THE "CONTEMPORARY" ASPECT

OF HISTORY

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Preface

Lavisse once said to his students: "We who live intellectually in the past should not forget that the majority of men live in the present and are concerned about the future." It was as one of the majority, rather than of the minority, that I turned to the subject of this text. I had often wondered about the marked hiatus in history between the end of historical narratives and the present time. Indeed, it seemed that history faded away towards the near end of time and that this phenomenon might, from chronological juxtaposition, be associated with another vague aspect of history, the utilitarian present. To read history was, assuredly, to gain the habit of historical thinking, to acquire a sense of the indivisibility of life, to see one's self and one's society from the evolutionary point of view, to learn to discriminate between transitory and perpetual values, to become appraised of the need to exercise curiosity towards institutions and compassion towards men, to embrace the aesthetic pleasure of language in high service and, above all, to incline to deem it wise to court every opinion but to hesitate before espousing any one. But these seeming merits, and others that sprang to mind beside them, appeared as attitudes of the intellect that haunted me in the study but became furtive, coy things in the world of practical affairs. So, curious about the river of history where it went underground and thinking that, maybe, it gushed forth somewhere as a spring of living waters, I seized upon the connotations customary to "contemporary history" as covering, more or less, both ends of an interesting field of enquiry.
Surprisingly, I found that discursive literature on contemporary history was not to be found. Only two brief articles touched upon the subject and, for the balance, I had to scan all the texts within my reach for a few fleeting references to the problems connected with narration of the last part of the past. Further, to acquire this negative information, I had to scan each book with some care as, in the matter of this neglected subject, indexes were never helpful. And, in addition, I was unable to find amongst my acquaintances anyone who had considered the contemporary aspect of history or who had much inclination so to do.

As a consequence of these things this work has emerged as a discourse on "contemporary" history in subordination to history and concerned as much with the genus as the species. Secondly, with little comparative criticism possible on the primary facet of the subject, and with an elaboration of history necessary such as led on to consideration of the narration of its latest period, footnotes are scanty and personal conceptions plentiful. Thirdly, I have had to be content to trace the subterranean flow of the river of history and to set my period near the spring of living waters.

While I think it cumbersome and unnecessary to give the living their usual prefixes such as Mr., Professor, Dr., and so on, I have retained these designations as far as was consonant with euphony and textual form; this to show a student's respect for those who stand where he aspires to rise.

Finally, my thanks are singular. My mentor is my only creditor. At times, when I asked of him an egg, it seemed he made me nurse-maid to a scorpion; but always, when I asked for bread, he sent me away heavy-laden, and not with stones.
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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary aspect of that very general subject "history" is its most difficult and exacting sphere. This distinction it does not owe exclusively to Professor Croce's well-known and variously accepted paradox. Indeed, the claim that "all history is contemporary history" is a paradox as long as the word "contemporary" or the word "history" are each permitted to remain ambiguous. If we concede history as denoting a mode of present thought projected against the content of past time and "think and speak rigorously" of the adjective "contemporary", it appears beyond argument that all history is in the immediate moment "now", or when it is thought. But then what Professor Croce really said was that "every true history is contemporary history" and he explained that "if we think and speak rigorously, the term 'contemporaneous' can be applied only to that history which comes 'into being immediately after the act which is being accomplished as consciousness of that act'. In other words, history is qualified by the word "true" and an implication of the statement is that truth, in its historical application, is in consciousness immediately after the act is done that made history. Afterwards, presumably, truth disappears or recedes and history that is not "consciousness of that act" is not true. Here, too, there could be a considerable measure of unanimity for who will question the effervescence of historical truth? Or, perhaps, the intention is that (history being a unity, and a progressive, living and dynamic whole) its truth must be sought in the unfolding present.

3. ibid., p.12.
4. ibid., p.11.
To deny this is to deny the unity of history; and who is so bold? Our point is that "contemporary history" is a phrase that may be conceived in innumerable ways depending upon what is intended by the word "history" and what qualification the adjective is thought to make.

However we view history the point of junction between that part of it that is "past" and that part of it that is "present" is the most intricate and obscure recess of our conception. Be history the content of time, or a mode of thought, or past "facts" and "events", or a narrative, or an organic whole, or a peculiar enquiry; or whatever it may be thought to be, the presence of the attributive adjective "contemporary" implies its co-existence in time with something or some one. This state of co-existence in time must refer to history within the experience of a presently existing human mind if it is to present a problem; if it refers to a state of co-existence beyond the experience of a presently existing human mind it is indistinguishable from what is meant by "fact" or "event" in their common historical usage. Thus, "contemporary" must signify history in the vicinity of that imperceptible point where past and present unite, and this is the point where "history" undefined as one thing or another is cast about in a confusion of words and emerges in the play of a paradox.

If we are to set aside the meanings that are possible, and are to remain face to face with one conception of contemporary history and one alone, it is necessary to state roughly our understanding of contemporary history and then, more precisely, the character of the history which we intend. To aid us in this first step we have this statement from Flavius Josephus:

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"The ancients all devoted themselves to writing the history of their own times in which their personal participation in events gave clarity to their presentation and every falsehood was certain of exposure by a public that knew the facts. To place on record events never previously related and to make contemporary history accessible to later generations is an activity deserving of notice and commendation." 5

So, contemporary history has a value peculiar to itself, it is subjected to a criticism other history escapes and its narration disposes of a duty we owe to the future. If our investigation requires justification these considerations should suffice. We would say, no doubt, that "personal participation in events tends to give a kind of clarity to their presentation" and that "every falsehood was liable to exposure by a public that knew the facts" but, of our duty to the future, it is improbable that we would have more or less to say.

History is, as we have suggested, several things and contemporary history is most of these: as Flavius Josephus implies it is at least two things; the events that happen, on the one hand, and, on the other, the posterior narrative record of their happening. It is in the peculiar relationship in which the historian stands to these events and their narration that the principal distinction between history and contemporary history lies. The contemporary historian is one with the events, breathing their air, seeing them, hearing them, feeling them; a sentient soul, catching here a whisper, there an odour, and anon the momentary flicker of light on shade. But these are ephemeral, and as fleeting; they cast up nothing that moth or rust may corrupt, they leave no documents, they need no tombs; only the human mind bears a trace of them, and that but a moment,

then all is gone. Yet, these transient incidentals are breath in the nostrils of the dead past, they are as the ultimate intangible things that give difference to life and death, the things that raise narrative history from a reconstruction of the past to a resurrection of its life.
The historian of the longer vista may play upon the flotsam and jetsam from the past with imagination that rises to the highest flights, but he is ever an alien in their original place in time, out of harmony with the momentary flux of its human passions, a barbarian denied access to its inner mysteries. It is in the gift of the contemporary historian that he is intimate with his times, that he partakes of their moods, that he shares their passwords; and it is the cardinal worth of contemporary history that it bears this quickened acquaintance.

So much may be said of contemporary history as commonly understood. Later we may have to re-order this outline; at the moment the question is: What are we to understand by the term "history"?

History as a topic for discussion is as elusive as those ephemerals of which we spoke. Elusive, firstly, because "history" is an ambiguous word; secondly, because its ambiguity is not entirely removed by definition; and, thirdly, because at best it embraces the inconstant and abstract concept of men in all their variety reacting to ever varying perceptions in that "time that travels in divers paces with divers persons". Indeed, the word implies ideally the total story of mankind in time and space with all that entails of immensity and multiplication of dimensions. At the other end it is used in reference to the last moment or two in the experience of any one of us, experience that has for content a breath,

6. "As You Like It", Act III Sc. III.
for duration the measure separating ticks from tocks and, for its world, the inches of this page. Then between these extremes end about and within them it has shades of meaning and is used with degrees of precision and imprecision; and, further, in the course of that same time that is so much of its content, it has suffered shifts of meaning that help to make confusion worse confounded. By what star, then, are we to set our course?

It is a principle of biography that the unity and integrity of a life should be traced through its development and evolution up to its crowning achievement: it is the end that distinguishes and enables us, with sure touch, to unravel all the means. So with history. By starting with a statement of its end product we have a bearing, and its winds and tides shall not prevail. Is it to be history that has as its end knowledge for the sake of knowledge? Or training for the mind? Or the appeasement of curiosity? Or political training? Or the establishment of scientific laws? Or the enunciation of moral precepts? Or is it to be history ending in any of the hundred and one directions in which its subject matter may find emphasis? No; none of these will do; if for no better reason, because we want an end that characterizes the whole and not one or other of its parts.

The consummation of any study within a body of knowledge should be the point that links it to the life and practical affairs of men. Otherwise, it is a vain endeavour and as futile as filling bottomless barrows with sand. With this allowed, the study must contribute to the satisfaction of human wants and the alleviation of need. What then is the nature of mankind's wants and needs? Which of these is history to satisfy? And how is it to do it? We can, of course attempt no more than generalizations
in reply to these questions for the wants of man are legion. But we know that his needs are now, that they are in the present, and we know that they arise from the environment that surrounds him, his wish for its betterment and the hope he has of realizing some ideal in it in the future. 

Man strives to improve his life and circumstances; as a child blindly, beating the air, without conscious purpose; but, come to manhood, he seeks to light his paths with reason and to direct his steps to worthwhile ends. He wants light to see, and seeing to understand, and understanding to strive the better. But, understanding, he has not only to understand the somewhat passive environment about him but also that other entity his own active, thinking, willing, doing, hoping, fearing self. Then, he wants light to see and understand himself and the world about him; or, in his striving, elucidation for the mind and inspiration for the soul. These are great and ever present needs and they give us a point where the study of history could find union with the life and practical affairs of ever-striving men. Men want to understand themselves in the present, they want elucidation for the mind of the present, they want inspiration for the heart of the present: Can history offer some satisfaction for these wants?

If the content of history is the total story of mankind in time and space the thread of that story must be the perpetual efforts of men to improve their lot. The story of history must have at its roots, and behind the pomp and ceremony and sound and fury, a tale to tell of the striving of men who were fashioned in moulds as our own. Be it otherwise, either history is not a record of mankind or human nature has changed to a degree of which, we are not commonly aware. Then, surely, the story it has to tell should be a very human story, tender with sympathy and mellow
with age, pregnant with the inspiration of heroic effort and ready to bear to humanity all the light and wisdom of its total past experience. It could show a man himself as he has been and remind him that he is, in all probability, much the same to-day. It could show him his environment as it has appeared to others before him and assist him to understand it to-day. It could show him the various relations in which man has stood to man and explain his standing with his fellows to-day. It could display the way of ideas with men and teach him to walk humbly with them to-day.

It could show him what men at their noblest and best have been, while still men, and touch him to high resolution and fearless courage to-day. In brief, it could bring to him, of its very humanity, that illumination for the mind or that spur to the heart which are not the least of his needs to-day.

Men woo Clio, not Clio men. She can do much for them but is chary in giving of her gifts and demands long and arduous courting. Man has in his need to turn to history and delve for his satisfactions but (by the progressive division of labour) there are, to-day, some of his kind to meet him half-way. The junction of the student (in the specialist, not superior, sense) and the everyday man is the historical narrative, the story that bears light and inspiration for the one and is the culmination of the effort of the other. It is the characteristic that sets apart the history of which we speak, it is the end product that binds together all the means, and it is that which, linking history and the practical affairs of men, is the consummation of history as endeavour within a body of knowledge. It is, then, history as it culminates in narrative which we wish to discuss; such history as it takes pattern in the mind of the
maker of the narrative from evidence of the interaction of men and time and space. It is, too, such history that we shall assume to be a higher genus of which "contemporary history" must be a species.

The historical narrative is, we have noted, the point of junction between a body of knowledge and the practical world of men's present affairs, and we may very well ask why access to and fro between knowledge and affairs should take this form. The historian, it is clear, will require a medium for transmitting his knowledge that enables him to convey the multi-dimensional picture that must form in his mind. On the other hand, the layman seeking knowledge requires it in a convenient, clear, and readily accessible form. Until our own day the spoken or the written word were the possible means that conformed with all these requirements and, of these, the written word was, in the main, the superior because it had the desirable qualities in the greater degree. In this twentieth century a remarkable change is promised from the development of contrivances for the preservation and later presentation of the sight and sound of man in time and space; but, for the present, the narrative is still the best medium we have for conveying the length and breadth of the past and its motion in time, and for doing this in a convenient, clear, and readily accessible form. If then, the narrative is the medium with this function, how does it function? And how efficiently?

Amongst our previous submissions we have seen that it is from the truth of human activity in the past that elucidation and inspiration for the present may come. But such truth has to be conveyed by means of a narrative from a man who knows to men who want, and the man who knows may, being a man, err deliberately or accidentally. "Deliberately" because a
tale of a kind can get action from men without conveying any truth from the past and the man in the historian's mantle may be more concerned to get action from men than to tell them truth. "Accidentally" because "to err is human" and nowhere is it easier to err than in the pursuit of truth. Then there is an exacting obligation on the historian to tell the truth if for no better reason (and what could be better ?) than that men are reposing faith in him. So the historian has a high office and we may wonder whether he can really discharge its exacting duties. What is this "truth"? And how far can the writer of historical narrative transmit it?

