabricated systems make me suspicious and science applied to history makes me wince. The nearest anyone has come to explaining history is, I think, Leon Trotsky, who both made history and wrote it. Cause in history, he said, ‘refracts itself through a natural selection of accidents.’ The more one ponders that statement the more truth one finds. More recently an anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* disposed of the systematizers beyond refute. ‘The historian,’ he said, ‘who puts his system first can hardly escape the heresy of preferring the facts which suit his system best.’ And he concluded, ‘Such explanation as there is must arise in the mind of the reader of history.’ That is the motto on my banner.

To find out what happened in history is enough at the outset without trying too soon to make sure of the ‘why’. I believe it is safer to leave the ‘why’ alone until after one has not only gathered the facts but arranged them in sequence; to be exact, in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. The very process of transforming a collection of personalities, dates, gun calibers, letters, and speeches into a narrative eventually forces the ‘why’ to the surface. It will emerge of itself one fine day from the story of what happened. It will suddenly appear and tap one on the shoulder, but not if one chases after it first, *before* one knows what happened. Then it will elude one forever.

If the historian will submit himself *to* his material instead of trying to impose himself *on* his material, then the material will ultimately speak to him and supply the answers. It has happened to me more than once. In somebody's memoirs I found that the Grand Duke Nicholas wept when he was named Russian Commander-in-Chief in 1914, because, said the memoirist, he felt inadequate for the job. That sounded to me like one of those bits of malice one has to watch out for in contemporary observers; it did not ring true. The Grand Duke was said to be the only ‘man’ in the royal family; he was known for his exceedingly tough manners, was admired by the common soldier and feared at court. I did not believe he felt inadequate, but then why should he weep? I could have left out this bit of information, but I did not want to. I wanted to find the explanation that would make it fit. (Leaving things out because they do not fit is writing fiction, not history.) I carried the note about the Grand Duke around with me for days, worrying about it. Then I remembered other tears. I went through my notes and found an account of Churchill weeping and also Messimy, the French War Minister. All at once I understood that it was not the individuals but the *times* that were the stuff for tears. My next sentence almost wrote itself: ‘There was an aura about 1914 that caused those who sensed it to shiver for mankind.’ Afterward I realized that this sentence expressed why I had wanted to write the book in the first place. The ‘why,’ you see, had emerged all by itself.

The same thing happened with Joffre's battle order on the eve of the Marne. I had intended to make this my climax, a final bugle call, as it were. But the order was curiously toneless and flat and refused utterly to rise to the occasion. I tried translating it a dozen different ways, but nothing helped. I grew really angry over that battle order. Then, one day, when I was rereading it for the twentieth time, it suddenly spoke. I discovered that its very flatness was its significance. Now I was able to quote it at the end of the last chapter and add, 'It did not shout "Forward!" or summon men to glory. After the first thirty days of war in 1914, there was a premonition that little glory lay ahead.'

As, in this way, the explanation conveys itself to the writer, so will the implications or meaning for our time arise in the mind of the reader. But such lessons, if present and valid, must emerge from the material, not the writer. I did not write to instruct but to tell a story. The implications are what the thoughtful reader himself takes out of the book. This is as it should be, I think, because the best book is a collaboration between author and reader.

When Does History Happen?

Within three months of the Conservative party crisis in Britain last October a book by Randolph Churchill on the day-to-day history of the affair had been written and published. To rush in upon an event before its significance has had time to separate from the surrounding circumstances may be enterprising, but is it useful? An embarrassed author may find, when the excitement has died down, that his subject had little significance at all. The recent prevalence of these hot histories on publishers' lists raises the question: Should — or perhaps can — history be written while it is still smoking?

Before taking that further, one must first answer the question: What is history? Professional historians have been exercising themselves vehemently over this query for some time. A distinguished exponent, E. H. Carr of Cambridge University, made it the subject of his Trevelyan Lectures and the title of a book in 1962.

Is history, he asked, the examination of past events or is it the past events themselves? By good luck I did not read the book until after I had finished an effort of my own at historical narrative, otherwise I should never have dared to begin. In my innocence I had not been aware that the question posed by Mr. Carr had ever come up. I had simply assumed that history was past events existing independently, whether we examined them or not.

I had thought that we who comment on the past were extraneous to it; helpful, perhaps, to its understanding but not integral to its existence. I had supposed that the Greeks' defeat of the Persians would have given the same direction to Western history whether Herodotus chronicled it or not. But that is not Mr. Carr's position. 'The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing independently of interpretation of the historian,' he says, 'is a preposterous fallacy but one that is very hard to eradicate.'

On first reading, this seemed to me to be preposterous nonsense. Was it some sort of recondite joke? But a thinker of such eminence must be taken seriously, and after prolonged silent arguments with Mr. Carr of which he remained happily unaware, I began to see what he was driving at. What he means, I suppose, is that past events cannot exist independently of the historian because without the historian we would know nothing about them; in short, that the unrecorded past is none other than our old friend, the tree in the primeval forest which fell where there was no one to hear the sound of the crash. If there was no ear, was there a sound?

I refuse to be frightened by that conundrum because it asks the wrong question. The point is not whether the fall of the tree made a noise but whether it left a mark on the forest. If it left a space that let in the sun on a hitherto shade-grown species, or if it killed a dominant animal and shifted rule of the pack to one of different characteristics, or if it fell across a path of animals and caused some small change in their habitual course from which larger changes followed, then the fall made history whether anyone heard it or not.

I therefore declare myself a firm believer in the 'preposterous fallacy' of historical facts existing independently of the historian. I think that if Domesday Book and all other records of the time had been burned, the transfer of land ownership from the Saxons to the Normans would be no less a fact of British history. Of course Domesday Book was a record, not an interpretation, and what Mr. Carr says is that historical facts do not exist independently of the *interpretation* of historians. I find this untenable. He might just as well say the Grecian Urn would not exist without Keats.

As I see it evidence is more important than interpretation, and facts are history whether interpreted or not. I think the influence of the receding frontier on American expansion was a phenomenon independent of Frederick Jackson Turner, who noticed it, and the role of the leisure class independent of Thorstein Veblen, and the influence of sea power upon history independent of Admiral Mahan. In the last case lurks a possible argument for the opposition, because Admiral Mahan's book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* so galvanized the naval policy of Imperial Germany and Great Britain in the years before 1914 that in isolating and describing a great historical fact he himself made history. Mr. Carr might make something of that. Meanwhile I think his main theme unnecessarily metaphysical. I am content to define history as the past events of which we have knowledge and refrain from worrying about those of which we have none — until, that is, some archaeologist digs them up.

I come next to historians. Who are they: contemporaries of the event or those who come after? The answer is obviously both. Among contemporaries first and indispensable are the more-or-less unconscious sources: letters, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, newspapers and periodicals, business and government documents. These are historical raw material, not history. Their authors may be writing with one eye or possibly both on posterity, but that does not make them historians. To perform that function requires a view from the outside and a conscious craft.

At a slightly different level are the I-was-there recorders, usually journalists, whose accounts often contain golden nuggets of information buried in a mass of daily travelogue which the passage of time has reduced to trivia. Some of the most vivid details that went into my book *The Guns of August* came from the working press: the rag doll crushed under the wheel of a German gun carriage from Irvin Cobb, the smell of half a million unwashed bodies that hung over the invaded villages of Belgium from Will Irwin, the incident of Colonel Max Hoffmann yelling insults at the Japanese general from Frederick Palmer, who reported the Russo-Japanese War. Daily journalism, however, even when collected in book form, is, like letters and the rest, essentially source material rather than history.

Still contemporary but dispensable are the Compilers who hurriedly assemble a book from clippings and interviews in order to capitalize on public interest when it is high. A favorite form of these hasty puddings is the overnight biography, like *The Lyndon Johnson Story*, which was in the bookstores within a few weeks of the incident that gave rise to it. The Compilers, in their treatment, supply no extra understanding and as historians are negligible.

All these varieties being disposed of, there remains a pure vein of conscious historians of whom, among contemporaries, there are two kinds. First, the Onlookers, who deliberately set

out to chronicle an episode of their own age — a war or depression or strike or social revolution or whatever it may be — and shape it into a historical narrative with character and validity of its own. Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, on a major scale, and Theodore White's *The Making of a President*, undertaken in the same spirit though on a tiny scale in comparison, are examples.

Second are the Active Participants or Axe-Grinders, who attempt genuine history of events they have known, but whose accounts are inevitably weighted, sometimes subtly and imperceptibly, sometime crudely, by the requirements of the role in which they wish themselves to appear. Josephus' *The Jewish War*, the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, and Winston Churchill's *World Crisis* and *Second World War* are classics of this category.

For the latter-day historian, these too become source material. Are we now in possession of history when we have these accounts in hand? Yes, in the sense that we are in possession of wine when the first pressing of the grapes is in hand. But it has not fermented, and it has not aged. The great advantage of the latter-day historian is the distance conferred by the passage of time. At a distance from the events he describes and with a wider area of vision, he can see more of what was going on at the time and distinguish what was significant from what was not.

The contemporary has no perspective; everything is in the foreground and appears the same size. Little matters loom big, and great matters are sometimes missed because their outlines cannot be seen. Vietnam and Panama are given four-column headlines today, but the historian fifty or a hundred years hence will put them in a chapter under a general heading we have not yet thought of.

The contemporary, especially if he is a participant, is inside his events, which is not an entirely unmixed advantage. What he gains in intimacy through personal acquaintance — which we can never achieve — he sacrifices in detachment. He cannot see or judge fairly both sides in a quarrel, for example the quarrel as to who deserves chief credit for the French victory at the Battle of the Marne in 1914. All contemporary chroniclers were extreme partisans of either Joffre or Gallieni. So violent was the partisanship that no one (except President Poincare) noticed what is so clearly visible when viewed from a distance, that both generals had played an essential role. Gallieni saw the opportunity and gave the impetus; Joffre brought the Army and the reinforcements into place to fight, but it took fifty years before this simple and just apportionment could be made.

Distance does not always confer objectivity; one can hardly say Gibbon wrote objectively of the Roman Empire or Carlyle of the French Revolution. Objectivity is a question of degree. It is possible for the latter-day historian to be at least relatively objective, which is not the same thing as being neutral or taking no sides. There is no such thing as a neutral or purely objective historian. Without an opinion a historian would be simply a ticking clock, and unreadable besides.

