

BENEDETTO CROCE

HISTORY: ITS THEORY AND PRACTICE

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY
DOUGLAS AINSLIE

R. G. COLLINGWOOD

THE IDEA OF HISTORY

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Reprinted from the English Edition by Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1923

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST ITALIAN EDITION

ALMOST all the writings which compose the present treatise were printed in the proceedings of Italian academies and in Italian reviews between 1912 and 1913. Since they formed part of a general scheme, their collection in book form presented no difficulties. This volume has appeared in German under the title *Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Historiographie* (Tübingen, Mohr, 1915).

On publishing in book form in Italian, I made a few slight alterations here and there and added three brief essays, placed as an appendix to the first part.

The description of the volume as forming the fourth of my *Philosophy of the Spirit* requires some explanation; for it does not really form a new systematic part of the philosophy, and is rather to be looked upon as a deepening and amplification of the theory of historiography, already outlined in certain chapters of the second part, namely the *Logic*. But the problem of historical comprehension is that toward which pointed all my investigations as to the modes of the spirit, their distinction and unity, their truly concrete life, which is development and history, and as to historical thought, which is the self-consciousness of this life. In a certain sense, therefore, this resumption of the treatment of historiography on the completion of the wide circle, this drawing forth of it from the limits of the first treatment

of the subject, was the most natural conclusion that could be given to the whole work. The character of 'conclusion' both explains and justifies the literary form of this last volume, which is more compressed and less didactic than that of the previous volumes.

B. C.

NAPLES : *May* 1916

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE author himself explains the precise connexion of the present work with the other three volumes of the *Philosophy of the Spirit*, to which it now forms the conclusion.

I had not contemplated translating this treatise, when engaged upon the others, for the reason that it was not in existence in its present form, and an external parallel to its position as the last, the late comer of the four masterpieces, is to be found in the fact of its publication by another firm than that which produced the preceding volumes. This diversity in unity will, I am convinced, by no means act as a bar to the dissemination of the original thought contained in its pages, none of which will, I trust, escape the diligent reader through the close meshes of the translation.

The volume is similar in format to the *Logic*, the *Philosophy of the Practical*, and the *Æsthetic*. The last is now out of print, but will reappear translated by me from the definitive fourth Italian edition, greatly exceeding in bulk the previous editions.

The present translation is from the second Italian edition, published in 1919. In this the author made some slight verbal corrections and a few small additions. I have, as always, followed the text with the closest respect.

D. A.

THE ATHENÆUM, LONDON
November 1920

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PART I

THEORY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

I

HISTORY AND CHRONICLE

I

‘CONTEMPORARY history’ is wont to be called the history of a passage of time, looked upon as a most recent past, whether it be that of the last fifty years, a decade, a year, a month, a day, or indeed of the last hour or of the last minute. But 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 : it is, for instance, the history that I make of myself while I am in the act of composing these pages ; it is the thought of my composition, linked of necessity to the work of composition. ‘Contemporary’ would be well employed in this case, just because this, like every act of the spirit, is outside time (of the first and after) and is formed ‘at the same time’ as the act to which it is linked, and from which it is distinguished by means of a distinction not chronological but ideal. ‘Non-contemporary history,’ ‘past history,’ would, on the other hand, be that which finds itself in the presence of a history already formed, and which thus comes into being as a criticism of that history, whether it be thousands of years or hardly an hour old.