At the moment it is not necessary to investigate the question of historical truth in its entirety; it is sufficient to remember that absolute truth is unobtainable and that such relative truth as may be deduced from the story of man in time and space must be immense in volume and the sum of an infinity of detail. If, for example, we cut away the content of history so drastically as to leave only a catalogue of the names of wearers of crowns at all times and in all places we would have a very large volume devoted to the conveyance of an infinitesimal part of the whole relative truth. And for every crowned head there have been some hundreds of great heads and hundreds of additional volumes would be needed for nothing more than a record of their names! And so we could go on. No more than the truth about the name one in a million of men has borne. Nothing about what they did, thought, saw, attempted, hoped or feared; nothing of the world in which they lived, of the other men who lived with them, of their striving and the reasons for it or results of it; nothing indeed that would aid to understanding of the present or serve to touch the heart.
Clearly, if men could devote their lives to reading the truth of history, they could not hope to read more than a small part of that truth. Yet, men are reposing faith in their historians; they believe they tell them the truth. It appears, however, that this cannot be so; if the historian attempts to tell them the truth they cannot and will not read it; the former, because they have not the time; the latter, because it would be easier to battle on without understanding than gain it at such cost. Perhaps, after all, Henry Ford was right and history is "burk".

Mention of Henry Ford reminds us that we repose a considerable measure of faith (some more, some less) in the end products of what was his body of knowledge: that is we take it for granted that the motor-cars produced by the firm he established contain truth as revealed by the study of mechanics. But they do not contain all the truth that emanates from mechanical science or they would have, in one car, not one but a hundred kinds of engines and would be, for that matter, not just motor-cars but "triphibians" that combined in one every mechanical device ever invented. The point is that a motor-car contains only such mechanical truth as is necessary to make it a fit instrument for the satisfaction of a particular want or group of the wants of mankind. In other words, even when we allow for the differences between truth as it appears to the mechanic and truth as it takes form in the mind of the historian, what is needed is the part that assists now and in a particular direction. In the historical sphere we would substitute "outline" for "part" and think of the general knowledge that is derived from historical truth and assists us in the present in various ways. In his narrative the historian conveys the outline of truth as (in all sincerity) it appears to him. From the nature
of his subject matter general ideas emerge that enable us to understand ourselves and to see our world with greater clarity and, with all, are a spur to our souls. Such is the truth which the writer of historical narrative may convey and the degree to which he can discharge his duty.

Earlier we noted that the historical narrative was the best medium through which the historian could express himself in convenient, clear, and readily accessible form. So far we have discussed this narrative mainly from the point of view of the historian and the demand on him to give historical truth convenient, clear and readily accessible form. What, however, of those for whom he writes? What, to them, is convenient, clear and readily accessible form? Even an outline of truth may be presented in a narrative that is inconvenient, not at all clear and with its truth lodged in the recesses of its obscurity from a layman's point of view. Returning to Mr. Ford's motor-car we can see that it might be so inconvenient to use that, for the most part, we would prefer to manage without it; few of us are in possession of sufficient interest in mechanical truth to take pleasure in applying mechanical knowledge day after day in order to keep such a contraption in use. Similarly with history, few have sufficient interest in it to bother with it if it is cumbersome and ugly and, as we say, "more trouble than it is worth". The historical narrative must be attractive and easy to use while epitomizing historical truth; like the latest and best motor-cars it must have beauty in combination with utility; it must convey the outline of truth in beautiful form. "The outline of truth" for reasons already given: "in beautiful form" because the aesthetic is pleasing and what gives pleasure has the widest, most interested and
most patient audience, and such an audience gives history its most uni-
versal and effective union with the practical affairs of men. If you
care, the narrative requires an outline of truth to be useful and beauti-
ful form to ensure the greatest measure of use. The compilation of histor-
ical narrative is, in its final stages, an art; not pure art fashioning
solely to give pleasure but art akin to that we detect in the work of a
designer of ships or aircraft, art that conforms a thing to the forces
that play upon it in use. Thus, the historical narrative will be easy to
the eye, music in the ear and a stimulant for the heart; but, from the
pen of the supreme craftsmen, it will be something more. Ultimately, the
greatest art is expression of a present ideal, and the greatest historical
narrative will weave its outline of truth within the semblance of the fore-
mest ideal common to the time of writer and reader. Rarely, however, has
one ideal such omniscience, more frequently we have to be content that art
"either states a true thing or adorns a serviceable one" and be satisfied
when art in historical narrative does one or the other or both.

We have made this brief survey of the nexus between history and life
partly to assist definition of the history we intend and partly to stress
the highest end of history, the service of the present with truth.
The need for historical truth is in the present but that truth (whatever it
is) has to be made clear, convenient and readily accessible by the work of
a man and that man may or may not have this end in view. What, ideally,
is an historian?

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7. As Browning said it:

"It is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least."
(The Ring and the Book, L. 842)

To historians, too, it "remains the one way possible".
If we press back through time and shifts of meaning we find "history" first used by the Greeks to denote an enquiry or search for truth. The Greek "histor" was a quaestor or arbiter sifting and weighing evidence in an attempt to come to a just decision on some point of disputed rights, and, we must stress it, he was not only a searcher for truth but also a searcher for truth to aid present life. In other words, he was first a contributor to life and to this end was a searcher for truth; not truth for truth's sake but truth for life's sake was his motive. He could conduct his research from any one of three present motives: to be erudite, or to support one or other partisan, or to adjudicate upon a present problem and aid mankind. Need we argue the question as to which of these was the noblest and best end? The key to the history of history is its tendency towards one or other of these ends. Those periods which we assess the greatest in historical endeavour are those in which historians were most emancipated from erudite and partisan aims: history has been great in proportion as it has approached the ideal of positive aid to present life: if there is significance attachable to historical development in the last hundred odd years it is not that it has extended the accumulation of its materials immensely, that it has intensified its objectivity, that its sciences have reached high development, or that it has ascended to first place amongst the Humanities; it is, rather, that it has made these replies to the greater demands of life. In part these responses to greater needs have necessitated division of labour and specialisation of the functions of the ancient quaestor; truth was needed to aid the present but it was insufficient in quantity and quality, the quaestor had to prepare himself for his higher function. Hence the intensive specialization of the
nineteenth century upon research. Hence too, we may conjecture, Lord Acton's emphasis on moral judgments at the end of the century when the season of seedtime was giving to the season of harvest. Perhaps a time will come when the "high-minded Victorian gentleman" will have some of his eminence attributable to the wholeness of his conception of the function of history, to his sense that it should be devoted to the service of justice and to that very high-mindedness that declined to accept erudition (even such as his own) as an end in itself. His instructions to the contributors to the Cambridge Modern History are instinct with the idea of garnering the truth revealed and making it available for use. It will be claimed that Lord Acton made a plea for moral judgment on historical characters and past events and that his aim with the Cambridge History was to aid students not judges. But we must remember that he stood in the mists at the dawn of a new day seeing much and sensing more; he saw that judgments could and should be made but failed to stress the futility of judging the past except as an aid to the present; and he stressed assistance for students wisely enough for surely students are the stuff of which arbiters are made. History, to say the least of it, is preparatory to adjudication. If we concede that in conformity with the progressive division of labour the search for truth has become a specialized function we cannot deny that the aim of the specialist's work is to enable others to judge of the present and that his endeavours must be oriented towards this end. The

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man serving truth should contribute to, and the man serving his own ends
should be subjected to, the man whose service is to do justly: this is
the high calling of history, that it contributes to the subjection of the
mean and to the support of right against wrong. The ideal historian of
to-day is a man who contributes means for men who have to do justly.

The historical narrative consummates the work of the specialist
researcher for truth and is the presentation of his findings. It is right
that he goes so far and no further for judgment in the realm of any present
human affairs demands of a man much that is not learnt in the student's
cloister. But the prime end of the narrative is use beyond the confines
of the study. When it attains to anything else it is not the culmination
of history but, at best, a contribution towards that end. All the labour
of historians must have as its goal a narrative that conveys truth to inspire
and enlighten those with decisions to make in the present work-a-day world.
The narrative may entertain and please, but, if it is to be a historical
narrative, these characteristics are means to its ultimate end and not,
as in a literary narrative, ends in themselves. For the toiling travellers
in the wilderness of the past the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of
fire by night is a narrative that will not only be bought and sold in the
market place but will also be sought there, read there and, above all, will
be of use there. It is, no doubt, for Joshuas to subdue the promised land
of the present, but it is the part of historians, as it was the part of
Moses, to fashion the wherewithal and to persist in the pursuit of duty
to the Mountains of Moab, and to within sight of the field for human striving
beyond Jordan.
CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF HISTORY

If history is to be conceived as a body of knowledge that assists men with truth in their practical affairs, and which does so through the historical narrative, the nature of that truth and the sources of it demand examination. History is a vast subject, its content is immense. It stretches to the uttermost the capacity of the human mind to grasp and comprehend. This, as it would seem, explains the variety in which its essential qualities have been perceived. The appearance of the whole study has varied like faces in a fire: to Seeley, politics; to Bury, a science; to Carlyle, heroes; to Dionysius and Bolingbrooke, a philosophy; to Marx and his train, economics; to Bacon, the road to wisdom; to Sir Robert Walpole, lies; to Henry Ford, "bunk"; and so we could go on showing it as to this one, that, to that one, this. 1 If we are to be concerned with history to the exclusion of any or all of these ideas and are to gain some understanding of what it is and not what it appears to be, and, further, are to elaborate our understanding of historical truth, we must penetrate to the heart of the matter and reveal its nature or essential qualities. And if some distinction is assumed to exist between history, the genus, and contemporary history, the species, we should aim to express the latter in terms of the nature of the former. We have defined our history as that which serves the present with truth and now ask: From whence

1. Bolingbrooke really said that others said it.

The production of a historical narrative that transmits truth of the past implies two things: first, knowledge of the past that is true and second, the work of a historian engaged in deriving that true knowledge and presenting it. Then the nature of that knowledge and the nature of that work are next in our order of interests.

There are two kinds of truth contained in knowledge of the past; there is the truth of fact that is to some extent demonstrable to our senses, and behind such established fact a higher truth derived from these facts. As the higher truth is dependent upon the prior establishment of facts our immediate concern is with the facts and their establishment. These facts must become endowed with that characteristic which we commonly term "real"; that is, they must be as evident to us as the things that happen to-day beyond the range of our immediate observation but of which we get knowledge that we believe to be more or less true. The past cannot, clearly enough, be brought within the range of our immediate observation any more than (and, indeed, much less than) events on the other side of the world. With these events, reality is derived from direct sense perception or from sense perception through means we have for extending the range of our perception. We cannot feel the warmth or otherwise of the weather for to-day's test-match in England or see the "air-lift" to Berlin, yet the facts about either of these incidents are as real to us, and almost as true for us, as this morning's frost or the aeroplane we see through our window. We know the truth of a contemporaneous event distant from us in space (or, at least, an outline of that truth) through the agency of another person who is perceiving it directly through his senses. He may, of course, lie
and feel cold when he tells us he feels warmth but we are sure enough that
if the truth is warmth we shall have it from others in sufficient weight to
contradict the liar. We work on the assumptions that "you can’t fool all
of the people all of the time" and that truth will out. More important
to notice is that we get only part of the truth because we have not, as
yet, means for projecting concurrently all our senses beyond their natural
range and, secondly, that our faith in the statements of our agents tends
to be in proportion as these statements are liable to correction by other
direct witnesses. From the nature of the transmission something is left
to our imagination and other mental powers. From many witnesses, we have
our assurance that as little as possible is derived from the imagination or
bias of our agent and that as much as possible is factual truth. From
elsewhere in space we get an outline of the whole truth of events and are
sure the outline is true in so far as it is open to criticism and liable to
comparative tests.

Past events may be distant from us in time and space or just in
time. In the one case all the outline of the truth, in the other, almost
all of it, must come to us at second-hand. We are limited in time and
space to the range of our sense organs, and to know beyond these limits we
must get our knowledge from others within whose range the given events have
occurred. However, these our agents may convey their perceptions by one
or other of several means, and our agents in the past have been someways
more restricted as to these means than they would be today. Then, too,
their motive has not always been to be consciously our agents transmitting
"events never previously related" and making them "accessible to later
generations." For much the greater part they have been makers of the
sources of history as unwittingly as those antediluvians who threw broken
sherdson a heap. If, for truth of the past, we had to rely upon de-
liberate attempts to transmit it, we would have very limited material avail-
able to us and, from fewer witnesses, we would greatly increase the danger
implicit in the assumption that truth will out. Our knowledge of the
past is conveyed to us almost exclusively by the mute traces or markings
upon material things made by our fortuitous agents in the centuries that have
gone. Often, very often, the material impressed was writing material
bearing some exposition by a human mind for those who can read, but in great
part too were stories without words expressing human thought in the piling
of stones or fashioning of a tool. For the balance we have evidence de-
related from other systems of study such as anthropology, archaeology and ge-
ology. But the thing to notice is that much the greater part in quantity,
and especially in quality, is the flotsam and jetsam from the past that
bear upon than expressions of human minds reacting to their environments.
Let us look quickly at the principal categories of these psychological traces
of earlier life.