Nevertheless, distance does confer a kind of removal that cools the judgment and permits a juster appraisal than is possible to a contemporary. Once long ago as a freshman journalist I covered a campaign swing by Franklin D. Roosevelt during which he was scheduled to make a major speech at Pittsburgh or Harrisburg, I forget which. As we were leaving the train, one of the newspapermen remained comfortably behind in the club car with his feet up, explaining that as a New Dealer writing for a Republican paper he had to remain 'objective' and he could 'be a lot more objective right here than within ten feet of that fellow.' He was using distance in space if not in time to acquire objectivity.

I found out from personal experience that I could not write contemporary history if I tried. Some people can, William Shirer, for one; they are not affected by involvement. But I am, as I discovered when working on my first book, *Bible and Sword*. It dealt with the historical relations between Britain and Palestine from the time of the Phoenicians to the present. Originally I had intended to bring the story down through the years of the British Mandate to the Arab-Israeli War and the re-establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

I spent six months of research on the bitter history of those last thirty years: the Arab assaults and uprisings, the Round Tables, the White Papers, the cutting off of Jewish immigration, the Commissions of Inquiry, the ultimate historical irony when the British, who had issued the Balfour Declaration, rammed the ship *Exodus*, the whole ignominious tale of one or more chapters of appeasement.

When I tried to write this as history, I could not do it. Anger, disgust, and a sense of injustice can make some writers eloquent and evoke brilliant polemic, but these emotions stunted and twisted my pen. I found the tone of my concluding chapter totally different from the seventeen chapters that went before. I had suddenly walked over the line into contemporary history; I had become involved, and it showed. Although the publisher wanted the narrative brought up to date, I knew my final chapter as written would destroy the credibility of all the preceding, and I could not change it. I tore it up, discarded six months' work, and brought the book to a close in 1918.

I am not saying that emotion should have no place in history. On the contrary, I think it is an essential element of history, as it is of poetry, whose origin Wordsworth defined as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' History, one might say, is emotion plus action recollected or, in the case of latter-day historians, reflected on in tranquillity after a close and honest examination of the records. The primary duty of the historian is to stay within the evidence. Yet it is a curious fact that poets, limited by no such rule, have done very well with history, both of their own times and of times long gone before.

Tennyson wrote the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' within three months of the event at Balaclava in the Crimea. 'Cannon in front of them volleyed and thundered . . . Flashed all their sabres bare . . . Plunged in the battery-smoke . . . Stormed at with shot and shell . . . When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made!' His version, even including the Victorian couplet 'Theirs not to reason why/ Theirs but to do and die,' as poetry may lack the modern virtue of incomprehensibility, but as history it captures that combination of the glorious and the ridiculous which was a nineteenth-century cavalry charge against cannon. As an onlooker said, '*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre*', ('It is magnificent, but it is not war'), which is exactly what Tennyson conveyed better than any historian.

To me who grew up before Bruce Catton began writing, the Civil War will always appear in terms of

*Up from the meadows rich with corn,
Clear in the cool September morn
The clustered spires of Frederick stand.*

Whittier, too, was dealing in contemporary history. Macaulay, on the other hand, wrote 'Horatius at the Bridge' some 2,500 years after the event. Although he was a major historian and only secondarily a poet, would any of us remember anything about Tarquin the Tyrant or Roman history before Caesar if it were not for 'Lars Porsena of Clusium/By the Nine Gods he swore,' and the rest of the seventy stanzas? We know how the American Revolution began from Longfellow's signal lights in the old North Church.

*'One if by land, and two if by sea,
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex town and farm.'*

The poets have familiarized more people with history than have the historians, and sometimes they have given history a push. Kipling did it in 1899 with his bidding 'Take up the White Man's Burden,' addressed to Americans, who, being plunged into involuntary imperialism by Admiral Dewey's adventure at Manila, were sorely perplexed what to do about the Philippines. 'Send forth the best ye breed,' Kipling told them firmly,

*To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.*

*Take up the White Man's burden,
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;*

*Take up the White Man's burden—
Ye dare not stoop to less.*

The advice, published in a two-page spread by *McClure's Magazine*, was quoted across the country within a week and quickly reconciled most Americans to the expenditure of bullets, brutality, and trickery, that soon proved necessary to implement it.

Kipling had a peculiar gift for recognizing history at close quarters. He wrote 'Recessional' in 1897 at the time of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee when he sensed a self-glorification, a kind of hubris, in the national mood that frightened him. In the *Times* on the morning after, when people read his reminder —

*Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget - lest we forget!*

— it created a profound impression. Sir Edward Clark, the distinguished barrister who defended Oscar Wilde, was so affected by the message that he pronounced 'Recessional' 'the greatest poem written by any living man.'

What the poets did was to convey the *feeling* of an episode or a moment of history as they sensed it. The historian's task is rather to what happened within the discipline of the facts.

What his imagination is to the poet, facts are to the historian. The exercise of judgment comes in their selection, his art in their arrangement. His method is narrative. His subject is the story of man's. His function is to make it known.

Jose Ortega y Gasset

History as a System

W W Norton & Company, New York, 1961

Here, then, awaiting our study, lies man's authentic 'being' — stretching the whole length of his past. Man is what has happened to him, what he has done. Other things might have happened to him or have been done by him, but what did in fact happen to him and was done by him, this constitutes a relentless trajectory of experiences that he carries on his back as the vagabond his bundle of all he possesses. Man is a substantial emigrant on a pilgrimage of being, and it is accordingly meaningless to set limits to what he is capable of being. In this initial illimitableness of possibilities that characterizes one who has no nature there stands out only one fixed, pre-established, and given line by which he may chart his course, only one limit: the past. The experiments already made with life narrow man's future. If we do not know what he is going to be, we know what he is not going to be. Man lives in view of the past.

Man, in a word, has no nature; what he has is . . . history. Expressed differently: what nature is to things, history, *res gestae*, is to man. Once again we become aware of the possible application of theological concepts to human reality. *Deus, cui hoc est natura quod fecerit . . .*, says St. Augustine. Man, likewise, finds that he has no nature other than what he has himself done.

History is the systematic science of that radical reality, my life. It is therefore a science of the present in the most rigorous and actual sense of the word. Were it not a science of the present, where should we find that past that is commonly assigned to it as theme? The opposite — and customary — interpretation is equivalent to making of the past an abstract, unreal something lying lifeless just where it happened in time, whereas the past is in truth the live, active force that sustains our today. There is no *actio in distans*. The past is not yonder, at the date when it happened, but here, in me. The past is I — by which I mean my life.

Until now history has been the contrary of reason. In Greece the two terms 'reason' and 'history' were opposed. And it is in fact the case that scarcely anyone up till now has set himself to seek in history for its rational substance. At most, attempts have been made to impose on it a reason not its own, as when Hegel injected into history the formalism of his logic or Buckle his physiological and physical reason. My purpose is the exact reverse: to discover in history itself its original, autochthonous reason. Hence the expression 'historical reason' must be understood in all the rigor of the term: not an extrahistorical reason which appears to be fulfilled in history but, literally, *a substantive reason constituted by what has happened to man*, the revelation of a reality transcending man's theories and which is himself, the self underlying his theories.

Until now what we have had of reason has not been historical and what we have had of history has not been rational.

Historical reason is, then, *ratio, logos*, a rigorous concept. It is desirable that there should not arise the slightest doubt about this. In opposing it to physico-mathematical reason there is no question of granting a licence to irrationalism. On the contrary, historical reason is still more rational than physical reason, more rigorous, more exigent. Physical reason does not claim to understand what it is that it is talking about. It goes farther, and makes of this ascetic

renunciation its formal method, the result being that the term ‘understanding’ takes on a paradoxical sense against which Socrates already protested in the *Phaedo* when describing to us his intellectual education. The protest has been repeated by every subsequent philosopher down to the establishment of empirical rationalism at the end of the seventeenth century. We can understand in physics the analytical operation it performs in reducing complex facts to a repertory of simpler facts. But these elemental, basic facts of physics are unintelligible. Impact conveys exactly nothing to intellection. And this is inevitable since it is a fact. Historical reason, on the contrary, accepts nothing as a mere fact: it makes every fact fluid in the *fieri* whence it comes, it sees how the fact takes place. It does not believe it is throwing light on human phenomena by reducing them to a repertory of instincts and ‘faculties’ — which would, in effect, be crude facts comparable to impact and attraction. Instead it shows what man does with these instincts and faculties and even expounds to us how these facts — the instincts and faculties — have come about: they are, of course, nothing more than ideas — interpretations — that man has manufactured at a given juncture of his life.

Alan Bullock

The Historian's Purpose

History and Metahistory', in **The Philosophy of History in Our Time** (ed Hans Meyerhoff)

Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, New York 1959

The historian, of course, does not live on a desert island. He is sensitive to the interests and problems of the society in which he lives. Marc Bloch tells a story of Pirenne, the great Belgian mediaevalist, when they went together to an historical congress at Stockholm. As soon as they had unpacked, Pirenne wanted to go out. *'Qu'allons-nous voir d'abord? Il paraît qu'il y a un Hotel de Ville tout neuf. Commençons par lui.'* When Marc Bloch expressed his surprise at such a choice, Pirenne retorted: *'Si j'étais un antiquaire je n'aurais d'yeux que pour les vieilles choses. Mais je suis un historien. C'est pourquoi j'aime la vie.'* It is often the preoccupations and experiences of his own time which suggest to an historian the particular subject or period which he takes up. But once he begins work, the question he is trying to answer is: What happened? His interest is in the past, not in the present or the future.

The historian finds his satisfaction in three things. First, in searching for and discovering new material to use as evidence. Second, in handling his material when he has found it, trying to discover whether it is authentic or a forgery — if so, why it was forged; whether the man who wrote this document is telling the truth or lies — if so, why he lied; trying to make it yield unexpected evidence. The third and supreme satisfaction is to put the evidence together, to produce not only an account of what happened, but a connected account, illuminating the motives and ideas of the actors, the influence of circumstances, the play of chance and the unforeseen. What the historian finds fascinating is to come as close as he can to the concrete and the individual, to try and get inside the skin of this man or group of men, Napoleon, Cromwell, the Jacobins, or the Bolsheviks; to trace the causes, the connections and consequences of this particular revolution of 1848, or a particular series of events like the famines and plagues of the Middle Ages, or the rise of the English cotton industry.