As we suggested, our ancestors left stories with and without words
and they left, too, some traces that were partly both. Everything that
was written in the past and has survived to our day is a source of history.
All the literature of past ages, the poetry, folk-tales, myths, legends
and transcriptions of speeches and sayings, narratives of travel and of
observation, autobiographies and contemporary histories yield us something
of earlier life for they are expressions of the human mind at a particular
point in time. We might say, broadly, that they are reactions of men to
their general environment. Then we have those traces in writing that are
commonly classed as documents: treaties, charters, grants, rolls, writs, correspondence, reports, announcements, legal and financial records, chronicles, memoirs, letters, wills, bonds and accounts, and all, again, contemporary expressions of the human mind but this time tending to convey to us the reactions of men to men within a general environment. From all these written traces knowledge of the past is derived from the content of the words, (although we gain something from acquaintance with the materials used for writing). In our next category more is gained from the material and its fashioning and less from the inscriptions upon it. This is a relatively small group embracing epigraphy (words cut on stones, statues, tombs, buildings and so on) and numismatics, which is the specialized study of coins. In this small category the words, the material and its fashioning all have a story to tell; that of the words is evident enough and explanation of the derivation of historical information from fashioned substance is most appropriately appended to our next and last sub-division. This last category includes all the things which men have made and which have survived the accidents of time: private and public buildings, the weapons of war and of the chase, costumes, tools and implements and, briefly, all the paraphernalia of human existence that has withstood change and decay. Behind the making of these things is thought occasioned by an environment, and they are then reflections through men of their environment. A house of wood indicates forests; of stone, quarries; of beauty, culture and leisure; with defences, social unrest; if large, opulence; if small or mean, poverty of some sort; and so on. But perhaps one of the best examples of the weight of evidence to be derived from a mute object is the case of a Roman harness for a horse. We have a great deal of
written, epigraphical and numismatical material revealing the Romans, their
Republic and Empire, and few people left as many wordless traces. But
in the absence of all of this we would know a lot about the Romans from a
horse's harness; and in the presence of all the material we have it makes
a tremendous contribution. The Romans failed to devise a harness that did
not press on a horse's windpipe; \(^\text{3}\) the remains of a harness or even a picture
of it tells us that without a word. Our whole vision of the world of
antiquity is, perhaps, upset by a simple mute object; in peace and war,
in the fields and on the highways over half of Europe, food for three horses
wasted or the energies of three lost. What, we may wonder, would the
history of Europe have been had the Romans been a people of sufficient origi
nality to avoid this uneconomic waste? It is clear that we have psychol
ogical sources of history of two kinds and that those that are devoid of
words may still convey much information to us. The important thing is that
historical sources are reactions of men to their environment or reflections
by men of their environment. The sources of history are psychological re
fections of life at a particular time and we must remember that, at best,
they convey only part of the whole truth and are to be trusted so far as
they may be tested by other witnesses.

It is convenient to see our sources as reflections and to liken the
makers of these sources to mirrors. As we have seen, the makers of the
sources of history act similarly to mirrors and reflect to us something of
their life and times. The greater the number of the reflections we have
the fuller our vision of a given time and the easier it is to compare the
reflections and, by the application of criticism, to exclude the distorted

and untrue and fill in the gaps in our whole picture. A reflection is an exposition of one man's thought at a particular time; if we can give it fixity in time we know something of that man's thought at that time; if we have several reflections we know something of what was thought generally at that time; and general thought is the general mental reaction to the life and circumstances at a time and, from knowledge of it, we can deduce the actualities that occasioned the thought. Looked at another way, what a man said or made implies motive and motive implies end and the ends towards which men move are their own or mankind's betterment. These ends may be good or bad ends but an account of the attempt at their attainment is a story of human striving for betterment. Then history is a record of human striving in the life and circumstances of given times as revealed in reflections of the thought of those times. We have no more than reflections of the mental life of our forerunners and have to deduce their intentions and motivations and much of their environment. Can the facts of history, therefore, be deemed "true"? No; historical truth is an ideal. We can know in part what men said they thought and what the expressions of their thought were in so far as the mediums have withstood change and decay; but their real thought and the life and circumstances behind it are matters for conjecture, supported, of course, by all the powers of intellect at our disposal, but never quite eliminating the element of guess. Historical truth, like any truth is relative truth. The innumerable reflections from the mental life of the past give us a fairly clear outline of the whole truth. As we study the millions of reflections from stars in the heavens we gain more and more knowledge of the whole truth of the universe and become more and more aware of how small a part of it we
really know. Similarly, with the reflections from the past, more gives us more, and a keener consciousness of how little. But, in both spheres, the important thing is the value and worth of our little bit of truth and the aid it is to our present understanding. The nature of our knowledge of the facts of the past is that it is a useful measure of truth derived, with the aid of our intellects, from psychological reflections of the striving of men in past time. To maximise truth and to safeguard it, it is of paramount importance that the psychological content of these sources, and the psychological processes involved in derivation from them, be open to criticism and amenable to test.

With this understanding of the nature of historical knowledge we require some understanding of the essential qualities of the work of historians. If history is to be consummated in narrative form, this end must be attained through the agency of a man who makes the narrative from the reflections of the past. But we have already noticed that a man who makes something reflects his mental life in doing so and that his mental life is a reflection of his environment. We may now add that his mental life may be directed against a certain part of his environment and his expression of it be, in the main, an expression of that sector of the environment. A historian directs himself to a sector of his environment (the traces of the past) and expresses himself in a narrative that has for content, for the most part, his exposition of that part of his environment. Briefly, the nature of his work is that it, too, is reflection, or, if you care, reflection of reflections. Of course, this greatly oversimplifies what must be a very involved psychological process as men are not, indeed, mirrors. But it stresses simply the essential fact about the work of the
historian who produces a narrative: he refracts his light from the past to within range of our senses. This is the elementary fact about his work; what, then, are some of the other considerations introduced when we allow that men are not mirrors?

A man functioning as a historian is conditioned by time and by the complexity of the mental processes involved in his reflection. As to the effect of time, we can note at least two things. First, it varies the relationship of the man to the reflections from the past, changing his perspective of them and showing him, at various points in time, lesser or greater details of the pattern in which they appear. Near in time, he sees the trees in detail, further away, he has an outline of the wood, and, further still, he sees the whole wood as a detail on the landscape. Second, a man can act as a historian during only his fifty or so mature years. He can reflect the reflections of those years or of any years anterior to them, and implicit in that thought is the idea that during the years of his life he may reflect upon the reflections of those years or just reflect. In other words, during a part of time he may make narrative histories or just sources for future narratives, or he may make both. Then time conditions the work of a historian by varying the view he has of the past and by enabling him to be at will a historian or a maker of sources or both. (In reality he cannot be a historian only, for to-day's recorded history becomes tomorrow's source.)

Turning to the complexity of the mental processes involved in the work of a historian we may (if our taste for analogy is not dulled) think of him as a camera. Light goes into a camera and a photograph comes out, light from the past goes into a man's mind and a narrative photograph
comes out. But it is true of the camera and far more true of the man that the processes within the dark interior are very complicated; and then, whereas the camera has light put into it and the photograph taken from it a man acquires the reflections from the past and expresses his narrative. What then are the essential facts about his processes of acquisition and expression?

The acquisition of knowledge of the past is a very complicated mental procedure. We cannot simplify the activities involved by giving them a time sequence but we can, to some extent, deal with them in two or three groups. There are the activities that tend to be what we might call objective activities: the sources have to be found, they have to be tested to establish their worth, they have to be critically selected and subjected to deductive reasoning to draw off their truth and, finally, an imaginative synthesis of the whole has to be formed to focus it within the span of human understanding. But, concurrently, more subjective activities are afoot. Knowledge requires form and order to be understood most readily. Immediately the mind is projected against historical material it seeks to order it in categories: vertical divisions in time or regional and kind groups; horizontal divisions in time or years, centuries, periods and so on. Then, too, a historian is a man with all a man's emotional nature and another subjective group of activities (during the process of acquiring knowledge of the past) is the overlaying of the whole procedure with something derived from his own personality: the nature of his work is greatly affected by his nature. At the moment it will suffice to notice that, in the process of acquisition, the historian's material has, in a sense,
been integrated into his whole personality; it has become one with the rest of his cognitive, conative and affective self.

When the historian turns to the expression of his photograph his primary concern is to convey the outline to lay minds for use by them in practical affairs. But the truth and the whole body of his thought have become as one. His material and his personality have become so closely interwoven that, whereas acquisition involved integration of past reflections into his thought, he is now faced with the problem of disentangling the pure truth from its intensely personal lodging place. Inevitably, this involves a large measure of conflict and much of the nature of the work of expression is that it is a contest between the man and his truth. Too much of his personality and too little of truth will result in the narrative of a partisan and the service of a cause. Yet his solution is not necessarily the entire exclusion of his personality for the bare bones of truth can be as uncomely as a skeleton and radiate as little appeal; and appeal, we remember, is an asset that will advance the utility of a narrative amongst men. At root, the historian's expression demands choice between alternatives: too much truth tends to make a catalogue, too much personality tends to make a plea; the essential quality of his expression is that it is neither in excess. This is a fine and difficult issue and not easily resolved. Ideally, a narrative must be true to be history, but, without the assistance of a man, that truth remains inert and cannot be used. On the other hand, a historian, insufficiently disciplined by truth must pursue an uncertain, unstable and fickle course. To resort to analogy once again, is not the historian and his truth best likened to a Polynesian canoe and its outrigger? The willing active, course-setting element in
the canoe and the steadying, stabilising, course-ensuring element is the subordinate outrigger. On his own the historian is at the mercy of every gust of human passion and the currents in affairs that beset his course, but, moving in harness with truth, lean he this way or that, the weight of truth or the buoyancy of truth eves his keel. The solution of the problem of bias in history is not to be found in the direction of its elimination; bias is as inevitable as a conative and affective man is necessary. The solution is to be found in the interaction of man and truth; to truth men give life, to men truth gives stability. The nature of the historian's expression is that his personality and the truth complement one another; the one vitalises and the other stabilizes the fashioning of a harmonious whole.

The essence of what we have said is that there is a psychological element in the source material of history that must be controlled to safeguard the truth. Our means are not perfect but our agents in past time are under the same restraint as our agents in present space; as with the latter so with the former, it is in many witnesses rather than one that we repose our trust. Similarly, in the work of a historian, the psychological element obtrudes and the restraints upon him that assure us that truth is safeguarded are, first, that his facts are supported by the weight of evidence and, second, that he rests his narrative on these facts and these alone. But to have these assurances we require that they be demonstrated, or demonstrable, to us.

Recorded history of course, derives its nature from man. Its nature is, if anything, that it is an aspect of mankind's work. That aspect is man's universal and eternal attack on time/space, his perpetual endeavour
to bring everything within the span of his senses, to extend their range. History is that part of the front that is an attack on time/space as it contains the experience of men (as opposed to other animals, vegetables and minerals) and its objective is to force the surrender of as many facts of that experience as possible. Why man does this, or why he seeks to extend the range of his senses, are very big questions and we have room for replies that are no more than general suppositions. We want more sense experience to increase our commerce in ideas because this is pleasant and gainful; "and gainful" because ideas promise more than the immediate pleasure they give, their element of truth promises new ideas in new directions and cumulative pleasure, (or, conversely, avoidance of pain). We want knowledge of the past experience of men because we are curious and, at a higher level, because the facts that satisfy our curiosity deposit truth "like grains of gold in the sand of a river", and such truth, we sense, is the makings of increase in pleasure and betterment. History that is to please may be more or less factual; what matter is it that it is fanciful if its end is just to please? Truth, maybe, is stranger than fiction (that is, actual fact may give more pleasure than alleged fact) but surely all the labours of establishing actual fact are not warranted to oust fiction from our fire-side chairs. Worthy history pleases and satisfies curiosity as a by-product while sifting the grains of gold from the sand and presenting truth for the service of our betterment.

The nature of the history we are discussing is the method of procedure of the man who quarries the sands of the past for truth and delivers it to our door conveniently bagged and ready to bring cheer to our hearts and light to the chambers of our minds. The nature of his quarry is that it is mental reflections of the striving of men in time and space. The
nature of his work is that, first, he variously processes the quarried material to segregate the facts that contain the truth we want and, second, in a narrative vitalizes and delivers the facts pregnant with this truth. The past is known to the historian through reflection; to us through his reflection of these reflections. But both of these categories of reflection are psychological in kind and the human minds that are involved cannot be trusted as vehicles of truth. Therefore, the best history is, as a consequence, based on sources that are freely available to criticism and test, and the historical narrative is deemed a conveyer of truth so far as its sources can be demonstrated to minds other than the historian's.
CHAPTER II

"THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY"

We have been at pains to define our understanding of the term "history" as that which connotes a narrative brings truth of the past to the service of the present. But we noted that the adjective "contemporary" was also an ambiguous word and promised to delimit its connotation. What then of it?

The Oxford Dictionary says that "contemporary" refers to "belonging to the same time, or "equal in age", or, again, "during the same period". It is an attributive adjective so qualifying a noun to convey the idea of the coexistence in time of the subject the noun denotes and some other concept. Clearly, even with history as we have defined it, several conceptions stemming from the phrase "contemporary history" are possible. For the sake of brevity we may say, simply, that we intend history as we have defined it but restricted to the content of the period of time through which the historian has existed. As we proceed other conceptions can be touched upon from time to time. At the moment here are two of the very few attempts to define "contemporary history" that appear to have been made. Sir James Hight refers to it as "contemporary history extending back fifty years or so from the present" and Professor Seton-Watson mentions "the history of the period upon which men still at the height of their powers can look back". Such history will, however, tend to be characterized


by something more than mere contemporaneity or the participation in events of the author. This feature of it appears to be something superimposed upon the more fundamental fact that it is recent history. At least, contemporary history, in our sense, must be recent history, or the last part in time of history, but recent history may or may not be contemporary history. The historian, as we said before, is conditioned by time. A man in his twenties may write the history of the previous fifty years and be to all intents and purposes, ineligible for the title "contemporary historian". In his seventies it seems indisputable that he would be a contemporary historian. In both cases recent history is written, in only one is it contemporary history. The point is that contemporary history implies two problematical spheres; it is recent history with the problems of recent history but, in addition, it superimposes other problems arising from the assumption of participation in the events by the author as either an observer or an actor.

This distinction between contemporary history and recent history is much of the key to the problem of contemporary history. Two of the few articles that discuss the latest period of history are entitled "A Plea for the Study of Contemporary History" and each pleads the case for the study of recent and not contemporary history. The substantiation of this charge is that neither article displays recognition of the special factor that arises in the sphere of recent history when the author has been a participant in the events he narrates. Professor Seton-Watson in particular shows that the problems usually attributed to recent history are identical with the problems of history generally, but he makes no reference

to the great difference that contemporaneity implies. This difference is that contemporary history is distinguishable from any other history in that human memory is added to its sources. This is the essential feature of contemporary history and the characteristic in the absence of which recent history is not contemporary history. But, as all contemporary history must 'ipso facto' be recent history, it is clear that our concern is firstly with the general problems peculiar to the proximity of happenings and their narration, and then with the particular problems that arise as a consequence of the writer's participation in the events he narrates.

Recent history is not to be distinguished from other history unless the principle of the continuity of history is denied. There appear to be no demarcations that set off recent history from what is commonly called "modern history." If we have a thought that recent history is distinguishable as that part of history in which the present was more or less clearly in the making it profits us nothing. Chosen at random two fairly different but major facts of the present are the universality of the democratic idea and of organised physical recreation; but who is to claim that the immediate roots of these present phenomena terminate nearer us than the French Revolution, in the one case, and the Industrial Revolution in the other? It is not necessary to elaborate this matter. Periodization is a convenience of the mind that the actualities of history ignore. Recent history is just the history of the last fifty years or so, perhaps more perhaps less, as the demands of the occasion indicate.

It is in the process of narration that recent history acquires some distinctive attributes. To commit to narrative the story of the latest years presents peculiar difficulties. History, as it is consummated in
narrative, contains an outline of the truth of the period with which it deals. It can contain, as we have noted earlier, no more than this outline. But the prime difficulty in narrating recent history is to perceive outline; more can be known of more events and happenings than is the case with the history of an earlier period but the salient features do not stand so clearly revealed. "The more time the history is seen through," to use Carlyle's phrase, the more the converse is true. It may be difficult to procure all the sources that will eventually be available for a period close to the present, the tendency to bias in the historian himself may be more difficult to control, and it may be true that the verdict of contemporaries is never the verdict of posterity; but these difficulties are not peculiar to recent history, they are simply problems that vary in degree with the distance from the present of the period under narration. The real peculiarity of recent history is that it is that period as to which the drafting of an outline of truth is most difficult because perspective is present in so short a measure. Or, to stress another facet of the same phenomenon, it is the period as to which truth of fact may be most easily established but, pertaining to which, truth of understanding is most obscure.

Failure to notice the distinction between recent and contemporary history appears to be as general as the occasional references to contemporary history in the literature on historiography. The two essays mentioned above fail in this respect and, typical of the customary attitude, is the following passage from Mr. Peter Muns in a discussion on the

methodology of the historian in selecting data:

"There are, of course, certain criteria which may be called external ones: in both space and time there will be necessarily a limit to the amount of data which the historian can select. Newspapers have a possibility of practically ignoring such external criteria, since their space, in comparison with an ordinary book is practically unlimited. This is the reason why we know contemporary history in greater detail than past history. But this distinction, which is merely one of degree, is the only distinction between past and contemporary history." 5

Close examination of the context makes it clear that both these mentions of contemporary history refer to narrative history and that the intention is "narrated recent history". It is narrated recent history that we know in greater detail, and, while this distinction of degree of detail may distinguish more-recent from not-so-recent history, it is certainly not the only distinction between narrated "past" history and narrated contemporary history. The narrative of "past" history is based on sources such as we discussed in the last chapter, as is that of recent history, but narrated contemporary history is unique: it draws on these sources plus the memory of the historian and is, therefore, recent history with a difference.

To elaborate this view that contemporary history is distinctive as recent history but with an additional distinction, an examination of recent and contemporary history in terms of the essential qualities of history is called for.

The nature of the sources of recent history (if, for the moment, we ignore our own remarkable century) is identical with that of the sources

of history. The sources of recent history are just later psychological reflections. They have been less subject in a shorter time to the destructive influences of time and for this reason, and not because of the greater space available to newspapers, they are more numerous. In addition to this prime explanation of their quantity there is also the fact of the continuing increase in volume in a developing civilization of more durable means of written expression. Indeed, the quantity of written reflections and the growth of concern for their preservation and of ability and willingness to secure them for the future tends to make the historian more and more independent of stories without words: not only this but the impossibility of dealing with the ever-increasing volume of the stories with words tends to exclude the stories without words. One might even have the temerity to enunciate a law on the lines that the more recent the period of a history the more the historian tends to rely exclusively upon written sources. The difficulty, of course, with such a proposition is that "The thoughts of men may flow into channels which lead to disaster and barbarism" and the accumulations of a culture be scattered to the four winds of heaven. Then the customary sources of history, as they are available to the historian of a recent period, are much more numerous because more have survived and much more effort has been made to protect them. When we admit the present century an extraordinary change is manifest. The means for preserving sight and sound are so different nowadays that the whole question of historical sources must be thrown into the melting-pot. Again, already we have historical sources that are not psychological

reflections from the past but precise and accurate "records" of past events that can be transmitted to us through our organs of sight and hearing and which exclude the psychology of our agents and, for that matter, of our historians. Put another way, we have developed means for extending the range of our sense organs in time and space through mechanical systems that greatly limit the effective element in human intervention. But the influence of these new factors upon historiography is not yet clear and, at any rate, our concern is with recent history up to what we must acknowledge as this present point of change. As yet, the historian of the twentieth century still turns to its immense volume of written sources and his greatest problem is to detect outline in this near and multitudinous detail.

Amongst our submissions regarding the nature of history we noticed that the probability of discerning truth was in proportion as sources were plentiful. Then more truth should be available the more recent the period under narration. Undoubtedly this is true, but it is equally evident that through less time there is less perspective and, because of the greater wealth of detail, more need for it. The great problem for the historian of a recent period is to grasp the outline of the wood while himself immersed in it: what can he do in this situation? It appears that he must tend to do one of two things. He may limit his sphere and grasp an outline of only a small part of the whole as, upon the lesser part, he has greater chance of acquiring a measure of perspective. Or, again, he may move about noting where appears the highest tree and the best growth and the lowest and poorest, and, by directed effort and technique, strive to acquire something of the view that would be possible with
distance. However, the more limited his subject the less truth he will have to tell as an aid to present life and the more his work must tend to result in the production of a source for future historians and not in a narrative that aids general understanding. To write a history of most use the historian must endeavour to substitute by technique for lack of perspective, for the truth of the recent past that is of value in the present is even more the outline of that truth than the truth embraced. "The more time history is seen through," the more evident the outline and the more obscure the actualities and the more history is concerned to establish the truth of fact. The less the time history is seen through, the less the problem of truth of fact and the more the need for, and the difficulty of, truth of understanding. It is just the problem we have with ourselves.

"O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ither's see us!"

The task of the historian of the recent past is pre-eminently to acquire the power to see his subject as others will see it through more time. The question is: How can he do this?

From its nature the subject matter of history offers two avenues of escape from the blinding proximity of massed detail. As history is the story of man in time and space the possibilities of spatial perspective may be investigated when those of time are denied. Secondly, man's activities are more general or less general: that is, some groups do things peculiar to themselves but some activities are peculiar to all men. These more general activities tend to be epitomised in the operations of the universal institution, or universal institutions, that they cast up.

7. Burns: "To a Louse."
In other words, the historian of the recent period is aided towards outline if he observes from afar in space and if he seeks for the highest manifestations of corporate life. For instance, it is easier for any one of us in New Zealand (all things being equal) to draft an outline of the history of the United States during the last twenty years than it is for a domiciled and indigenous American citizen to do so. Again, an outline of the truth pertaining to the League of Nations and the United Nations' Organization during the same period will be the easiest outline to acquire because politics is the highest form of group life and international politics the highest form of politics. Of course, these emphases should not be overstressed; whatever techniques are used to overcome the handicap implicit in loss of time - perspective, every fact arises out of what has been and affects what will be, and the deepest understanding is possible only when the fact that arises has arisen, and the effect on what will be is visible. The problem of the outline of truth in recent history may be solved in part by attending to the sources distant in space or by looking for the reflections from the highest levels of corporate life; but, at best, the narrative of recent history must be denied something that only time has in her gift: this is inescapable.

Another important consideration arises from the foregoing. The concern of any given present is not with the real truth of history but with the appearance of truth in history to that time. Historical truth, whether of an early or late period, is always changing as it appears to one generation and another, and the prime duty of history is to reveal the truth of any part or all of the past as it appears to the narrator's
present. In this view, that loss of perspective on recent history which technique cannot completely replace is not a cause to discount it any more than the fact of escaped detail from the earlier past gives occasion to denounce ancient history as "bunk." Perspective is a concomitant of lost fact, available fact is a concomitant of obscure perspective. Different procedures may be adopted to remedy to a degree each loss, but, ultimately, we have to bow to the inevitable and accept equally the near or distant past as it is available to our present; we can do no more. Perhaps some day our scientists will evolve means for recapturing the light and sound waves that played upon the past (they have an idea that in the economy of the universe nothing is lost) and actual history will be re-acted on a screen. But, in the absence of such techniques, we have to do the best we can within the limits imposed upon us in recent as in not-so-recent history.

The work of a historian in the preparation of a recent history (assuming that he is not a "contemporary historian") is as similar to the work of the historian of an earlier period as the one history is to the other. He too has to acquire his knowledge of the past and then express it. As we have noted he has more trouble in getting perspective just as his colleague of the earlier period has more difficulty with the establishment of fact. But there is an additional difference. The historian of recent history is, being a man, possessed of a body of prejudices and

8. Cf. Salmon: Why is history rewritten? (New York, 1929) passim, for elaboration of this and many other reasons why history is rewritten.

psychological leanings that are direct outcomes of the period with which he deals; he is literally and figuratively a child of the environment of which he speaks and beset by the affinity of his nature to the cradle of its nurture. It will be claimed that this is true of other history; but it is perhaps sufficient to remember that it is easier for any of us to be dispassionate over Tories and Whigs in the eighteenth century than over communists and conservatives in the twentieth century; or, again, how much easier is it to note the decline and fall of Rome than to accept indifferently the possibility of the collapse of Imperial Britain? Whether contemporaries of it or not we are identified with some limited part of the recent past that bears a degree of antagonism to other parts of it; the more distant the past the less this identification and the less one aspect of the subjective problem in history counts. This matter of the greater tendency towards partisanship in the narration of recent history appears, up to a point, of a kind with the problem of perspective. 10 There are two elements in perspective: distance in time or space and certain facts of our physical or psychological beings, such as for instance, distance between the eyes. We require breadth between the eyes to get direct perspective on the concrete in space, we require breadth of mind to get perspective on the abstract in time; in both cases the degree of distance in time or space is an aid. The point is that an outline of the truth in recent history demands not only detachment but dispassion. Recent history is, least of all, the sphere for the narrow-minded. It demands more than any other the emotionally neutral ideal in its historian.

10. Cf. ibid., p. 53.
if it is to avoid partisan ends and the service of a cause, and if it is to attempt the transmission of truth.

It will be evident that the aids to detachment and the aids to dispassion are the same. As we said earlier a man functioning as a historian is conditioned by time and the complexity of his mental processes. A man functioning as a recent historian is subject to these same conditions but in different degree; perspective and dispassion are more difficult to attain to and less attainable. Then the tendencies in the best recent history will be towards narration of what is distant in space and highest amongst the manifestations of human striving by the best endowed of men. This last, of men, because all the difficulties of a historian's work save one are greater as the time through which he sees the past is less. The exception is his first procedure of search, the finding of his sources. But searching is, for the most part, a matter of method and persistent work, and (without disclaiming the dignity of such endeavour) it must be recognised the lowest level of the work of a historian. All the other aspects of his work demand the greatest intellectual gifts and the later the period the greater these demands. Recent history is the most difficult to narrate and of which to tell truth for present use. When it is contemporary history there is additional complication and difficulty consequent upon the entry of an unique factor upon the scene.

The phrase "contemporary history" does not imply a period of history but a form of history that is singularly distinctive. A contemporary history is a narrative in the events of which the author has participated and, from this fact, it is a history to be set apart from all others in that the author's memory is admitted as a source. Overtly, this is
a distinction which is unique for, as we have seen, the conditions of 
historical truth are that sources are many and amenable to test and criti-
cism. But a man has only one unit of memory and what assurance have we 
that he has subjected it to adequate test? However, before prosecuting 
enquiries on these lines a word or two in disposal of other possible impli-
cations of the term "contemporary history" is necessary.

One sense in which, conceivably, "contemporary history" may be used 
is history at present unfolding. There is a history that, obviously 

enough, is being "made" at this moment, to-day, during this year or during 
any part of the time over which we may choose to think recent history ex-
tends and which is, with greater or lesser accuracy, to be termed "con-
temporary" history. But this cannot be our contemporary history for two 
reasons. First, because it is too loose and inaccurate in its application 
to warrant our attention. Second, its most restricted meaning is history 
in the making at this moment and we have been at pains to restrict our-
selves to history as it is consummated in narrative: to be cast in narra-
tive history must, presumably, be at the very least some hours old. Simi-
larly, there is no significance for us in the sense that the history of 
the times through which we have lived is contemporary history. Such is 
history in which we have participated, history which we have "made" and, 
indubitably, in a sense contemporary history. But history of this kind 
is devoid of special interest until the mind is projected against it; in 
the absence of this condition there is nothing about it for discussion; 
in its presence we discuss the characteristic consequence of such mental 
activity, that is, the narrative of this history. Small points these, 
but they are aids to clarity around that obscure, indeed imperceptible,
point where past and present unite.