This is not to identify history with historical research: that makes as little sense as to confuse literature with textual criticism. To borrow another quotation from Pirenne: 'Historical criticism, or historical erudition, is not the whole of history. It does not exist for its own sake.... Its sole purpose is the discovery of facts.... Criticism provides materials for what is properly called history.... Important and indeed essential though it be, its role remains subordinate. Once the authenticity of texts has been established, the sources criticized, the chronology of events fixed, there still remains the task of making history.... Without hypothesis or synthesis, history remains a pastime for antiquarians; just as without criticism and erudition it loses itself in the realm of fantasy.'

Still less am I putting forward an argument in favour of reducing history to chronology, a bare recital of facts. History is always an attempt to explain the sequence and connection of events, to explain why, after the events of 1789, there followed the Revolutionary Wars, the execution of the King, the Jacobin dictatorship, the Terror and the Thermidorian Reaction. Not why they *had* to follow — that is prediction in reverse, and the historian has no business with prediction—but why *in fact* they followed.

Now, the moment the historian begins to explain, he is bound to make use of general propositions of all kinds — about human behaviour, about the effect of economic factors and the influence of ideas and a hundred other things; It is impossible for the historian to banish such general propositions; they are smuggled in by the back door, even when he refuses to admit it. He cannot begin to think or explain events without the help of the preconceptions, the assumptions, the generalization of experience which he brings with him — and is bound to bring with him — to his work. When Mathiez for example began to work on the history of the French Revolution, his mind was not a blank, it was full of views and prejudices about revolutions and their causes, about the way people behave in times of revolution, about how much importance to attach to economic, how much to intellectual factors. The historian gives a false account of his activity if he tries to deny the part a general ideas and assumptions play in his work.

In such work it is obvious that the first rule of the historian must be to keep a critical eye on his own assumptions and pre-conceptions, lest these should lead him to miss the importance of some piece of evidence, the existence of some connection. His whole training teaches him to break down rather than build up generalizations, to bring the general always to the touchstone of particular, concrete instances. His experience of this discipline and its results makes him cautious and sceptical about the possibility of establishing uniformities and regularities of sufficient generality to bear the weight of the conclusions then built up on them. Probabilities, yes — rules of thumb, the sort of thing you can expect to happen—but not more than this...

Pieter Geyl

Use and Abuse of History

Yale University Press, New Haven, 1957

But the historian cannot evade his responsibility. To ascertain the bare facts or factors, sometimes a difficult job in all conscience, is only the first stage of his work: if he is to give an intelligible account, if he will to his own satisfaction understand, he must use his material by choosing from it, ordering it, and interpreting it. In doing so he is bound to introduce an element of subjectivity; that is, he will tamper with or detract from the absolute, unchanging truth. 'I shall stick to the facts,' 'I shall let the facts speak for themselves' — these well-known turns of speech are often permissible enough, but they are apt to be as misleading as that other favorite phrase: 'History shows.' Behind the facts, behind the goddess History, there is a historian. Clio may be in possession of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but to the historian (the young, middleaged, or old lady or gentleman rummaging among papers in the archive or writing at a desk) she will at best, in exchange for their labor and devotion, vouchsafe a glimpse. Never will she surrender the whole of her treasure. The most that we can hope for is a partial rendering, an approximation, of the real truth about the past.

The historian merely preserves, but the members of the community use the material preserved as and when it suits them. Yet as I see it, the historian often and rightly plays a more active part, shaping the material, suggesting, if only by implication, conclusions of importance for the present. Even so, the collective memory of the public, largely the product of the historians' teaching, is much more defective and erratic than the individual's memory of his experiences.

I wish that it were possible to draw a simple contrast between myth and history. Myth — the past arranged, without any hampering inhibition, so as to suit the prejudice of its adherents, their national or religious loyalty or intolerance, their party feeling; history — the past shown as it really was. I have said too much, and you knew too much before I said it, about the shortcomings and delinquencies of historians to pretend anything so childish. History and myth are almost inextricably mixed.

What I do say is that it has always been the ideal of historians to separate the two and that in their attempts to make their accounts conform to demonstrable, palpable truth they have done an enormous amount of useful sifting and in one field after another helped intelligible order to overcome confusion. This order, however, will always retain an element of arbitrariness, because it is to some extent dependent on human minds. And such as it is, the history of the historians will have no more than a restricted influence on the community. Not only will the public's notions on history always lag behind those of scholarship; there sometimes seems to be downright incapacity to adopt them, largely due, no doubt, to lack of attention, though often inattention is a disguise for active reluctance. Man, after all, is not governed by reason alone, and the myth, springing from affections or hatreds, has a vitality of its own. It is a form of life.

When dealing with historical myths, traditions, or misconceptions, in the past, the historian has to accept them as manifestations of the politics or civilisation of the generation to which they belong; he will extend to them the understanding, the discriminating sympathy that all manifestations of life claim from him. But the doctrine of the useful myth is, to him, of no

application to the present. No doubt the historian can be so wrapped up in a myth of his own day that he does not recognise it as such; his history will suffer from it, but it does not necessarily destroy his excellence, or greatness, as a historian.

And I think I may add that not I personally but all professional historians do possess a kind of familiarity with the past that should not be unheard in that great argument. We do not claim to have Clio's only authentic message, but we know that we devote ourselves to the deciphering of it with a single-minded devotion. Enthusiasm and abstract thinking, too, are stating their case, supported, most likely, by mythical readings of the past. Even if we wanted to, we could not suppress those voices or prevent others from listening to them; we shall ourselves at times find in them delight and inspiration. Meanwhile, events will proceed on their mysterious course as they have always done, and to the shaping of it how much the past contributes, and how much the urge that is in man's creative powers, we can only guess. But shall historians therefore keep silent? No, we must fulfil our function, which is, to the best of our ability, to show up the myths and tell the world all we can find about past reality — in short to promote legitimate use and check the abuse of history.

Marc Bloch

The Historian's Craft

(tr Peter Putnam)

Manchester University Press, 1979

(Bloch died in 1941)

The word 'history' is very old — so old that men have sometimes grown weary of it. It is true that they have rarely gone so far as to wish to erase it from the vocabulary entirely. Even the sociologists of the Durkheim school make room for it. They do so, to be sure, only in order to relegate it to one poor corner of the sciences of man — a sort of secret dungeon in which, having first reserved for sociology all that appears to them susceptible of rational analysis, they shut up the human facts which they condemn as the most superficial and capricious of all.

Here, on the contrary, we shall preserve the broadest interpretation of the word 'history.' The word places no a priori prohibitions in the path of inquiry, which may turn at will toward either the individual or the social, toward momentary convulsions or the most lasting developments. It comprises in itself no credo; it commits us, according to its original meaning, to nothing other than 'inquiry.' Assuredly, since its first appearance on the lips of men, more than two millenniums ago, its content has changed a great deal. Such is the fate of all truly living terms in a language. If the sciences were obliged to find a new name each time they made an advance — what a multitude of christenings! and what a waste of time for the academic realm!...

It is no less true that, faced with the vast chaos of reality, the historian is necessarily led to carve out that particular area to which his tools apply; hence, to make a selection — and, obviously, not the same as that of the biologist, for example, but that which is the proper selection of the historian. Here we have an authentic problem of action. It will pursue us throughout our study.

History and Men

It is sometimes said: 'History is the science of the past.' To me, this is badly put.

For, to begin with, the very idea that the past as such can be the object of science is ridiculous. How, without preliminary distillation, can one make of phenomena, having no other common character than that of being not contemporary with us, the matter of rational knowledge? On the reverse side of the medal, can one imagine a complete science of the universe in its present state?

Doubtless, in the origins of historiography, the old annalists were scarcely embarrassed by these scruples. They narrated pell-mell events whose only connection was that they had happened about the same time: eclipses, hailstorms, and the sudden appearance of astonishing meteors along with battles and the deaths of kings and heroes. But into these early reminiscences of humanity, as garbled as the observations of a small child, a sustained effort of analysis has gradually introduced the necessary classification. It is true that our language, fundamentally conservative, freely retains the name of history for any study of a change taking place in time. The custom is harmless, for it deceives no one. In that sense, there is a

history of the solar system, because the stars which compose it have not always been as we now see them. It belongs to the province of astronomy. There is a history of volcanic eruptions which is, I am sure, of most lively interest as regards the composition of the earth. It does not concern the history of historians.

Or, at least, it does so only in so far as its observations chance to coincide with the specific preoccupations of our history. How, then, is the division of labor determined in practice? To understand this, a single example will be worth more than a thousand words.

In the tenth century AD, a deep gulf, the Zwin, indented the Flemish coast. It was later blocked up with sand. To what department of knowledge does the study of this phenomenon belong? At first sight, anyone would suggest geology. The action of alluvial deposit, the operation of ocean currents, or, perhaps, changes in sea level: was not geology invented and put on earth to deal with just such as these? Of course. But at close range, the matter is not quite so simple. Is there not first a question of investigating the origin of the transformation? Immediately, the geologist is forced to ask questions which are no longer strictly within his jurisdiction. For there is no doubt that the silting of the gulf was at least assisted by dyke construction, changing the direction of the channel, and drainage — all activities of man, founded in collective needs and made possible only by a certain social structure. At the other end of the chain there is a new problem: the consequences. At a little distance from the end of the gulf, and communicating with it by a short river passage, rose a town. This was Bruges. By the waters of the Zwin it imported or exported the greatest part of the merchandise which made of it, relatively speaking, the London or New York of that day. Then came, every day more apparent, the advance of the sand. As the water receded, Bruges vainly extended its docks and harbor further toward the mouth of the river. Little by little, its quays fell asleep. To be sure, this was not the sole cause of its decline. (Does the physical ever affect the social, unless its operations have been prepared, abetted, and given scope by other factors which themselves have already derived from man?) But this was certainly at least one of the most efficacious of the links in the causal chain.

Now, the act of a society remodeling the soil upon which it lives in accordance with its needs is, as any one recognizes instinctively, an eminently 'historical' event. It is the same with the vicissitudes of a powerful seat of trade. Hence, in an example entirely characteristic of the topography of learning, we see, on the one hand, an area of overlap, where the union of two disciplines is shown to be indispensable to any attempt at explanation; on the other, a point of transition, where when a phenomenon has been described with the sole exception that its consequences remain undetermined, it is, in some definitive way, yielded up by one discipline to another. What is it that seems to dictate the intervention of history? It is the appearance of the human element.