The primary distinction of narrated contemporary history is that it admits memory as a source; is it then to be admitted as history? The prime problem of history is, as we have found, to defeat the all-pervading influence of pernicious men. The common characteristic of its sources and of the work that leads from sources to narrative is their psychological nature, and it is just this same psychological element that is the greatest obstacle to the acquisition and transmission of truth and to the control of which the whole methodology of history is devoted. To preserve truth requires safeguards against the misconduct of the unavoidable human agent. In most natural sciences the material against which the energies of the enquirer are projected is tangible substance which has a high degree of permanence or repeats itself universally in space or time and can thus anywhere at any time, manifest itself identically to human sense organs. The material of history is intangible shadow that lies behind substance capable of sensory stimulus. A document or a harness can be felt or seen or in some way observed but the history derived from these things has to be described. History is utterly dependent upon two categories of description: those more or less contemporary with the actual events and those more or less contemporary with the present. The test of the truth of a contemporary past description and of a contemporary present description is that each conforms with the mean of the contemporary past descriptions but with the exception that intervening time will have added something in

the case of the later description. But this "added something" is a changed perspective that is available equally to any presently living mind and, more accurately, the test of a present description is that it is the mean of present descriptions of the mean of past descriptions. This, succinctly, is a prime condition of historical truth, and it is by this criterion that history is to be judged more or less true. Our point is, as it touches contemporary history, that history consummated in narrative must be demonstrably the mean of past descriptions in the mean of to-day's perspective.

Then, first, as to the mean of past descriptions and memory. The content of a man's memory does not necessarily conform with the mean of the descriptions of events contemporary with a time he recollects: we have ample confirmation of that contention within the scope of our personal experience. Then, if he writes a recent history and draws upon his memory as a source, is his work to be admitted as history? If it conforms with the mean of past descriptions it appears that the answer is yes, and conversely, no. But yes or no the matter of importance is the condition that "it conforms with the mean of past descriptions" and, by implication, any merit attachable to contemporary history is disowned; history must be the mean of past descriptions and contemporary or memory history is the measure of this criterion only by chance. Returning to the reflections of which we spoke earlier, we remember that a man may reflect the reflections of his own times or just reflect: by the former procedure he may write recent history, by the latter (simple primary reflection) he makes a source of future history. Clearly, contemporary or memory history is a primary reflection that may or may not conform with the mean of reflections or
descriptions and, therefore, may or may not be history. The truth emerges
that "contemporary history" so-called is not really history but a source of
history. As a source it may add or subtract something to shift the mean
measured by other sources but, in common with the others, it has to be the
subject of criticism and test. If occasionally contemporary history is in
fact history it is so because a source may so far conform with the mean
of the descriptions of a set of events as to be admissible directly as
history. A source has to be tested, a history is the product of the tests.
Contemporary history is never the product of tests but has always to be
tested and is, therefore, a source and not history. (To avoid confusion it
is, perhaps, advisable to re-assert that contemporary history in the narra-
tive sense can mean only memory history; it deals 'ipso facto' with the
recent content of time but is not necessarily history. Recent history and
contemporary history are to be distinguished.)

As to the mean of to-day's perspective and memory: the essence of
this issue appears to be whether historical perspectives inclusive of mem-
ory and exclusive of memory are identical. Do we, in other words, see a
historical event of ten years ago in our memories in the perspective of
ten years ago or that of the present? The psychologists would tell us
that much depended on our individual powers of recall; the human mind
really forgets nothing and under hypnosis precise memory of any given time
can be recalled. If, normally, we had such powers our notions of recent
and contemporary history would be completely upset; but, in fact, we have
not such capacities. If we each attempt to recollect a point that should
be common to our memories, such as the moment of Mr. Chamberlain's decla-
ration of war on Germany in 1939, and then turn introspective we shall
notice two things. One is that we recollect something of our own attitude of mind and of the general attitude of mind at the time, neither of which conceptions is elsewhere preserved. The other is that we see these personal and other sentiments as bearing a different appearance to-day. For instance, one could be named who thought in the perspective of the moment that he was destined to fight Germany in Polish trenches; in the perspective of the present he sees that he lacked understanding partly because of his own incapacity and partly because of the absence of perspective. It appears that we can, to a limited extent, recall the contemporary perspective of a past event that is within the span of memory and preserve it as a separate entity against the present view. But at best memory is a fickle faculty and must always be deemed subservient to the expression in a contemporary document. Memory may transmit something that aids to-day's perspective, it may bring forward something that the contemporary reflections or descriptions do not convey and, like a traveller from the other side of a valley, it may add something to the view we have from a distance. Such an addition is to understanding and not to the things seen; contemporary history cannot add to the truth of fact because truth of fact must be derived from observable data (tangible things), but it may add to the truth of understanding. Memory history may add to the establishment of the mean of to-day's perspective by contribution to the truth of understanding; it may contribute to history in this way but is again a source of history and not history.

12. It is enlightening and entertaining to run off notes on (a) what you remember of your own attitude during the first days of September, 1939, (b) what you remember as said by others, (c) what should have been said, and then to compare these jottings with the files of newspapers of that time.
History as it culminates in narrative endeavours to transmit truth of fact and truth of understanding. Truth of fact is approached by testing sources, truth of understanding by testing present views, and history is the product of the whole series of tests. Contemporary history is a source and a present view that have still to be tested, and the term "contemporary history" is, therefore, a misnomer. History that does not aim at truth is futile, the effort to attain to truth implies certain conditions and contemporary or memory history is not governed by these stipulations. The adjective "contemporary" is improperly used when applied in qualification of the noun "history" in its narrative sense; the only meaning it can have is of a narrative derived from the memory of a man who has lived contemporaneously with the events he describes, but therein is no warranty for supposing truth. This narrative of a contemporary may, under test, be found to conform with, or to be conformable with, the mean of present views; but it is submission to this criterion that makes it history and not any attribute it possesses of itself. It is a narrative based on memory and of a kind with memoirs and autobiographies but, no more than these, is it to be admitted as history. Narration of the content of the last part of time introduces to historiography two new sets of phenomena: those peculiar to "recency" and those pertaining to the odd fact that much of this time is within the span of living memory. All history draws on memory material (inclusive of contemporary histories) but only recent history has living memory available as a source. But be it living or dead memory, it is no matter; memory is a source and only a source. No one thinks to accept Bishop Burnet's "History of My Own Times" or Clarendon's "History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England"
as other than sources for a history of Stuart England; and no one should think the memoirs Mr. Churchill is publishing at the moment (1948) more than a source for the recent history of our present.
CHAPTER III

RECENT HISTORY, PAST AND PRESENT

History, like any other aspect of cultural life, is such a plant as its soil permits. Narrative history is to us an abstraction somewhat akin to narrative history as understood by Thucydides but much at variance with the concept of the author of the Book of Joshua, or of Gregory of Tours or Cardinal Baronius. Circumstances produce both the demand for history and the means for a suitable response. The history of history cannot be viewed exclusively as the history of history for historiography at any point in time must be a manifestation of the phenomenon of contemporary culture, which, in turn, is conditioned by contemporary life. Our point is that the history of history is inexplicable unless it is conceived against the background of the life and circumstances of a selected period.

We have in this present an ideal, a certain standard, to which a history may approach in greater or lesser degree. But this ideal was inconceivable in the seventeenth century and the means to its attainment were absent. The philosophical contributions of such as Vico, Montesquieu and Adam Smith and the accumulations of the Age of Erudition, the establishment of the study of diplomacy by Mabillon and the methods of internal and external criticism of documents demonstrated by Wolf; these are amongst the factors emerging in the interim and of which we are the beneficiaries. In addition, we must acknowledge other debts. Darwinian evolution emphasised historical continuity and the development of sociology as a field of study in the wake of Comte, of chemistry as an aid to diplomatic, of psychology as an
approach to the understanding of men and masses or of archaeology and anthropology to extend our knowledge of the development and existence of men in space and time; these too are amongst the many manifestations of an organic culture that have enlarged our conception and improved our equipment for historical study. Amongst the lore of the amateur gardener is the maxim that where roses thrive is health for animal and vegetable; the rosarian and horticulture are conditioned by place as the historian and culture by time. History in antiquity was a measure of the circumstances of antiquity, in the middle ages of the middle ages, in the sixteenth century of the sixteenth century, in the twentieth century of the life and circumstances of our times.

Professor Seton-Watson draws attention to the conspicuous place of recent history judged by the criterion of the eminence of authors:

"For, indeed, if we pass in survey the historians of past ages - let us say up to the year 1830, for it is perhaps still too soon to decide the eventual fate of later writers - we shall find that almost all who achieved full immortality were essentially writers of contemporary history. Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Tacitus, or, in later times, Matthew Paris, Froissart, Villani, Comines, Gualtieri, Machiavelli, De Thou, Clarendon, Burnet are but a few names selected at random, but not I think unfairly. Of all the historians whom the eighteenth century produced, is there any, save the incomparable Gibbon, who dealt solely with times other than his own and who has survived to our day as a recognised and readable classic? Even Hume and Smollett as historians are utterly extinct."

To this list it is easy to add the names of others of rank with the immortals: Polybius amongst the Greeks, Caesar amongst the Romans or Ordericus in the middle ages, whose contemporary history is judged their

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best. But, in chronological order after Burnet is there any historian conspicuous as a "contemporary" historian? The matter of significance is not that the achievement of full immortality has tended to be a crown falling to writers of recent history but that the best history, by our present standard, was, until about the eighteenth century, almost exclusively contemporary history. If you care, a distinction of nineteenth century historiography is its relatively exclusive attention to other than recent history and, of the twentieth century, its re-establishment of the recent field as the complement of historiography of the distant past.

The reasons for the prominence of recent history until the eighteenth century and for its comparative absence in the nineteenth are not far to seek. Until the early years of the nineteenth century there was never a cultural soil in which history, other than recent history, could take root and bear truthful fruit. Weeds grow anywhere but only rare combinations of soil, locality and climate are meet for some plants: fictional history has been as universal as imagination in men, recent history bearing truth has thrived at certain points in time, but history of more remote periods had to await an unique place to have similar issue. It may, of course, be claimed that the Greeks, and those Romans who entered into their inheritance, had much of the equipment that lay at the hand of Niebuhr and Ranke for prosecuting critical enquiry of the past. But, excluding the question of the truth or otherwise of this assertion, we must remember that the historians of antiquity were beamed in by their cyclic view of historical phenomena and their paramount interest (particularly, of the

Similarly, the teleological philosophy of the feudal world or the passionate endeavours of the age of religious and constitutional conflicts made for cultural climates that lacked some of the elements essential to the nurture of history that bears truth from the remote past. Some factors are conspicuous in the eighteenth century as causes of the remarkable change in historiography during the next hundred years; the ideas of Vico drawing upon Bodin, of Montesquieu stressing relativity of institutions, of Turgot and Condorcet expounding progress or of Adam Smith pointing to a whole new field of enquiry, the development of new critical equipment culminating in Wolf's "Prolegomena to Homer", or, again, the diminution of ecclesiastical and theological bias in letters and scholarship. But these are no more than strands going with others to the strengthening of the protecting web of culture and civilization. A certain quantum in this web was the pre-requisite to narration of the truth of the non-recent past, and this portion was achieved during the years roughly contemporary with the Revolutionary Wars.

After allowance is made for general cultural development, for social evolution and for the compounding of ideas on history in history, it still remains that the construction of apparatus for the criticism and test of historical data is the most notable factor in the causal mesh that led up to the differentiation of nineteenth century from earlier historiography. The Greeks had much of this equipment for searching the past but few traces

3. ibid.

4. I think "mesh" a more suitable word to associate with the idea of causation in history than the more customary "chain". (e.g. "causal chain").
of the past to work upon and as little inclination to depart the contem-
porary present and its immediate roots. After them, for most of 2000
years, there were traces and various measures of interest but no equipment.
The publication of Wolf's "Prolegomena to Homer" in 1795 may or may not
serve to mark the development of internal and external criticism of docu-
ments to the point where it had application in work on history, but it is
as convenient a point as any to divide history as predominantly recent
history from history as predominantly not-so-recent history. In so far,
at any rate, as Wolf's work is deemed the precursor of nineteenth century
historiography so far too it marks the transition from recent to remote
history. Niebuhr was the first to apply the new techniques in the
historical field:

"He was also the first to collect and discuss the whole of the
available literary evidence, and to steer a middle course between
blind acceptance of Livy's narrative and wholesale scepticism. To
these immense merits Niebuhr owes his unassailable position as
the principal author of the great revolution in historical study
effected in the opening years of the nineteenth century." 5

Many had to follow Niebuhr and perfect the new means of objective
approach to the truth of the distant past and its subsequent narration.
But the prime distinction of Ranke and his disciples was that they had
the "know-how" 6 for making the past render up its truth of fact. For
want of this earlier historians had to turn to recent history to achieve
immortality.

6. This graceless, atomic-age compound is used after due deliberation.
Almost all medieval historiography is the work of clerical writers as literacy was exclusively theirs. But, when scholarship and letters were not denied to the secular mind, the ranks of the immortal historians are almost entirely filled by "rising men of action with broken careers" or those who took their "observations with the eyes of Odysseus and not through the lenses of Ranke". If we examine the names mentioned earlier in this chapter, so far as we may generalize, the more conspicuous the name the more it is true that it denotes a rising man of action with a break in his career or a wanderer like Herodotus, Froissart or De Thou. In the middle ages history proceeded from the cloister and the hand of the highly placed priest or the clerical dweller at a crossroads who was the confident of travellers. But one way or another history and recent history until the nineteenth century emanated from minds acquainted with special distance or the higher levels of men's affairs or both.

The clearer generalization as between historians before and after 1795 is that the earlier, as typified by their prototype Thucydides, were men of affairs, the latter, as typified by Ranke, were men of academic bent. Indeed, if we hold with the principles of unity and continuity in history, we see that it is in the tradition of historiography that it deals with the recent period and is non-academic. The nineteenth century emphasis upon the distant past and scholarly historians was a disavowal of historical tradition, and, as to historians, more precariously maintained than we commonly recognise.

8. Ibid., xii.
Many of the eminent figures in the nineteenth century were men of prominence in non-academic spheres: viz., the Germans of the Prussian School, such Frenchmen as Thiers, De Tocqueville, Guizot, Duruy, Rambaud, Lavisse and Monod, or, in England, Mitford, Grote, Macaulay, Stubbs, Seeley, Seebohm, Bagehot and, later, Temperley and Fisher. And, to these, many other names could be added of historians with some conspicuous experience of other than scholastic affairs: Lord Acton was a member of parliament; the amateur tradition is strong in American historiography; like Stubbs, Green and Mandell Creighton were primarily churchmen; H手上ax of France and Woodrow Wilson of the United States have it in common with Mr. Winston Churchill that they made history in two senses. This is not, of course, to claim that the writing of history is a layman's avocation or that history gains when the historian is both a maker and writer of history, but it stresses the continuation of historiographical tradition since Herodotus. Further to this, it suggests that the Historical Revolution like the French Revolution did not break the perennial stream of tradition and that we may hazard a guess that the ancient primacy of recent history was not for ever overturned.

We may doubt whether the convention of practical men as historians has yet been broken. The truth is, more probably, that history has undergone a bifurcation during the last one hundred and fifty years, passing in part to the scientific hands of the scholar and remaining in part consistent with tradition and a mode of expression for "rising men of action with broken careers". The difference is the difference between recent and contemporary history. Before the revolution in historiography this difference could not exist: since then, the one is the product of
scholarship and scientific effort, the other is an account of action by a participant and is fashioned under a lesser standard. The writer of recent history stands in the new tradition stemming from Niebuhr and Ranke, the writer of contemporary history stands in the old and is one cast in the mould that made Thucydides or Machiavelli or Clarendon.

In the nineteenth century recent history, and, for that matter, contemporary history, was deserted for the time being for the fairer fields of the remoter past. This is no harder to understand than any other instance of human conformity with contemporary fashion. To use the new critical equipment was the current enthusiasm and was followed, understandably enough, by attempts (by such as Buckle) at its use in directions in which it was to prove inadequate. Immortality was promised away from the recent past where facility with the new techniques was most demonstrable. The scientific nature of this endeavour with its emphasis on truth threw into relief the greater problem of understanding in less perspective and, undoubtedly, inclined most to the thought that recent history could not be written. "The use of history," said Lord Acton "turns far more on certainty than on abundance of acquired information." But, as we have noticed, certainty of recent fact is more possible than certainty of remote fact and the converse really holds for certainty of understanding. The re-establishment of recent history as a part of equal importance with any other in the whole had to await the twentieth century. But then the history of the last part of the past took two forms and not one as before; the old contemporary history remained but a new scientific narrative emerged and this we have called "recent history".

To be sure, the nineteenth century was not devoid of recent histories but these were completely overshadowed by historical endeavour with the more remote past. Much recent and contemporary history came from the pens of lesser authors and from French historians as reference to the bibliographies attached to Volume XII of the Cambridge Modern History will show. The French appear to have had also a course in contemporary history at one of their universities and Lord Acton embraced recent history in his plan for the Cambridge History while even the great Ranke wrote "a book that Niebuhr called the greatest book on contemporary history which he knew." Then, too, the century saw the development of innumerable journals that, inevitably, drew sap from the tap-root of contemporary history. Most of these include the word "Review" in their title and, with other organs of the press and publicity, they must have absorbed energies that of old produced contemporary histories. In our own century, with advances in education and the end of the pioneering era in so much of the great English-speaking world, many more hands are fit for pens and, despite increased means of written expression, there are energies and to spare for history in all its phases. Further, under our own eyes, while "the Press grew more outspoken in its language and more relentless in its pursuit of the secrets of the recent past" indiscretion in the matter of political secrets "received a gigantic impetus from the great war and the series of revolutions in which it culminated" and,

11. ibid.,


14. A list of these is in Thompson, op. cit., vol. II, viii.

at the same time, interest in the history of the recent past was intensified. Thus, at once interest in recent history and sources of it have been greatly increased since Lord Acton said "the contemporary differs from the modern in this, that many of its facts cannot by us be definitely ascertained" and, too, there have been labourers available for the vineyard.

In addition to these things other factors have contributed to the re-assertion of recent history during the last fifty years. The tremendous change made during the last century and a half in the relationship of man to global space has rubbed every culture and civilization together and resulted in universal interchange and clash of ideas. Inevitably, the age-long controversies of Authority and Reason, Tradition and Liberty, and of sceptical enquiry and unquestioning faith have flared up anew and, to 1948, it can scarcely be contested that the radical elements have had the ascendency. Inevitably too, unrest has entailed with its concomitants of sovereignty tending towards the mass, of the affairs of polity tending towards high levels and of a present pressing in upon consciousness with its acute problems. The elevation of the common man and his closer identification with government have greatly increased the demand for, and the aids to, understanding in his personal striving and in carrying the responsibilities of his higher social and political office. Likewise, the grave problem of ensuring global law and order has required of history a rendering of the guidance implicit in human experience and has imposed on it the duty of explaining the present to the present. And that present, by the way, is peculiarly inescapable: the "isolationist" and "escapist"

can be neither for long, there are no Pacific island sanctuaries, hermits need ration books, every frontier has its formalities; never indeed has a present been so unavoidable while the life of men was claimed free. The problem of the mass has stimulated the study of society from many aspects, and, not least, from the evolutionary point of view, and from history’s evidence of development and progress in gregarious man. In special fields, notably in political science and economics, the methodology of history has been adopted with consequent added emphasis on recent history: for instance, the roots of the great depression of the early 1930s were more in the twentieth than the nineteenth century, and a study of Russian Communism or American Federalism or of the British Commonwealth is futile if it stops short of the present. The League of Nations and its successor have also thrust to the forefront not only their questions of what and how but the more fundamental issues of why and from whence. What the League of Nations was and how it was to function we were told aplenty, but this, to the layman without a grasp of the historical development of the need for an instrument to ensure international order and of the attempts to meet it, was a house built on sand. If the United Nations’ Organization is to succeed "We, the people" must see it before us not only as a plant from which fruit is promised but also as seed, seedling and sapling for nurture with sympathetic and intelligent understanding from day to day, believing erstwhile that "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear". The long term and short term history of U.N. must be in the understanding of "We, the people" and no study so much as recent history can inculcate the needed sense of husbandry towards a steadily evolving organic thing. Lastly, this insistent and tumultuous
twentieth century has demanded that it be understood and not avoided
and to this end men have increasingly sought explanations of their contemporay past. The means have been many.

Recent history in this century has been served for better or for worse by the newspaper, the periodical publication, the book, the film
and the radio broadcast. But, with this wealth of agencies much of
it cannot be admitted as recent or contemporary history in our strict senses. Until the eighteenth century we had contemporary history, the academic
emphasis of the nineteenth added recent history as a distinguishable entity, but, with the renaissance of narration of the recent past in the
twentieth century came the suborning of history to a popular demand for
diversionary literature and recent history, less attended than other
history by the discipline of scholarship, has been in most danger of the
charlatan's seductions. In addition, as we know, it is ever in peril of the disservice of passion. Consequently, of our own time we have
had scholarly recent histories, the memory histories of men of action
and popular versions from irresponsible pens. But these last are an
aberration which we may leave alone as they are inconsequential so long as
the other forms are forthcoming to counter them. And there is ample
evidence that this is so.

However, before surveying this evidence another point is to be
noted. Truth of understanding is a greater problem in recent history

17. vide Henderson: "A Flea for the Study of Contemporary History",
History, June 1941, vol. XXVI p. 35, And Highton: "Some Observa-
tions on the Use of History". Presidential Address, Printed
in the Report of the Melbourne (1955) Meeting of the Australian
and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science,
p. 173.
than truth of fact. This is the 'raison d'être' for that notable phenomenon of our times, the commentary, in its diverse variety of forms. Truth of fact in contemporary times is in the gift of the agencies purveying news and, from their many witnesses, we believe that truth of fact will out. But the layman, seeking to understand his present, is deficient in time and specialized knowledge even if he succeeds in grasping the outline of factual truth at his breakfast table. So the commentator comes to his aid with an interpretation of the recent historical facts; and he is judged more or less reliable, be it noted, by the same criteria by which the works of historians are weighed in our present. Ideally, we demand that he serve but one end, that of the service of the present with truth. Immediately we have reason to suspect that he seeks to further a partisan end, or display his erudition, the interest and attention of the discerning are, in part, dispelled. The tragedy and inherent danger lies, of course, in the immemorial fact that it is given to few to be discerning; but that is to claim the paramount importance of ensuring that the leaven of recent (that is academic) history is at work in the community. It is at work today. Scholarly and reliable comment on current affairs is available from many sources such as the best of the world's newspapers, publications of a kind with "Foreign Affairs", "The Round Table", "Public Opinion", the many reviews published at various set intervals, and (from the radio) elucidating talks of the type broadcast from the relatively impartial British Broadcasting Corporation. Significantly enough, parallel with the development of these expositions of the recent past, it is beyond dispute that the other humanities have given way to history as the training ground of the expositors.
The academic and scholarly history of our contemporary times has come to us through the book, the periodical publication and the radio broadcast, to a lesser extent through the newspaper and, insignificantly as yet, through the film. Amongst books, the first great work of recent history in this century must have been Volume XII of the Cambridge Modern History. It is an example of academic recent history 'per excellence' and is clearly distinguishable from the earlier contemporary histories of men of action. Of their peculiar problems let the editors speak:

"The period of history with which this volume deals presents many obvious difficulties to the historian. Living in a crowded and circumscribed fragment of a fraction of the world which he is attempting to describe he must transport himself by imagination to some higher sphere whence the nations and their fortunes may be seen to range themselves in intelligible perspective. Writing under the influence of momentary and transitory impressions, he must free himself from their bondage and pay homage to the future and the past. He must endeavour to see this world, not as it affects the prejudices, interests, and limited outlook of his contemporaries, but as it might appear to one who should look back on it without any personal concern in its turmoil. Only partial success is possible; but he may console himself for partial failure with the belief that he is handing down to posterity one of those records of contemporary impressions which history is bound to respect if only they be sincere, impartial, and accurately informed.

"Sources of information are not lacking. Secret history, such as is included in confidential papers and private correspondence, remains for the most part, unrevealed. Rumours and false reports cannot yet be controlled or checked. But in the abundance of contemporary literature, solid as well as ephemeral, lies the answer to nine tenths of all the historical problems relating to this age which will ever receive even an approximate solution. We are, in many ways, more amply instructed about our own time than we are in the affairs of any other age; the main difficulty lies in the fact that hardly a beginning has been made in the sorting, sifting, arranging and summarising of the bewildering mass of accessible knowledge. With these difficulties we and our contributors have done our best to cope." 18

18. C.M.H. Vol. XII, Preface. I have quoted this passage at length because it is an expression of those with the most representative experience of narrating recent history.
In succession to this work stand many others but of various weights in the scales of recent history. Amongst these certain tendencies are conspicuous. The degree of scholarship (by the standard we have set) applied in their making seems to have been in like measure with their inclination towards fact and the essential explanation of the inter-relation of facts. Some, similar to the Cambridge History, restrained all temptation to interpret the recent past more than was unavoidable to construct a narrator's hypothesis. The various works of Dr Gooch dealing with recent history are of this category 19 as is also Grant and Temperley: "Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries". With these might be compared D. W. Brogan: "The Development of Modern France" as an example of historical scholarship leaning away a little from emphasis on fact and towards a tentative interpretation. In his preface Professor Brogan warns that the work is designed for the general public and: -

"As the history of the Third Republic has only recently begun to be studied in a scholarly fashion, many important questions are still unsettled and it has been necessary to omit discussion of the evidence for the views taken here and to drop any apparatus of notes or bibliography."

And he adds: -

"The writing of very recent history must involve the use of materials which it is almost impossible to control. I have tried to reduce to a minimum the amount of guesswork - - - - ." 20

Indeed, this is surely a borderline case: it omits discussion of the evidence for the views taken and admits to a degree of guesswork;

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19. e.g., "History of Europe 1878-1919."
which practices are, as we have thought, measures of latitude more than history can permit. The truth is that the scientific bias that created recent history almost denies us narration of it; the developments in the spheres of history's sources and means and the multiplication of potential narrators have all led to a wide differentiation in the narratives of recent history. The variety, even in books, spreads through the range between strict catalogues of established fact and the pseudo-histories of untested opinion such as the "famous correspondent" narratives that were "bestsellers" some years ago. Even then it is hard to decide whether to classify as histories highly interpretative dissertations such as Drucker: "The End of Economic Man", or entertainingly descriptive, although basically historical, narratives of a kind with F.I. Allen: "Only Yesterday" and Bryant: "English Saga". It seems clear that, while retaining in the mind's eye a standard at once a goal and a criterion, we have in the narration of the recent past to admit histories that are not strictly the mean of past descriptions in the mean of to-day's perspective. But our concession is to the historian and not to his sources: it must hold for recent as for any history that the sources must be demonstrable: it is the mean of the present descriptions that eludes us more as the past narrated is more recent. With recent history opinions that have demonstrable bases in fact must be sanctioned and this dispensation permits any of the texts mentioned to be classed as recent (academic) histories.