Long ago, indeed, our great forebears, such as Michelet or Fustel de Coulanges, taught us to recognize that the object of history is, by nature, man. Let us say rather, men. Far more than the singular, favoring abstraction, the plural which is the grammatical form of relativity is fitting for the science of change. Behind the features of landscape, behind tools or machinery, behind what appear to be the most formalized written documents, and behind institutions, which seem almost entirely detached from their founders, there are men, and it is men that history seeks to grasp. Failing that, it will be at best but an exercise in erudition. The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.

From the character of history as the knowledge of men derives its peculiar situation as regards the problem of expression. Is it 'science' or 'art'? About 1800, our great-grandfathers delighted in solemn debates on this question. Later, about 1890, saturated with the aura of a

rather primitive positivism, the methodologists were indignant that the public should attach an excessive importance to what they called 'form' in historical works. Art versus science, form versus matter: the history of scholarship abounds with such fine debates!

There is no less beauty in a precise equation than in a felicitous phrase, but each science has its appropriate aesthetics of language. Human actions are essentially very delicate phenomena, many aspects of which elude mathematical measurement. Properly to translate them into words and, hence, to fathom them rightly (for can one perfectly understand what he does not know how to express?), great delicacy of language and precise shadings of verbal tone are necessary. Where calculation is impossible we are obliged to employ suggestion. Between the expression of physical and of human realities there is as much difference as between the task of a drill operator and that of a lutemaker: both work down to the last millimeter, but the driller uses precision tools, while the lutemaker is guided primarily by his sensitivity to sound and touch. It would be unwise either for the driller to adopt the empirical methods of the lutemaker or for the lutemaker to imitate the driller. Will anyone deny that one may not feel with words as well as with fingers?

Historical Time

We have called history 'the science of men.' That is still far too vague. It is necessary to add: 'of men in time.' The historian does not think of the human in the abstract. His thoughts breathe freely the air of the climate of time.

There is, then, just one science of men in time. It requires us to join the study of the dead and of the living. What shall we call it? I have already explained why the ancient name, 'history,' seemed to me the best. It is the most comprehensive, the least exclusive, the most electric with stirring reminders of a more than age-old endeavor. In proposing to extend history down to the present (contrary to certain prejudices which are not so old as history itself), I have no wish to expand the claims of my own profession. Life is too short, and science too vast, to permit even the greatest genius a total experience of humanity. Some men will always specialize in the present, as others do in the Stone Age or in Egyptology. We simply ask both to bear in mind that historical research will tolerate no autarchy. Isolated, each will understand only by halves, even within his own field of study; for the only true history, which can advance only through mutual aid, is universal history.

A science, however, is not to be defined entirely in terms of its object. Its limits can be fixed quite as well by the character of its appropriate methods.

It remains to be seen whether the techniques of inquiry should be considered fundamentally different according as the investigation approaches or recedes from the present. This, in its turn, suggests the entire problem of historical observation.

W C Sellar and R J Yeatman

1066 and All That

Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967 (first published 1930)

COMPULSORY PREFACE (*This Means You*)

Histories have previously been written with the object of exalting their authors. The object of this History is to console the reader. *No other history does this.*

History is not what you thought. *It is what you can remember.* All other history defeats itself.

This is the only Memorable History of England, because all the History that you can remember is in this book, which is the result of years of research in golf-clubs, gun-rooms, green-rooms, etc.

For instance, two out of the four Dates originally included were eliminated at the last moment, a research done at the Eton and Harrow match having revealed that they are *not memorable*.

The Editors will be glad of further assistance towards the elimination, in future editions, of any similarly unhistorical matter which, despite their vigilance, may have crept into the text.

They take this opportunity of acknowledging their inestimable debt to the mass of educated men and women of their race whose historical intuitions and opinions this work enshrines.

Also, to the Great British People without whose self-sacrificing determination to become top Nation there would have been no (memorable) history.

History is now at an end (see p. 123); this History is therefore final.

W. C. S.
R. J. Y.

J B Bury

Selected Essays (ed Harold Temperley)

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1930

The Science of History
(1903)

Old envelopes still hang tenaciously round the renovated figure, and students of history are confused, embarrassed, and diverted by her old traditions and associations. It has not yet become superfluous to insist that history is a science, no less and no more; and some who admit it theoretically hesitate to enforce the consequences which it involves. It is therefore, I think, almost incumbent on a professor to define, at the very outset, his attitude to the transformation of the idea of history which is being gradually accomplished; and an inaugural address offers an opportunity which, if he feels strongly the importance of the question, he will not care to lose.

And moreover I venture to think that it may be useful and stimulating for those who are beginning historical studies to realise vividly and clearly that the transformation which those studies are undergoing is itself a great event in the history of the world — that we are ourselves in the very middle of it, that we are witnessing and may share in the accomplishment of a change which will have a vast influence on future cycles of the world. I wish that I had been enabled to realise this when I first began to study history. I think it is important for all historical students alike — not only for those who may be drawn to make history the special work of their lives, but also for those who study it as part of a liberal education — to be fully alive and awake to the revolution which is slowly and silently progressing. It seems especially desirable that those who are sensible of the importance of the change and sympathise with it should declare and emphasise it; just because it is less patent to the vision and is more perplexed by ancient theories and traditions, than those kindred revolutions which have been effected simultaneously in other branches of knowledge. History has really been enthroned and ensphered among the sciences; but the particular nature of her influence, her time-honoured association with literature, and other circumstances, have acted as a sort of vague cloud, half concealing from men's eyes her new position in the heavens.

And here I may interpolate a parenthesis, which even at this hour may not be quite superfluous. I may remind you that history is not a branch of literature. The facts of history, like the facts of geology or astronomy, can supply material for literary art; for manifest reasons they lend themselves to artistic representation far more readily than those of the natural sciences; but to clothe the story of a human society in a literary dress is no more the part of a historian as a historian, than it is the part of an astronomer as an astronomer to present in an artistic shape the story of the stars.

The principle of continuity and the higher principle of development lead to the practical consequence that it is of vital importance for citizens to have a true knowledge of the past and to see it in a dry light, in order that their influence on the present and future may be exerted in right directions. For, as a matter of fact, the attitude of men to the past has at all times been a factor in forming their political opinions and determining the course of events. It would be an instructive task to isolate this influence and trace it from its most rudimentary form in primitive times, when the actions of tribes were stimulated by historical memories, through

later ages in which policies were dictated or confirmed by historical judgments and conceptions. But the clear realisation of the fact that our conception of the past is itself a distinct factor in guiding and moulding our evolution, and must become a factor of greater and increasing potency, marks a new stage in the growth of the human mind. And it supplies us with the true theory of the practical importance of history.

A Letter on the Writing of History (1926)

PROFESSOR BURY on PERSONAL BIAS

To the Editor of the Morning Post

SIR,

In reference to your article on 'The Writing of History', it seems to me that it would be necessary first to elucidate two or three fundamental questions. For instance, is history a sequence of contingencies, and can our knowledge of events of the past claim to be much more than a *fable convenue*? But to go into either of these problems is impossible here, it would need too much space and lead too far, but there is another fundamental question about which I will venture to make a brief observation.

It seems to be always assumed as self-evident and universally admitted that impartiality and freedom from bias are indispensable qualifications in every Historian's ideal of how history should be written. Here I totally disagree, I do not think that freedom from bias is possible, and I do not think it is desirable. Whoever writes completely free from bias will produce a colourless and dull work.

Bishop Stubbs, our great authority on the early constitutional history of England, has remarked somewhere, if my memory does not betray me, 'That it seems as if history could not be written without a certain spite'; and it is a fact that the most effective histories have usually been partial and biased, like those of Tacitus, Gibbon, Macaulay, and Mommsen, to take familiar examples.

Is there any event or any transaction worth investigating or writing about on which the writer can fail to have a definite bias if the subject really engages his interest? And it will be admitted that otherwise he cannot hope to produce anything that will engage the interest of the world.

No history can be instructive if the personality of the writer is entirely suppressed; it will be dead and colourless and inhuman, however faultless it may be in detail, however carefully the rules of historical method may be applied.

J B Bury

Rome

Selections from **Theories of History** (ed Patrick Gardiner)

The Free Press, New York, 1967

Vico, Herder, Hegel, Tolstoy

Readings from Philosophers

1. Giambattista Vico

The New Science (tr. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Frisch)

Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1948

(Selections are from the third edition of 1744)

Idea of the Work

Until now, the philosophers, contemplating Divine Providence only through the natural order, have shown only a part of it. Accordingly men offer worship, sacrifices and other divine honors to God as to the Mind which is the free and absolute sovereign of nature, because by His eternal counsel He has given us existence through nature, and through nature preserves it to us. But the philosophers have not yet contemplated His Providence in respect of that part of it which is most proper to men, whose nature has this principal property: that of being social. In providing for this property God has so ordained and disposed human affairs that men, having fallen from complete justice by original sin, and while intending almost always to do something quite different and often quite the contrary — so that for private utility they would live alone like wild beasts — have been led by this same utility and along the aforesaid different and contrary paths to live like men in justice and to keep themselves in society and thus to observe their social nature. It will be shown in the present work that this is the true nature of man and thus that law exists in nature. The conduct of divine providence in this matter is one of the things whose rationale is a chief business of our Science, which becomes in this respect a rational civil theology of divine providence.

Establishment of Principles

119. ... We now propose the following axioms, both philosophical and philological, including a few reasonable and proper postulates and clarified definitions. And just as the blood does in animate bodies, so will these elements course through our Science and animate it in all its reasonings about the common nature of nations.

120. Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance, man makes himself the measure of all things.

121. This axiom explains those two common human traits, on the one hand that rumor grows in its course, on the other that rumor is deflated by the presence [of the thing itself]. In the long course that rumor has run from the beginning of the world it has been the perennial source of all the exaggerated opinions which have hitherto been held concerning remote antiquities unknown to us, by virtue of that property of the human mind noted by Tacitus in his *Life of Agricola*, where he says that everything unknown is taken for something great.

122. It is another property of the human mind that whenever man can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand.

123. This axiom points to the inexhaustible source of all the errors about the beginnings of humanity that have been adopted by entire nations and by all the scholars. For when the former began to take notice of them and the latter to investigate them, it was on the basis of their own enlightened, cultivated and magnificent times that they judged the origins of humanity, which must nevertheless by the nature of things have been small, crude and quite obscure.

124. Under this head are to be recalled two types of conceit we have mentioned above, one of the nations and the other of the scholars.

347. In search of these natures of human things our Science proceeds by a severe analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or utilities of social life, which are the two perennial springs of the natural law of nations... In its second principal aspect, our Science is therefore a history of human ideas, on which it seems the metaphysics of the human mind must proceed. This queen of sciences, by the axiom that 'the sciences must begin where their subject matters began,' took its start when the first men began to think humanly, and not when the philosophers began to reflect on human ideas...

348. To determine the times and places for such a history, that is, when and where these human thoughts were born, and thus to give it certainty by means of its own (so to speak) metaphysical chronology and geography, our Science applies a likewise metaphysical art of criticism with regard to the founders of these same nations, in which it took more than a thousand years for these writers to come forward with whom philological criticism has hitherto been occupied. And the criterion our criticism employs, in accordance with an axiom above stated [142] is that taught by Divine Providence, and common to all nations, namely the common sense of the human race, determined by the necessary harmony of human things, in which all the beauty of the civil world consists. The decisive sort of proof in our Science is therefore this: that, once these orders were established by Divine Providence, the course of the affairs of the nations had to be, must now be and will have to be such as our Science demonstrates, even if infinite worlds were produced from time to time through eternity, which is certainly not the case.

349. Our Science therefore comes to describe at the same time an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every human nation in its rise, progress, maturity, decline and fall. Indeed we go so far as to assert that whoever meditates this Science tells himself this ideal eternal history only so far as he makes it by proof 'it had, has, and will have to be.'

2. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803)

Man's Place in the Universe

At an early age, when the dawn of science appeared to my sight, the thought frequently occurred to me whether, since everything in the world has its philosophy and science, there must not also be a philosophy and science of what concerns us most, the history of mankind. Everything forced this on my mind: metaphysics and morals, physics and natural history, and religion above all. Shall He who has ordered everything in nature, I asked myself, by number, weight and measure; who has regulated according to them the essence of things, their forms

and relations, their course and subsistence, so that only one wisdom, goodness and power, prevails from the system of the universe to the grain of sand, from the power that supports the worlds and suns to the texture of a spider's web; who has so wonderfully and divinely weighted everything in our body and in the faculties of our mind that, when we try to reflect on the only-wise even the least bit, we lose ourselves in an abyss of his purposes; would that God depart from his wisdom and goodness in the general destiny of our species, and act in them without a plan? Or can he have intended to keep us in ignorance of this, while he has displayed to us so much of his eternal purpose in the lower part of the creation, in which we are much less concerned?

If our philosophy of the history of man is in any way to deserve its name, it must begin from heaven. For as our dwelling, the earth, is in itself nothing, but derives its structure and constitution, its power of forming organized beings, and preserving them, when formed, from the heavenly powers that pervade the whole universe, so we must first consider it not only by itself, but as part of the system of the worlds in which it is placed . . . When I open the great book of the universe and see before me an immense palace, which the Deity alone can fill in every part, I reason as closely as I can from the whole to its parts, and from its parts to the whole . . . All being is alike an indivisible idea; in the greatest, as well as the least things, it is founded on the same laws. Thus the structure of the universe confirms the eternity of the core of my being, of my intrinsic life.

The philosophy of history which follows the chain of tradition is, to speak properly, the true history of mankind, without which all the outward occurrences of this world are only clouds or revolting deformities. It is a gloomy outlook if we can see nothing in the revolutions of our earth but wreck upon wreck, external beginnings without end, channels of circumstances without any fixed purpose. The chain of improvement alone forms a whole out of these ruins, in which human figures indeed vanish, but the spirit of mankind lives and acts immortally . . . Thus the changeable form and imperfection of all human operations entered into the plan of the creator. Folly had to appear, so that wisdom could surmount it; the decaying fragility even of the noblest works was an essential property of their materials, so that men might have an opportunity to work harder in improving or building on their ruins; for we are all here in a state of exercise.

What is the chief law we have observed in all the great occurrences of history? In my opinion it is this: everywhere on our earth whatever could be has been, according to the situation and wants of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the native or generated character of the people.

3. Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Ultimate Purpose in History

The only thought which philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of history is the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the sovereign of the world; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. Reason . . . is substance, as well as infinite power; its own infinite material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the infinite form — that which sets this material in motion. On one hand, Reason is the substance of the universe, ie that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence. On the other hand, it is the infinite energy of the universe; since Reason is not so powerless as to be incapable of producing anything but a mere ideal, a mere intention — having its place outside reality, nobody knows where; something separate and abstract, in the

heads of certain human beings. It is the infinite complex of things, their entire essence and truth. It is its own material which it commits to its own active energy to work up; not needing, as finite action does, the conditions of an external material of given means from which it may obtain its support, and the objects of its activity. It supplies its own nourishment, and is the object of its own operations. While it is exclusively its own basis of existence, and absolute final aim, it is also the energizing power realizing this aim; developing it not only in the phenomena of the natural, but also of the spiritual universe — the history of the world. That this ‘Idea’ or ‘Reason’ is the true, the eternal, the absolutely powerful essence; that it reveals itself in the world, and that in that world nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory — is the thesis which, as we have said, has been proved in philosophy, and is here regarded as demonstrated.

But even regarding history as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized — the question involuntarily arises: to what principle, to what final aim these enormous sacrifices have been offered. From this point the investigation usually proceeds to that which we have made the general beginning of our inquiry. Starting from this, we pointed out those phenomena which made up a picture so suggestive of gloomy emotions and thoughtful reflections — as the very field which we, for our part, regard as exhibiting only the means for realizing what we assert to be the essential destiny — the absolute aim, or — which comes to the same thing — the true result of the world’s history . . .

The first remark we have to make is that what we call principle, aim, destiny, or the nature and idea of Spirit, is something merely general and abstract. Principle — plan of existence — law — is a hidden, undeveloped essence, which as such — however true in itself — is not completely real. Aims, principles, etc, have a place in our thoughts, in our subjective design only; but not yet in the sphere of reality. That which exists for itself only is a possibility, a potentiality; but has not yet emerged into existence. A second element must be introduced in order to produce actuality — ie, actuation, realization; and whose motive power is the will — the activity of man in the widest sense. It is only by this activity that that Idea, as well as abstract characteristics generally, are realized, actualized; for of themselves they are powerless. The motive power that puts them in operation, and gives them determinate existence, is the need, instinct, inclination, and passion of man . . .

The history of the world occupies a higher ground than that on which morality has properly its position; which is personal character — the conscience of individuals — their particular will and mode of actions; those have a value, imputation, reward or punishment proper to themselves. What the absolute aim of Spirit requires and accomplishes — what Providence does — transcends the obligations, and the liability to imputation and the description of good and bad motives, which attach to individuality in virtue of its social relations. They who on moral grounds, and consequently with noble intention, have resisted that which the advance of the spiritual Idea makes necessary, stand higher in moral worth than those whose crimes have been turned into the means — under the direction of a superior principle — of realizing the purposes of that principle. But in such revolutions both parties generally stand within the limits of the same circle of transient and corruptible existence. . . . The deeds of great men, who are the individuals of world history, thus appear not only justified in view of that intrinsic result of which they were not conscious, but also from the point of view occupied by the secular moralist. But looked at from this point, moral claims that are irrelevant must not be brought into collision with world-historical deeds and their accomplishment.

It is the concrete spirit of a people which we have distinctly to recognize, and since it is Spirit it can only be comprehended spiritually, that is, by thought. It is this alone which takes the lead in all the deeds and tendencies of that people, and which is occupied in realizing itself —

in satisfying its ideal and becoming self-conscious — for its great business is self-production. But for spirit, the highest attainment is self-knowledge; an advance not only to the intuition, but to the thought — the clear conception of itself. This it must and is also destined to accomplish; but the accomplishment is at the same time its dissolution, and the rise of another spirit, another world-historical people, another epoch of universal history. This transition and connection lead us to the connection of the whole — the idea of the world's history as such — which we have now to consider more closely, and of which we have to give representation.

4. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

Arriving at this conclusion we can reply directly and positively to these two essential questions of history:

1) What is power?

2) What force produces the movement of the nations?

1) Power is the relation of a given person to other individuals, in which the more this person expresses opinions, predictions, and justifications of the collective action that is performed, the less is his participation in that action.

2) The movement of nations is caused not by power, nor by intellectual activity, nor even a combination of the two as historians have supposed, but by the activity of *all* the people who participate in the events, and who always combine in such a way that those taking the largest direct share in the event take on themselves the least responsibility and vice versa.

The wielder of power appears to cause the event; physically it is those who submit to the power. But as the moral activity is inconceivable without the physical, the cause of the event is neither in the one nor in the other but in the union of the two.

Parden E Tillinghast

Selections from
Approaches to History

Prentice Hall Inc, Englewood Cliffs, 1963

1. Jean Bodin (1530-96)

(from *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, tr Beatrice Reynolds, Columbia University Press, New York, 1945)

In history the best part of universal law lies hidden; and what is of great weight and importance for the best appraisal of legislation — the customs of the peoples, and the beginnings, growth, conditions, changes, and decline of all states — are obtained from it. The chief subject matter of this *Method* consists of these facts, since no rewards of history are more ample than those usually gathered about the governmental form of states . . .

Although history has many eulogists, who have adorned her with honest and fitting praises, yet among them no one has commended her more truthfully and appropriately than the man who called her the ‘master of life.’ This designation, which implies all the adornments of all virtues and disciplines, means that the whole life of man ought to be shaped accordingly to the sacred laws of history . . . From [past days] not only are present-day affairs readily interpreted but also future events are inferred, and we may acquire reliable maxims for what we should seek and avoid. So it seemed to me remarkable that no one has compared famous histories of our forbears with each other and with the account of deeds done by the ancients . . .

This, then, is the greatest benefit of historical books, that some men, at least, can be incited to virtue and others can be frightened away from vice.

But of what value is it that this branch of learning is the inventor and preserver of all the arts, and chiefly of those which depend upon action? Whatever our elders observe and acquire by long experience is committed to the treasure-house of history; then men of a later age join the observations of the past reflections for the future and compare the causes of obscure things, studying the efficient causes and the ends of each as if they were placed beneath their eyes. Moreover, what can be for the greater glory of immortal God or more really advantageous than the fact that sacred history is the means of inculcating piety to God, reverence to parents, charity to individuals, and justice to all? . . .

To ease is added the pleasure that we take in following the narrative of virtue’s triumphs . . . What is more delightful than to contemplate through history the deeds of our ancestors placed before our eyes, as in a picture? What more enjoyable than to envisage their resources, their troops, and the very clash of their lines of battle? . . . I go on to the utility. How great it is, not only in the most accurate narratives, but even in those where only a likeness to actual fact and some glimmer of truth shines, I shall make plain . . .