For a moment we may pause to note that, as well as differentiating recent and contemporary history, the adoption of history by scholarship has resulted in the ideal of the mean of present descriptions being
proportionately attainable as the period under narration is distant. This both because the "present" descriptions of the distant past may be made over the last fifty to one hundred years, and because the greater variety of the descriptions of the more recent past makes their mean more elusive. For example, an interpretative treatment of Greek or Roman history would be unacceptable unless it demonstrated cognizance with all previous interpretations; but, at the other extreme, Professor Brogan declines to discuss the evidence for his views of France and French policy during recent years. So, in recent history the ideal of remote history is not attainable although the test of demonstrable sources may be more rigidly applied.

The development of the periodical is a phenomenon of the last hundred years and, in the service of recent history, it has been predominantly a vehicle of interpretative exposition. The reasons for this are various. The periodical is, in the first instance, a response to a demand being made in the present and, so far as it is a demand that may make a claim on history, it arises usually from concern about present politics at high levels. In this view the periodical tacitly assumes that the facts of the recent past have been available from other and prompter agencies and, therefore, its service tends to be comment upon these facts as they relate to a present situation and a future prospect. Arising thus from a present situation historical commentaries, in these journals, are usually discussions of a topical character and selective of only a very small part of the material available from the recent past. The admission of these treatments as history seems to depend again on the demonstrability of the sources, and it should be noted that, almost
invariably, the publisher disclaims responsibility for the view expressed or dictates the particular range of views to which he will sanction publicity. In all their variety expositions of this sort represent many degrees of good and bad; the better of them are of great value to the student of recent times both immediately and later, and the characteristic that differentiates those better is either their demonstration of sources or (a very common quality) the scholarly repute of their authors. Closely allied is the radio's main service. Its utterances are impermanent and its time for them strictly limited and, like the newspaper, although for reasons that vary in some respects, it has to have an eye on the novel and a concern to be first in the field with the facts of nascent history. This really is the main historical function of the daily newspaper and the minute-to-minute radio: that they give the first accounts of the seeming facts of recent history. And the film is preoccupied, as yet, with dramatising the past or screening novelties occurring in yesterday's present and, apart from its relatively perfect potential as a source of fact, it has not so far advanced the study of history to any notable extent. Of course, its possibilities in this direction in combination with such an agency as television are obviously immense.

One and all, however, these agencies, the periodical, the radio, the newspaper and the film, as they have demonstrated up to this present are not meet for dealing with history that is a unity and for conveying it in convenient, clear, and readily accessible form. They are at best

21. e.g. See the disclaimer printed on the inside front cover of all copies of "Foreign Affairs". An American Quarterly Review, Published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Concord, N.H. U.S.A.
to commandeer Lord Acton's phrase, "a rope of sand" and repositories for the materials of the more concrete narrative to be made tomorrow. Exclusive of the film, their physical limitations make it impossible for them to display the outline of the truth of the continuous development of men's affairs in time and space, and the unity of life to which each and every fact is species not genus. If the film can do more than the others it still seems that it must remain very limited in handling the constantly changing perspective that demands, even of the written narrative, that from time to time it be rewritten. In fine, the book is still the main and the best medium for the transmission of knowledge of the past to the present in recent as in other history.

Finally, as to contemporary history in the twentieth century. As we have seen recent history is an academic product but contemporary history is in line with the ancient order and customarily an expression by men of affairs. But, parallel with the adoption of scientific method by history, the demand increased for biographical literature in its various forms as sources for the new objective history. Consequently, with history more and more a field for specialists penetrating more and more into the nooks and crannies of the past, men of action (and presumably of eminence) who had literary inclinations have tended towards memoirs and autobiographies and away from the field proper to the trained historian. Seen another way, an effect of the progressive division of labour and of the setting apart of history as a sphere for the expert has been to exclude men of affairs from historiography while increasing the value of other expressions of the content of their memories. Thus the contemporary
historian of the pattern of Thucydides is almost without place in the last hundred and fifty years although most great men have published their recollections, or, if they have not done so, others have ransacked their papers and the memories of friends, relatives and foes to do so for them. Contemporary or memory history has been disavowed as history but elevated as a source of history. The possible exception is, of course, Mr. Winston Churchill than whom no one in the last century and a half is more fit to stand with the immortal contemporary historians. Mr. Churchill is an epitome of the great historians from Herodotus to the eighteenth century: Who more a man of action and affairs? Who more with opportunity arising from breaks in his career? Who more conversant and intimate with the highest levels of human affairs? Who more by travel or place or birth or position at the conflux of civilizations? And who more apt in expression or gifted with dispassion when dispassion serves? Then, are we to suppose him supreme amongst the immortal writers of contemporary history? No: there is no prospect of that. Mr. Churchill, it is sometimes said, is the reincarnation of the spirit of English history but, whatever the truth in that, it is more true that he is the pre-Ranke historian reborn in a different age. History is now a sphere for scholarly specialization and the application of an expert's technique and what it, and the world at large, wants from Mr. Churchill is his account of the great affairs with which he has been intimate. And "the greatest Englishman of his generation" is astute enough to know it and to make no pretence to recent history or to hazard a contemporary history. Instead, he is content to record the high affairs of polity that have come within the compass of his personal experience and to produce what are, indubitably,
his memoirs. They are not history because, while they deal with the recent past and draw on sources other than memory, they excuse from criticism the author himself and the sphere of association that moved with him and not against him. Again, they are not biographical as the title of the first and only volume to reach the printers indicates and the extra-personal nature of its content confirms. And so he, the best endowed of contemporary historians shows that contemporary history is a thing of the past.

22. Churchill: "The Gathering Storm". Due to appear from Messrs. Collins & Coy., Melbourne in October, 1948. A title for the whole series planned has not so far been decided upon. Much of the content of the first volume was published throughout the world in newspapers earlier this year, (1948).
CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF RECENT HISTORY

By way of conclusion let us turn to the utility of recent history for therein it is to be judged more or less worthwhile. Knowledge of mankind in the past and in the recent past must aid our striving for betterment or promise such assistance to posterity. To this assertion there can be no opposing argument unless it be in terms that justify knowledge divorced from use; And who is to offer such counsel? No: use there must be; the problem is the kind of use. But those who rank foremost in historiography through the ages are as diverse in their conceptions of the function of history as in name and place and time. If we enquire of each of the immortals what purpose history serves each answer has one thing in common and almost everything else in particular. Invariably history has been conceived, explicitly or implicitly, as serving the present, but the nature of that service is described in unending variety. At once we may dismiss the ranks of the historians of Greece and Rome, of the middle ages and of the intervening centuries prior to the eighteenth: the answers of these men are conditioned by attitudes towards history which we now discount. And, to represent the views of our latter-day, let us turn to the Inaugural Lectures of the Regius Professors of Cambridge and Oxford since 1841.

York Fowell noticed as "the importance of history" that it had forwarded nationalism for better or for worse, and Professor Trevelyan

that "if rightly studied" it made men better in their various callings while, for the average reader, it is at once "a stimulation and a satisfaction of intellectual curiosity". For Bury it had in common with the end of higher education "the training of the mind to look at experience objectively, without relation to one's own time and place", and this is a similar thought to that of Stubbs that "the aim of Historical teaching is the training of the judgment to be exercised in the moral, social and political work of life". Arnold distinguished the historian from the antiquary by his "strong and lively interest in the present", Goldwin Smith and Seeley saw it useful as a training for high public office, and the latter complained that in the ordinary teaching of history the point of application is never reached. "History has no disciplinary or independent value if it is used with an easy and indifferent familiarity to point a moral and adorn a tale" said Powicke who states the main purpose of the Oxford School as "to educate a man to understand modern civilization". Amongst these suggestions all that is clear is that history has a variety of present functions that tend towards personal and public advantage. It is, perhaps, from Lord Acton that we have the essence of the views of modern English scholarship:-

"To men in general I would justify the stress I am laying on Modern History — — — by the argument that it is a narrative told of ourselves, the record of a life which is our own, of efforts not yet abandoned to repose, of problems that still entangle the feet and vex the hearts of men."

It conveys, he goes on, the lessons of experience and fulfils its purpose if it only makes us wiser and gives us the gift of historical thinking,

it assists the formation of character and training of talent. And then—

"Convictions that have been strained through the instances and comparisons of modern times differ immeasurably in solidity and force from those which every new fact perturbs and which are often little better than illusions and unsifted prejudice." 3

The gist of this and the sum of the earlier suggestions is surely that history is of a kind with personal memory but personal memory projected into extra-personal spheres and extra-personal time. Without memory a man is immature, without history his society is a nursery full of "illusion and unsifted prejudice".

But to say that is not enough. No man is to be conceived entirely devoid of memory and no society can be imagined innocent as Adam and Eve. Clearly, the experience of its ancestors has ever been available to any given present in some degree. Even the lower animals seem to have an inheritance of experience to pass on to their young, and a prime distinction of man is that he has at once the greatest need of, and the best means for, this elementary education. With the development of more efficient means more of the lessons of experience have been transmissible and the level of educational attainment progressively raised. If we ask ourselves: What is the most fundamental fact about education? the answer must be the transmission to the child of the lessons of the parent's experience. Basically the aims of education must be to avoid to-day what was detrimental in the experience of yesterday and to foster to-day what was beneficial in the experience of yesterday. Of course, education embraces a great deal more than that and posits a multitude of problems, yet its first principle is, maybe, to ensure betterment from knowledge of good and evil.

But experience, and only experience, can bear this knowledge, and what remains are the great problems associated with transmission. These are of three kinds: those associated with choice amongst experiences, with the actual conveyance, and with its assimilation by the recipients. And the higher the order of life the more diversified its form and the greater the problems of choice and assimilation but the more numerous the means and aids to transmission. In fine, history functions primarily as an aspect of education; it selects certain experience and adopts a means suitable for its transmission and fit for the needs of its various recipients.

In this view, that history is a function of education, all the parts of the jig-saw fall into place. The questions of philosophy, mutability, scope and content, the personal factor, science, or law and causation, have to do primarily with choice amongst experiences. The first essential in the historian is that he is a teacher choosing and conveying with an eye to his pupil. And this pupil, clearly enough, is, in his variety of capacity and need, the centre of a host of special difficulties. But the governing factor in all is the thought that history is a select part of education and concerned only with a part of the totality of experience. It is not the part of history to teach the earlier experience of men with mathematics, or with art, or with agriculture, or with handicrafts, or with philosophies, or with gods, any more than it has a duty to warn the present that fire burns or to show the conventional uses of a knife. The lessons of experience in these and innumerable other facets of education are chosen and taught to the present departmentally. The task of history is to show the inter-relation of all these experiences at a time and in time; that is,
it deals with the unity of life both vertically and horizontally in time, and endeavours to select and teach the lessons of the inter-relation of experience. But, then, the bearing of experience to experience is a consequence of setting "the solitary in families", and the larger the family the greater the total body of its experiences and the more it is necessary to trace their inter-relation through the most representative experiences. Inseparable from the family, great or small, is a hierarchy of government based fundamentally on the variety of capacity to use force of various kinds. Men are not born equal and within the unity of a society there is one or more who have what is necessary to command the obedience of all or most. This ascendancy of a governing element is in itself a representation of the total experience of the group and, thereafter, the subsequent experience within the group must tend to be reflected in the actions of government. For instance, if the general experience is prosperity or adversity, any record of it that the future finds will tend to be amongst the traces left by government both because government tends to react to the general circumstances of the governed and because any means of recording will tend to be more at the disposal of masters than of servants. Thus, the experiences within a polity tend to be represented in the actions of its governing element and, so far as traces of experience at a time are to be found, these will tend to convey the experiences of government. That is, when we attempt to project memory beyond personal limits the experience of the past we seek as most representative is the political experience of the past, and this, as it happens, has, on the whole,

left most traces of its happening.

Indubitably, history functioning as an aspect of education teaches the lessons of political (or representative) experience first and foremost. Yet, at the same time, it should never lose sight of its goal of the sum of total past experience, which may or may not repose in political history. Attainment of this end depends entirely upon the adequacy of the traces left by the past, and overtly, the content and scope of history increases in proportion as traces are left. Thus, increasingly, while political history has remained the backbone of history, more and more of the inter-relationship of experience at other levels in society has come within the compass of the historian. Inevitably it would seem, each subdivision of knowledge must deal increasingly with its own history and the experiences in the past of its kind. And, as inevitably, the particular study called "history" must tend to pursue exclusively the grand inter-relation with political history retained as its touchstone. Already the problem obstructs and the historian is more in danger of drowning than of death. But the difficulty must be mastered. History is required to remind us of the unity of all experience and to transmit, as far as it can, the lesson of the experience of unity in life.

The scope of history as a branch of knowledge is hard to define but, if it is to be reduced to a succinct word or two, it must be that it treats of the unity of life. Its theme, it would appear, is that all human life, past, present and future, is indivisible; and its use, it seems, is to teach the present the significance pertaining to the concept of unity and to point to the conditions that were associated with gain or loss in the organic development of the whole. Restated, it teaches the
totality of experience and seeks for the relationship of any particular experience to this whole in the length and breadth of time. In doing so its service is of two kinds: it sets wide horizons about the minds of men and it advances their social life; but it is doubtful whether this is to say more than that its teaching depends on the pupil. It may serve all men by abetting improved social relationships but for some only can it make the room of life wider. Then, to pursue its most universal use, we set aside its influence upon high thinking and turn to the more immediate practical utility of history as an aid to social advance. The essence is that history is much more than politics but politics is its backbone, and that the use of history is much more than the assistance of progress in social relations, but that, conditioned as it is by the capacities of its "pupils", this is the most extensive level of its use.

To serve the present by fostering the advance of social relations history draws upon all that is known of the experiences of men in their relationships with men. Many factors condition the relationship of man to man but the fundamental thing in social intercourse is that every man in whatever he does seeks to better the lot of himself or of some others, and, not infrequently, of both. Common to every experience is, as was suggested earlier, the element of striving; a man strives with his environment or with other men, alone or in a group, for personal or social gain; and certain striving in certain circumstances tends in the fullness of time, to produce certain results. It is in the gift of history that from knowledge

5. This is not an economic interpretation of history. Men's wants are infinite, their resources limited. But the second of these phenomena arises from the first. Satisfy one want and another replaces it, remove "economic" scarcity and men will still indulge in acquisitive striving although, then, for other than carnal ends.
of the effort, the conditions, and the outcome, it can point to the probability of a similar outcome from similar present factors. In this its value in the present is at least as great as the value of his personal experience is to an individual in the present; and it is customary to repose our trust in men of experience when choice between men with and without experience confronts us. No later experience of an individual is ever quite identical with any earlier occurrence in his life and less still is there exact similarity between any two experiences of society.

The matter of importance is the compounding of residues that empower a man or a society to sense the better amongst several present choices; whether or not the best choice is made clear, there is a considerable prospect that the more disadvantageous are avoided. So, from knowledge of the experiences of men striving within groups in the past, history functions most universally by offering aid in the present in choosing the direction of our social efforts.

The use of recent history is of a kind with the use of history. The concept of the unity of life embraces human existence from the dawn of time until this moment and fosters the concept of history as one whole. If the latest period in the experience of mankind was indistinguishable from any other period in that its contents were the works of the dead, the use of recent history would be no more and no less than the use of history. But it is distinguishable, for, increasingly, it contains the works of the living. This brings us to the very essence of any claim in support of recent history: it has been the nursery of the presently living or, almost equally important, of their immediate ancestors. Clearly, the recent past has made the present in a double sense: the present is born of the past.
impersonally but of the recent past personally as well as impersonally. Then, as to the concept of unity, history emphasises unity vertically in time whereas recent history stresses the horizontal wholeness of life. And, as to experience teaching, the "end-on" emphasis in historical causation gives way to a "side-on" stress. History is a projection of personal memory beyond its possible span but recent history is, on the whole, within that span and, instead of substituting for memory, it functions to rectify and complement it. Thus, while history deals with impersonal experience in inter-relation, recent history describes the inter-relation of experience that is personal and, so, elaborates and explains our individual experiences and advances self-knowledge. In so doing recent history extends the use of history from the understanding of gregarious life (the spirit of community) to the understanding of individual life: it explains his society to a man and a man to himself and sheathes home the paramount lesson of history: that self is to be understood in subordination to a higher series and, conversely, that the higher series is the sum of self. Which, indeed, means that life is not only indivisible in time but also now, in this present, exclusive of time.

Recent history fulfils the supreme purpose of history by extending its unity to the uttermost while transposing it from an abstraction to a personal and living issue. In a second and higher sense "history is a narrative told of ourselves, the record of a life which is our own," and it passes from the figurative to the literal sense of this passage when recent history weaves the gossamer strands of memory into the warp

6. Acton: ibid.
and woof of the fabric of total life. Only recent history can do this. The more distant past ever remains impersonal and unreal and liable to disavowal. But recent history weighs on our consciences like Lady Macbeth's "damned spot", it is our doing, a deed done in the flesh, and for good or bad a responsibility we cannot escape. And there, be it noted, is history's point of application, for, when it cannot be escaped, we are forced to recognize and accept it all as our past and not the past, and, so doing, to advance towards the goal implicit in the Socratic maxim: "Know thyself". There is, it seems, an external spirit born of gregariousness that enters into the presently living to give and get sustenance, to bear and be reborn. It patterns present life and is refashioned in it, but its power is not of itself but of those in whom it dwells; its effect upon tomorrow is from us, its effect upon us is from yesterday. History is a tale of its wanderings but recent history spans the time of metamorphosis and deals with its latest incarnation. Recent history tells of this spirit as a living issue, clad in flesh and blood that are our own and as inseparable from us as any other member; it tells then of ourselves as historical beings. Beyond the concept of unity and the didacticism of experience is the higher question of the mystery that is personality. "The recent Past contains the key to the present time," but more, it opens the door that reveals the presence in ourselves of the eternal spirit to which history bears witness.

It is required of a study that explains ourselves that it be forthright in its objectivity and copious in its sympathies. "Illusion and unshifted prejudice" are the antithesis of the historical attitude yet the makings of both are congenital in us. Consequently, history, and in particular recent history, is ever in danger of being suborned to sentiment, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the risk that the cure may prove worse than the complaint. The highest level of the latest unfolding of organic history is the United Nations' Organization towards which any one of us can project an objective realism or a blind faith. Allowing that it is accepted that the data hold with the assertion, the historian narrating the seeming truth of this century to the present should deal with international organization on the theme of progressive development and reveal and state quite bluntly the inadequacy of the existing international government to ensure order. Put another way, the historian cannot but conclude from his knowledge of the past that war is as probable as the United Nations' Organization is insufficient to prevent it. But, very often, historians do not say this in the commentaries on contemporary life which issue from them. Instead, as it seems, they tend to iterate whatever is suited to support an unthinking faith and they keep to themselves the rational scepticism which the evidence of history must dictate to them. Of course, the reason for this is that it is dangerous to shatter sentiments, but more than that, it is suggested, it has to do with the immaturity of recent history. It is to-day unthinkable that a


historian would approach the Congress of Vienna in this manner, or even that the League of Nations should be free of historical criticism. Why, then, is United Nations sacrosanct? It is because we are not, as yet, accustomed to the advance of the historian's objectivity into the present, and that, despite all its progress, academic history has a long way to go; and much of the country it has to traverse is the waste land known as recent history. "It is equally, however the duty of a Hellene, when he is bequeathing to future generations a historical record of past events, to bequeath it altogether uncontaminated by falsehood." And no less is it the duty of a historian to bequeath to his own generation an exposition of itself uncontaminated by evasion and half-truth. Nothing is, perhaps, more difficult than to see ourselves and our personal affairs with dispassion and in detachment, and a similar Sisyphean labour faces us, it seems, in seeing objectively the social present which is, willy-nilly, but another personal affair.

Finally, dealing thus with what is intensely human in its content and point of culmination, history demands of its historians the balm of compassion. The more recent the past narrated or commented upon the more painful the wound history may inflict upon our sentimental systems, and the greater the need for the touch of sympathetic understanding on the fevered brow of the present and its becoming. This is not to renounce justice. The first office of the historian, in his scrutiny of the works of human nature, is to do justly and to set apart right and wrong. But it claims that, as his criterion, a moral code is not enough for morality is but an institution. Institutions, like drums and trumpets, are only by-products

of the activity of "vital-force" in men which is the true object of the historian's enquiry and the constant stimulant of his curiosity. To unravel this divine spark at play in recent history is to dissect the living, and this demands not the scalpel of critical scepticism but that of intensely human understanding. The truth must be told, but not to point the finger: the historian of recent history must be himself the first penitent! Maybe these were among John Morley's thoughts when he inscribed over his mantel-shelf these words from Bacon: "The nobler a soul, the more the objects of compassion it hath." Be that as it may, recent history is pre-eminently a province for compassion for it narrates not so much the iniquities of others as the errors of ourselves. And seeking thus to reveal our secrets, to prick the bubble of our egotism, to strip from us our illusions, to sift our prejudices, to enter into our hearts, to tamper, perhaps, with the eternal spirit of history at work in ourselves, recent history requires in its historian not only an attitude of ruthless objectivity and a relentless intent to pursue truth, but also that nobility of mind that commands, by its graces, the trust of men.

The progressive development of human inventions, the onset of power production, and the present rapidly extending and unifying economic organization of mankind are subjects that cannot be properly dealt with in a general review of Life; they belong in part to current history and in part to descriptive economics. But here we may say a few words upon the subject of the development of that conscious unification of the human species which is now going on very rapidly. And again we face something quite unparalleled elsewhere in the entire realm of biology.

Other species of animal seem to have an individual conscious existence limited strictly to their individual experiences, but with the dawn of tradition the human mind began to extend itself in time and space beyond the individual range. The difference between the human mind and the mind of a chimpanzee is infinitely greater than the difference of the bodies or brains of the two; it is as different as a bird is from a snake; it moves in more dimensions. At present a human mind, fully developed by education and inquiry, reaches so far and so wide that individual experience is a mere point of departure for its tremendous ramifications. What it has of its very own is altogether dwarfed by what it has in common with other individuals of the species. Just so far as a human mind is well-informed and soundly instructed, so far is it able to understand, that is to say identify itself with, other well-informed and soundly instructed minds. By means of books, pictures, museums, and the like, the species builds up the apparatus of a superhuman memory. Imaginatively the individual now links himself with and secures the use of this continually increasing and continually more systematic and accessible super-memory. The human mind neither begins nor ends therefore with the abruptness of an animal mind. As it grows up, it takes to itself more or less completely the growing mental life of the race, adds a personal interpretation to it, gives it substance and application, and in due course fades out as an individuality, while continuing in its consequences as a contribution to the undying flood. From the point of view of the species, the consciousnesses of men are passing trains of thought and impulse. They are now as much part of a larger life as the perception of the sunlight on this sheet of paper and of the singing of a bird outside are parts of the life of the writer of this sentence. They are material and enrichment. It is not a metaphor, not an analogy; it is a statement of fact that this larger comprehensive life is going on.
In this work we have traced a long process of synthesis from the single cell to the multicellular organism and from the coelenterate to the coelomate. We have seen the interdependence of individuals in space increase with the development of colonial and gregarious forms and of individuals in time with the growing care and intimacy of parent for young. The higher forms of interdependence have involved great extensions of mental correlation. We have shown how human social economy is based almost entirely upon the mental modifications of the individual and how little it owes to instinct. This mental modification is steadily in the direction of the subordination of egotism and the suppression of extremes of uncorrelated individual activity. An inflation of the persona has gone on, so that the individual has become tribal, patriotic, loyal, or devotee. Homo sapiens accommodates this persona, by which he conducts his individual life, to wider and wider conceptions.

The more intelligent and comprehensive man's picture of the universe has become, the more intolerable has become his concentration upon the individual life with its inevitable final rejection. No animal, it would seem, realizes death. Man does. He knows that before his individuality lies the probability of senility and the certainty of death. He has found two alternative lines of accommodation.

The first is a belief in personal immortality, in the unendingness of his conscious self. After this life, we are told, comes the resurrection and all necessary rejuvenescence. This idea is the essential consolation of several of the great religions of the world. We have already discussed its credibility.

The second line of accommodation is the realization of his participation in a greater being with which he identifies himself. He escapes from his ego by this merger, and acquires an impersonal immortality in the association; his identity dissolving into the greater identity. This is the essence of much religious mysticism, and it is remarkable how closely the biological analysis of individuality brings us to the mystics. The individual, according to this second line of thought, saves himself by losing himself. But in the mystical teaching he loses himself in the Deity, and in the scientific interpretation of life he forgets himself as Tom, Dick, or Harry, and discovers himself as Man. The Buddhist treatment of the same necessity is to teach that the individual life is a painful delusion from which men escape by the conquest of individual desire. Western Mystic and Eastern Sage find a strong effect of endorsement in modern science and in the everyday teaching of practical morality. Both teach that self must be subordinated; that self is a method and not an end.

We have already, if this account of mental processes is sound, the gradual appearance of what we may call synthetic superminds in the species Homo sapiens, into which individual consciousnesses tend to merge themselves. These super-individual organizations have taken the form of creeds, communities, cultures, churches, states, classes, and such-like
accumulations of mentality. They have grown and interacted in the history
of the species very like the complexes of an individual human mind. They
seem to have now under current conditions a ruling disposition to coalesce.
They seem to be heading towards an ultimate unification into a collective
human organism, whose knowledge and memory will be all science and all
history, which will synthesize the prevailing will to live and reproduce
into a collective purpose of continuation and growth. Upon that creative
organization of thought and will the continuing succession of conscious
individual lives, drawing upon and adding to its resources, will go on.
At the end of our vista of the progressive mental development of mankind
stands the promise of Man, consciously controlling his own destinies and
the destinies of all life upon this planet.

But note these words we are using, "seem" and "promise". This
is no assured destiny for our kind. The great imperfect conflicting
collectivities of to-day, swiftly as they have developed and wonderful as
they are in comparison with all other animal life, may never become a
unity. Man may prove unable to rid himself of the overdevelopment of
war; he may be hindered too long by the dull, the egoistic, and the un-
imaginative, by the stupid, timid, and tradition-swayed majority, ever to
achieve an effective unity. The dead-weight of inferior population may
overpower the constructive few. Or the incalculable run of climatic
changes may turn harshly against him. Strange epidemics may arise too
swift and deadly for his still very imperfect medical science to save
him from extirpation. There is no certain assurance that rats and mice,
dogs gone wild again, prowling cats, flies, and a multitudinous vermin
may not presently bolt, hide, and swarm amidst the decaying ruins of his
cities. Shoals of fish may dart in the shadow encrusted wreckage of
his last lost ships. We have no assurance that so Homo sapiens may not
end. But such an end is hard to believe possible.