2. Aristotle (384-322 BC)

(from 'The Poetics' in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard P McKeon, Random House, New York, 1941)

9. From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, ie what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse — you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do — which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement, one as to what, say, Alcibiades did or had done to him. In Comedy this has become clear by this time; it is only when their plot is already made up of probable incidents that they give it a basis of proper names, choosing for the purpose any names that may occur to them, instead of writing like the old iambic poets about particular persons. In Tragedy, however, they still adhere to the historic names; and for this reason: what convinces is the possible; now whereas we are not yet sure as to the possibility of that which has not happened, that which has happened is manifestly possible, else it would not have come to pass. Nevertheless even in Tragedy there are some plays with but one or two known names in them, the rest being inventions; and there are some without a single known name, eg Agathon's *Antheus*, in which both incidents and names are of the poet's invention; and it is no less delightful on that account. So that one must not aim at a rigid adherence to the traditional stories on which tragedies are based. It would be absurd, in fact, to do so, as even the known stories are only known to a few, though they are a delight none the less to all.

It is evident from the above that the poet must be more the poet of his stories or Plots than of his verses, inasmuch as he is a poet by virtue of the imitative element in his work, and it is actions that he imitates. And if he should come to take a subject from actual history, he is none the less a poet for that; since some historic occurrences may very well be in the probable and possible order of things; and it is in that aspect of them that he is their poet.

23. As for the poetry which merely narrates, or imitates by means of versified language [without action], it is evident that it has several points in common with Tragedy.

The construction of its stories should clearly be like that in a drama; they should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature. Nor should one suppose that there is anything like them in our usual histories. A history has to deal not with one action, but with one period and all that happened in that to one or more persons, however disconnected the several events may have been. Just as two events may take place at the same time, eg the sea-fight off Salamis and the battle with the Carthaginians in Sicily, without converging to the same end, so too of two consecutive events one may sometimes come after the other with no one end as their common issue. Nevertheless most of our epic poets, one may say, ignore the distinction.

Histories

BOOK I

1. Had the praise of history been passed over by former chroniclers it would perhaps have been incumbent upon me to urge the choice and special study of histories of this sort, as knowledge of the past is the readiest means men can have of correcting their conduct. But my predecessors have not been sparing in this respect. They have all begun and ended, so to speak, by enlarging on this theme: asserting again and again that the study of history is in the truest sense an education, and a training for political life; and that the most instructive, or rather the only, method of learning to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of Fortune is to recall the catastrophes of others. It is evident, therefore, that no one need think it his duty to repeat what has been said by many, and said well. Least of all myself, for the surprising nature of the events which I have undertaken to relate is in itself sufficient to challenge and stimulate the attention of everyone, old or young, to the study of my work. Can anyone be so indifferent or idle as not to care to know by what means, and under what kind of polity, almost the whole inhabited world was conquered and brought under the single dominion of the Romans, and that too within a period of not quite fifty-three years? Or who again can be so completely absorbed in other subjects of contemplation or study as to think any of them superior in importance to the accurate understanding of an event for which the past offers no precedent?

3. ... Had the states that were rivals for universal empire been familiarly known to us, no reference perhaps to their previous history would have been necessary to show the purpose and the forces with which they approached an undertaking of this nature and magnitude. But the fact is that the majority of the Greeks have no knowledge of the previous constitution, power, or achievements either of Rome or Carthage. I therefore concluded that it was necessary to prefix this and the next book to my *History*. I was anxious that no one, when fairly embarked upon my actual narrative, should feel at a loss, and have to ask what were the designs entertained by the Romans, or the forces and means at their disposal, that they entered upon those undertakings, which did in fact lead to their becoming masters of land and sea everywhere in our part of the world. I wished, on the contrary, that these books of mine, and the prefatory sketch which they contained, might make it clear that the resources they started with justified their original idea, and sufficiently explained their final success in grasping universal empire and dominion.

4. There is this analogy between the plan of my *History* and the marvellous spirit of the age with which I have to deal. Just as Fortune made almost all the affairs of the world incline in one direction, and forced them to converge upon one and the same point, so it is my task as a historian to put before my readers a compendious view of the ways in which Fortune accomplished her purpose. It was this peculiarity which originally challenged my attention, and determined me on undertaking this work. And combined with this was the fact that no writer of our time has undertaken a general history. Had anyone done so, my ambition in this direction would have been more diminished. But, in point of fact, I notice that by far the greater number of historians concern themselves with isolated wars and the incidents that accompany them; while as to a general and comprehensive scheme of events, their date, origin, and end, no one as far as I know has undertaken to examine it. I thought it, therefore, distinctly my duty neither to pass by myself, nor allow anyone else to pass by, without full study, a characteristic specimen of the dealings of Fortune at once brilliant and instructive in the highest degree. For fruitful as Fortune is in change, and constantly as she is producing dramas in the life of men, yet never assuredly before this did she work such a marvel, or act

such a drama, as that which we have witnessed. And of this we cannot obtain a comprehensive view from writers of mere episodes.

It would be as absurd to expect to do so as for a man to imagine that he has learned the shape of the whole world, its entire arrangement and order, because he has visited one after the other the most famous cities in it, or perhaps merely examined them in separate pictures. That would be indeed absurd; and it has always seemed to me that men who are persuaded that they get a competent view of universal from episodic history are very like persons who should see the limbs of some body, which had once been living and beautiful, scattered and remote; and should imagine that to be quite as good as actually beholding the activity and beauty of the living creature itself. But if someone could there and then reconstruct the animal once more, in the perfection of its beauty and the charm of its vitality, and could display it to the same people, they would beyond doubt confess that they had been far from conceiving the truth, and had been little better than dreamers. For indeed some idea of a whole may be got from a part, but an accurate knowledge and clear comprehension cannot. Wherefore we must conclude that episodic history contributes exceedingly little to the familiar knowledge and secure grasp of universal history. While it is only by the combination and comparison of the separate parts of the whole — by observing their likeness and their difference — that a man can attain his object, can obtain a view at once clear and complete, and thus secure both the profit and the delight of history.

BOOK II

56. ... Let us inquire what is essential and to the purpose in history. Surely a historian's object should not be to amaze his readers by a series of thrilling anecdotes; nor should he seek after men's probable speeches, nor enumerate the possible consequences of the events under consideration, like a writer of tragedy; but his function is above all to record with fidelity what was actually said or done, however commonplace it may be. For the purposes of history and tragedy are not the same, but widely opposed to each other. In the latter the subject is to thrill and delight the audience for the moment by words true to nature, in the former to instruct and convince serious students for all time by genuine words and deeds. In the latter, again, the power of beguiling an audience is the chief excellence, because the object is to create illusion; but in the former the thing of primary importance is truth, because the object is to benefit the learner.

BOOK III

31-2. Everyone normally adapts his words and actions to the situation of the moment and plays the corresponding part with sufficient adroitness to make the policy of the particular individual hard to define, and to obscure the truth in an appalling number of cases. The actions of the past, however, are put to the test by the actual course of events and therefore shed real light upon the aims and attitudes of individuals, revealing in some of them the existence of goodwill, good intentions, and practical helpfulness in our regard, and in others the opposite dispositions. From such examples it is frequently possible, in many situations, to discover who will sympathize with our sorrows and our grievances, and who will justify us — possibilities which add greatly to the resources of human life in both public and private affairs. For this reason, writers and readers of History ought to concentrate attention less upon the bald narrative of transactions than upon the antecedents, concomitants and consequences of any given action. If you abstract from History the 'why' and the 'how' and the 'wherefore' of the particular transaction and the rationality or the reverse of its result, what is left of her ceases to be a science and becomes a tour de force, which may give momentary pleasure, but is of no assistance whatever for dealing with the future.

BOOK XII

25. It is the function of History in the first place to ascertain the exact words actually spoken, whatever they may be, and in the second place to inquire into the cause which crowned the action taken or the words spoken with success or failure. The bare statement of the facts themselves is merely entertaining without being in the least instructive, whereas the additional explanation of the cause makes the study of History a fruitful employment. The analogies that can be drawn from similar situations to our own offer materials and presumptions for forecasting the future, in regard to which they sometimes act as a warning, while at other times they encourage us to strike out boldly into the oncoming tide of events in virtue of a historical parallel. A historian, however, who suppresses both the words spoken and their cause and replaces them by fictitious expositions and verbosities, destroys, in doing so, the characteristic quality of History.

BOOK XXXIII

4. When it comes to the historian of public affairs, the profession should be closed altogether to the writer who values anything more highly than the truth. A historical record reaches a far wider public over a far longer period of time than any ephemeral observations; and that gives the measure of the value which the author ought to place upon the truth and which his readers ought to place upon an exalted standard of truth in the author. At the moment of crisis, it is the duty of every Hellene to help Hellas by every means in his power — to fight in her defence, to draw a veil over her sins, to plead with the victors to have mercy on her — and this, in the hour of need, I have done in all sincerity.

4. Thucydides (c. 460-395 BC)

History of the Peloponnesian War

(from M I Finley, *The Greek Historians*, Viking Press, New York, 1959)

BOOK I

1. Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, beginning at the moment that it broke out, and believing that it would be a great war, and more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it. This belief was not without its grounds. The preparations of both the combatants were in every department in the last state of perfection; and he could see the rest of the Hellenic race taking sides in the quarrel, those who delayed doing so at once having it in contemplation. Indeed this was the greatest movement yet known in history, not only of the Hellenes, but of a large part of the barbarian world — I had almost said of mankind. For though the events of remote antiquity, and even those that more immediately precede the war, could not from lapse of time be clearly ascertained, yet the evidences, which an inquiry carried as far back as was practicable leads me to trust, all point to the conclusion that there was nothing on a great scale, either in war or in other matters.

21. On the whole, the conclusions I have drawn from the proofs quoted may, I believe, safely be relied on. Assuredly they will not be disturbed either by the lays of a poet displaying the exaggeration of his craft, or by the compositions of the chroniclers that are attractive at truth's expense, the subjects they treat of being out of the reach of evidence, and time having robbed most of them of historical value by enthroning them in the region of legend. Turning from

these, we can rest satisfied with having proceeded upon the clearest data, and having arrived at conclusions as exact as can be expected in matters of such antiquity. To come to this war; despite the known disposition of the actors in a struggle to overrate its importance, and when it is over to return to their admiration of earlier events, yet an examination of the facts will show that it was much greater than the wars which preceded it.

22. With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on, some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said. And with reference to the narrative events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible. My conclusions have cost me some labour from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eyewitnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other. The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content. In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.

5. Agathias (c. 537-582 AD)

Histories

A glamor of success surrounds the triumphs and trophies of war, the destruction and aggrandizement of states, and all the marvelous pageant of great events. Such prizes bring glory and pleasure to their fortunate winners, and yet, when those winners have departed this life and passed into the other world, they do not find it easy to carry their achievements with them. Oblivion breaks in and covers them, until she has distorted the true course of events; and when even the witnesses have departed in their turn, the knowledge of the facts is extinguished with them and dispersed into nothingness. Mere memory is thus an unprofitable illusion that possesses no permanence or power to keep abreast with time in its eternal prolongation. In my belief, the heroes who have deliberately risked their lives for their country or taken the burdens of others upon their shoulders, would never have done what they did in the certainty that, when they had reached the height of human achievement, their fame would perish with them and would dissolve into nothing within the short span of their own lifetimes, unless what can only be regarded as a divine Providence had fortified the weakness of human nature by introducing the blessings and the hopes that flow from the Art of History.

It was . . . my intention to devote my time to Poetry and never voluntarily to abandon these vivacious and delightful pursuits, but to follow the precepts of Delphi and to 'know my own business.' I happened, however, to have been born into a generation in which great wars broke out unexpectedly in many parts of the world, a number of uncivilized peoples migrated to new homes, and the life of the entire human race was upheaved by a series of obscure and incredible events with extraordinary denouements, by violent oscillations of fortune, and by the extermination of races, the enslavement of populations and the settlement of others in their place. The spectacle of these and other similar portents inspired me with a certain misgiving as to whether I might not be sinning against the light in leaving unrecorded and unmentioned, so far as I was concerned, events of such supreme interest and importance

which might have a positive value for posterity. I arrived at the conclusion that it would not be beyond my province to make some kind of experiment in historical writing, in order that my whole life might not be spent upon romance and the curiosities of literature, but might bear some practical fruit as well. This impulse of mine was further strengthened and stimulated by pressure and encouragement from many of my friends . . . A high official in the Civil Service . . . recommended to me as the truer view that History was not far removed from Poetry, and that the two arts were sisters in the same family, with nothing, conceivably, except the versification to distinguish them from one another. I was to consider myself equally at home in both camps and was to make my move and set to work with corresponding confidence and energy.

In character, my work will not resemble that of some of my contemporaries. There are, of course, others at the present time who have already set their hands to the same task, but for the most part they have paid slight regard to the truth or to the narration of occurrences as they were actually shaped by Fortune and have elected instead to flatter and compliment a number of persons in high places in so transparent a fashion that no one else would believe them, even if they happened occasionally to tell the truth. The experts declare, however, that the exaggeration of an individual's merits is the function of journalism and journalism alone; while History, though she too does not refuse in principle to pay a tribute to successful achievement, declines, I conceive, to accept this as her aim and characteristic. Where the physiognomy of the events suggests praise or blame, History is not at liberty to strain or embroider the facts . . . I am resolved in my case, to make the truth my first consideration, whatever the consequences may be.

Other Ancient and Medieval Opinions

Readings

1. Herodotus

Histories (tr Aubrey de Selincourt)

Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time and great and marvellous deeds — some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians — may not be w/thout their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other.

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, his Researches are set down here to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own peoples; and more particularly, to show how they came into conflict.

2. Geoffrey of Monmouth

The History of the Kings of Britain (tr Lewis Thorpe)

Folio Society, 1969

Dedication

Whenever I have chanced to think about the history of the kings of Britain, on those occasions when I have been turning over a great many such matters in my mind, it has seemed a remarkable thing to me that, apart from such mention of them as Gildas and Bede had each made in a brilliant book on the subject, I have not been able to discover anything at all on the kings who lived here before the Incarnation of Christ, or indeed about Arthur and all the others who followed on after the Incarnation. Yet the deeds of these men were such that they deserve to be praised for all time. What is more, these deeds were handed joyfully down in oral tradition, just as if they had been committed to writing, by many peoples who had only their memory to rely on.

At a time when I was giving a good deal of attention to such matters, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the art of public speaking and well informed about the history of foreign countries, presented me with a certain very ancient book written in the British language. This book, attractively composed to form a consecutive and orderly narrative, set out all the deeds of these men, from Brutus, the first King of the Britons, down to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo. At Walter's request I have taken the trouble to translate the book into Latin, although, indeed I have been content with my own expressions and my own homely style and I have gathered no gaudy flowers of speech in other men's gardens. If I had adorned my page with high-flown rhetorical figures, I should have bored my readers, for they would have been forced to spend more time in discovering the meaning of my words than in following the story.

3.Procopius

The Secret History (tr G A Williamson)

Folio Society,1990 (Penguin 1966)

FOREWORD

The Purpose of this Book

In recording everything that the Roman people has experienced in successive wars up to the time of writing I have followed this plan — that of arranging all the events described as far as possible in accordance with the actual times and places. But from now on I shall no longer keep to that method: in this volume I shall set down every single thing that has happened anywhere in the Roman Empire. The reason is simple. As long as those responsible for what happened were still alive, it was out of the question to tell the story in the way that it deserved. For it was impossible either to avoid detection by swarms of spies, or if caught to escape death in its most agonising form. Indeed, even in the company of my nearest relations I felt far from safe. Then again, the case of many events which in my earlier volumes I did venture to relate I dared not reveal the reasons for what happened. So in this part of my work I feel it my duty to reveal both the events hitherto passed over in silence and the reasons for the events already described.

But as I embark on a new undertaking of a difficult and extraordinarily baffling character, concerned as it is with Justinian and Theodora and the lives they lived, my teeth chatter and I find myself recoiling as far as possible from the task; for I envisage the probability that what I am now about to write will appear incredible and unconvincing to future generations. And again, when in the long course of time the story seems to belong to a rather distant past, I am afraid that I shall be regarded as a mere teller of fairy tales or listed among the tragic poets. One thing, however, gives me confidence to shoulder my heavy task without flinching: my account has no lack of witnesses to vouch for its truth. For my own contemporaries are witnesses fully acquainted with the incidents described, and will pass on to future ages an incontrovertible conviction that these have been faithfully recorded.

And yet there was something else which, when I was all agog to get to work on this volume, again and again held me back for weeks on end. For I inclined to the view that the happiness of our grandchildren would be endangered by my revelations, since it is the deeds of blackest dye that stand in greatest need of being concealed from future generations, rather than they should come to the ears of monarchs as an example to be imitated. For most men in positions of power invariably, through sheer ignorance, slip readily into imitation of their predecessors' vices, and it is to the misdeeds of earlier rulers that they invariably find it easier and less troublesome to turn. But later on I was encouraged to write the story of these events by this reflection — it will surely be evident to future monarchs that the penalty of their misdeeds is almost certain to overtake them, just as it fell upon the persons described in this book. Then again, their own conduct and character will in turn be recorded for all time; and that will perhaps make them less ready to transgress. For how could the licentious life of Semiramis or the dementia of Sardanapalus and Nero have been known to anyone in later days, if contemporary historians had not left these things on record? Apart from this, those who in the future, if so it happens, are similarly ill-used by the ruling powers will not find this record altogether useless; for it is always comforting for those in distress to know that they are not the only ones on whom these blows have fallen.

That is my justification for first recounting the contemptible conduct of Belisarius, and then revealing the equally contemptible conduct of Justinian and Theodora.

4.Plutarch

'Lycurgus' from **Plutarch on Sparta** (tr Richard J A Talbert)

Penguin, Harmondsworth,1988

Generally speaking it is impossible to make any undisputed statement about Lycurgus the lawgiver, since conflicting accounts have been given of his ancestry, his travels, his death, and above all his activity with respect to his laws and government; but there is least agreement about the period in which the man lived. Some claim that he was in his prime at the same time as Iphitus and was his partner in instituting the Olympic truce. Among those who take this view is Aristotle the philosopher, adducing as proof the discus with Lycurgus' name inscribed on it preserved at Olympia. But others like Eratosthenes and Apollodorus, who calculate his period by the succession of kings at Sparta, make the claim that he lived a great many years before the First Olympiad. Timaeus conjectures that there were two Lycurguses at Sparta at different times, and that the achievements of both were attributed to one because of his renown. The older one might have lived close to Homer's time: there are some who think that he even met Homer in person. Xenophon, too, suggests a very early date in the passage where he states that Lycurgus lived in the time of the Heraclids. Now of course the most recent Spartan kings were in fact Heraclids by ancestry, but Xenophon evidently also wanted to call the first kings Heraclids, as being closely connected with Heracles. Nonetheless, even though this is such a muddled historical topic, we shall attempt to present an account of Lycurgus by following those treatments which offer the smallest contradictions or the most distinguished authorities.

The poet Simonides maintains that Lycurgus' father was not Eunomus, but that both Lycurgus and Eunomus were the sons of Prytanis. Nearly all others, however, trace his genealogy differently, as follows: Procles, son of Aristodemus, was the father of Sous; Eurypon was Sous' son; Prytanis was Eurypon's son; Eunomus was Prytanis' son; Eunomus had Polydectes by his first wife, and Lycurgus was his younger son by a second wife, Dionassa. This is the account given by Dieutychidas, which puts Lycurgus in the fifth generation after Procles and in the tenth after Heracles.

5. Tacitus

The Annals of Imperial Rome (tr Michael Grant)

Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987

When Rome was first a city, its rulers were kings. Then Lucius Junius Brutus created the consulate and free Republican institutions in general. Dictatorships were assumed in emergencies. A Council of Ten did not last more than two years; and then there was a short-lived arrangement by which senior army officers — the commanders of contingents provided by the tribes — possessed consular authority. Subsequently Cinna and Sulla set up autocracies, but they too were brief. Soon Pompey and Crassus acquired predominant positions, but rapidly lost them to Caesar. Next, the military strength which Lepidus and Antony had built up was absorbed by Augustus. He found the whole state exhausted by internal dissensions, and established over it a personal regime known as the Principate.

Famous writers have recorded Rome's early glories and disasters. The Augustan Age, too, had its distinguished historians. But then the rising tide of flattery exercised a deterrent effect. The reigns of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were described during their lifetimes in fictitious terms, for fear of the consequences; whereas the accounts written after their deaths were influenced by still raging animosities.

So I have decided to say a little about Augustus, with special attention to his last period, and then go on to the reign of Tiberius and what followed. I shall write without indignation or partisanship: in my case the customary incentives to these are lacking.

6.Arrian

History of Alexander and Indica (tr P A Brunt), vol 1

Loeb, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1976

Preface

Wherever Ptolemy son of Lagus and Aristobulus son of Aristobulus have both given the same accounts of Alexander son of Philip, it is my practice to record what they say as completely true, but where they differ, to select the version I regard as more trustworthy and also better worth telling. In fact other writers have given a variety of accounts of Alexander, nor is there any other figure of whom there are more historians who are more contradictory of each other, but in my view Ptolemy and Aristobulus are more trustworthy in their narrative, since Aristobulus took part in King Alexander's expedition, and Ptolemy not only did the same, but as he himself was a king, mendacity would have been more dishonourable for him than for anyone else; again, both wrote when Alexander was dead and neither was under any constraint or hope of gain to make him set down anything but what actually happened. However, I have also recorded some statements made in other accounts of others, when I thought them worth mention and not entirely untrustworthy, but only as tales told of Alexander. Anyone who is surprised that with so many historians already in the field it should have occurred to me too to compose this history should express his surprise only after perusing all their works and then reading mine.

7. Josephus

The Jewish War (tr G A Williamson and E Mary Smallwood)

Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1981

Preface

The war of the Jews against the Romans was the greatest of our time; greater too, perhaps, than any recorded struggle whether between cities or nations. Yet persons with no first-hand knowledge, accepting baseless and inconsistent stories on hearsay, have written garbled accounts of it, while those of eyewitnesses have been falsified either to flatter the Romans or to vilify the Jews, eulogy or abuse being substituted for factual record. So for the benefit of the Emperor's subjects I have decided to translate into Greek the books which I wrote some time ago in my native language for circulation among non-Greek speakers inland. I myself, Josephus, son of Matthias, am a Hebrew by race, and a priest from Jerusalem; in the early stages I fought against the Romans, and of the later events I was an unwilling witness.

This upheaval, as I said, was the greatest of all time; and when it occurred Rome herself was in a most unsettled state. Jewish revolutionaries took advantage of the general disturbance; they had vast amounts of men and money; and so widespread was the ferment that some were filled with hope of gain, others with fear of loss, by the state of affairs in the East; for the Jews expected all their Mesopotamian brethren to join their insurrection. From another side Roman supremacy was being challenged by the Gauls on their borders, and the Celts were restive — in fact after Nero's death disorder reigned everywhere. Presented with this opportunity many aspired to the imperial throne, while the soldiery were eager for a transference of power as a means of enriching themselves.

I therefore thought it inexcusable, when such issues were involved, to see the truth misrepresented and to take no notice. Parthians, Babylonians, Southern Arabians, Mesopotamian Jews, and Adiabeniens, thanks to my labours, were accurately informed of the causes of the war, the sufferings it involved, and its disastrous ending. Were the Greeks and those Romans who took no part in it to remain ignorant of the facts, deluded with flattery or fiction? Yet the writers I have in mind claim to be writing history, though besides getting all their facts wrong they seem to me to miss their target altogether. For they wish to establish the greatness of the Romans while all the time disparaging and deriding the actions of the Jews. But I do not see how men can prove themselves great by overcoming feeble opponents! Again, they are not impressed by the length of the war, the vastness of the Roman forces which endured such hardships, and the genius of their commanders, whose strenuous endeavours before Jerusalem will bring them little glory if the difficulties they overcame are belittled.

However, it is not my intention to counter the champions of the Romans by exaggerating the heroism of my own countrymen: I shall state the facts accurately and impartially. At the same time the language in which I record the events will reflect my own feelings and emotions; for I must permit myself to bewail my country's tragedy. She was destroyed by internal dissensions, and the Romans who so unwillingly set fire to the Temple were brought in by the Jews' self-appointed rulers, as Titus Caesar, the Temple's destroyer, has testified. For throughout the war he pitied the common people, who were helpless against the partisans; and over and over again he delayed the capture of the city and prolonged the siege in the hope that the ringleaders would submit. If anyone criticizes me for the accusations I bring against the

party chiefs and their gangs of bandits, or for my laments over the misfortunes of my country, he must pardon my weakness, regardless of the rules of historical writing. For it so happened that of all the cities under Roman rule our own reached the highest summit of prosperity, and in turn fell into the lowest depths of misery; the misfortunes of all other races since the beginning of history, compared with those of the Jews, seem small; and for our misfortunes we have only ourselves to blame. How then could I master my feelings? If anyone is disposed to pass harsh judgement on my emotion he must remember that the facts belong to the story and that only the grief is the writer's.

On the other hand criticism may fairly be levelled at those Greek scholars who, knowing that the wars of the past fade into insignificance beside the astonishing events of their own times, sit in judgement upon the latter and severely censure those who make an effort to record them. For though their own flow of words is greater, their historical sense is inferior. They write histories themselves about the Assyrians and Medes, implying that the earlier writers did not do the work properly. Yet they are no more a match for them as writers than as thinkers. For the old historians were all eager to set down the events of their own lifetimes, and their participation in these events gave vitality to their accounts, while it was impossible to depart from the truth without being detected. Surely to leave a permanent record of events not previously recorded for the benefit of posterity is worthy of the highest praise; and the real worker is not the man who merely changes the order and arrangement of another man's work, but the one who has something new to say and constructs a historical edifice of his own. I myself have gone to great trouble and expense, though an alien, so that I may offer to the Greeks and Romans a permanent record of their triumphs: native writers, on the other hand, though the chance of profit from litigation finds them possessed of ready tongue and an unlimited flow of words, when they turn to history (which requires them to speak the truth after laboriously collecting the facts) appear to be gagged, and pass over to inferior writers unaware of the facts the task of recording the achievements of the great. I am determined therefore to respect the truth of history, though it has been neglected by the Greeks.

An account of the early history of the Jews, their origin, their exodus from Egypt, the extent of their wanderings and subsequent conquests, and their removal from their country, would, I think, be out of place here, and in any case unnecessary; for many Jews before me have accurately recorded the doings of our ancestors, and their accounts have been translated into Greek with very few mistakes. But where the Greek historians and our own prophets left off I shall begin my story; and I shall relate the events of the war which I witnessed in great detail and with all the completeness of which I am capable, whereas events before my time will be run over in brief outline.

Starting with Antiochus Epiphanes, who stormed Jerusalem and after holding it for three and a half years was driven out of the country by the Hasmonaeans, I shall explain how their descendants by their struggles for the throne forced Pompey and the Romans to intervene; how Antipater's son Herod brought in Sosius and put an end to the Hasmonaean dynasty; how the people revolted after Herod's death, when Augustus was Roman Emperor and Quintilius Varus the local governor; and how in the twelfth year of Nero's reign the war broke out, with disastrous results to Cestius and remarkable successes for Jewish arms in the early encounters.

The fortification of the neighbouring towns will occupy us next; and the decision of Nero, in whom Cestius' defeats had aroused fears for the whole Empire, to give Vespasian supreme command; the invasion of Jewish territory by Vespasian assisted by his elder son; the size of the Roman army and allied contingents with which he overran Galilee; and the capture of the Galilean towns, some by all-out assault, some by negotiation. At this point I must explain the Roman system of military discipline and legionary training, and describe the dimensions and

features of the two Galilees and the limits of Judaea, with the peculiarities of the country, especially the lakes and springs. Of the fate of each of the captured towns I shall give an exact account based on my own observations and the part I played. It would be pointless to draw a veil over my own misfortunes with which my readers are familiar.

Next will come the death of Nero at the moment when Jewish hopes were waning; the interruption of Vespasian's advance on Jerusalem by his summons to the throne; the encouragement he received from portents, and the upheavals in Rome; the insistence of his soldiers on making him emperor despite his protests; the outbreak of party strife among the Jews following his departure for Egypt to settle the affairs of the Empire; and the tyranny and dissensions of the party chiefs.

An account must next be given of the second invasion, mounted in Egypt by Titus; the method, place, and size of his troop concentrations; the state of the party-riven City when he arrived; the series of assaults and the erection of the platforms; the siting and measurements of the three protecting walls; the defences of the City and the plan of the Temple and Sanctuary; all the exact measurements of these and of the altar; certain customs of the feasts, the seven grades of purity, the priestly ministrations, the priestly and high-priestly vestments; and a description of the Holy of Holies. I shall conceal nothing, and add nothing to the published facts.

Then I shall contrast the brutality of the party chiefs towards their countrymen with the clemency of the Romans towards aliens, and the persistence with which Titus showed his anxiety to save the City and the Sanctuary by inviting the insurgents to come to terms. In discussing the sufferings of the people and the calamities that led to their final defeat, I shall consider how far they were due to enemy action, how far to party strife, and how far to starvation. My account will include the misfortunes of the deserters and the punishments inflicted on the prisoners; the burning of the Sanctuary despite Caesar's disapproval and the number of sacred treasures snatched from the flames; the capture of the entire City and the signs and wonders that preceded it; the arrest of the party chiefs, the number of people enslaved and the fates that befell them; the way in which the Romans disposed of the last remnants of the war, demolishing the ramparts of every fort; the progress of Titus through the whole country to establish order, and his return to Italy and triumphal celebrations.

All this I have embraced in seven books. To those who took part in the war or have ascertained the facts I have left no ground for complaint or criticism; it is for those who love the truth, not those who seek entertainment, that I have written. I will now begin my story where I began my summary

R G Collingwood

The Idea of History

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961

History is concerned neither with the past by itself nor with the historian's thoughts about it by itself but the two things in mutual relations.

All history is the history of thought.

In history ... fact ... is arrived at inferentially by a process of interpreting data according to a complicated system of rules and assumptions. A theory of historical knowledge would discover what these rules and assumptions are ... How is historical knowledge possible? How and under what conditions can the historian know facts which, being now beyond recall or repetition, cannot be for him objects of perception?

Leopold von Ranke

To history has been assigned ...

To history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high offices this work does not aspire: it wants only to show what actually happened (how it really is) (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).

The Venerable Bede (d.735)

My brother...

My brother, you are familiar with the usage of the Roman Church, in which you were brought up. But if you have found customs, whether in the Roman, Gallican, or any other Churches that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of England, which is still young in the Faith, whatever you can profitably learn from the Churches. For things should not be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things.