A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE

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TO
MARY AND KENNETH AND ELLEN

PREFACE

It is generally the origin of the new that we seek in the past. We want to know how the new thoughts and new forms of life, which in later times revealed themselves in all their fullness, developed. We examine every period chiefly for the promise it conceals of that which follows, especially of that which helps to control the life of today. Yet in this search for the seeds of new life we sometimes forget that in the life of man, as in that of a forest, birth and death are forever taking place side by side and almost unnoticed. Old forms of civilization die at the same time and on the same soil wherein the new finds the nourishment by which it grows. Feudalism, useful as it was in its day, had to disappear before men could live together as a nation. Nowhere else is the chronicle of this birth and death to be found in greater variety and fullness than in literature. There we may see the world of the body, the intellect, and the soul; there we are given glimpses of the lowest depths and the loftiest heights; there are to be seen the broad influences to which millions of men have been subjected in common, the general outlook on life, and the prevailing types of sentiment. Literature obtains its subject-matter from life. It is informed and colored by the life to which it gives expression. In its turn it helps to change life. Dickens, for instance, gave "a greater impulse than any other man of his generation to that righteous hatred of caste-feeling and class-cruelty which more and more distinguishes modern society" from every preceding period. It is for these reasons that so much space in this story of a people, in this attempt to narrate their essential thoughts and deeds, has been devoted to literature.

Yet this unusual attention to literature has not made impossible a fairly full treatment of political development. Nowhere else in the world has the progress of constitutional government, of the spirit and the institutions of democracy, been so important as in the British Isles; and so an attempt has been made to record and explain every essential step in that long march from the days of the Witenagemot to the last extension of the suffrage and the curtailment of the veto power of the House of Lords.

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A knowledge of their political development, however, were it unaccompanied by a study of other conditions, would still leave us with only an inadequate understanding of the life of the British people. We must know something of the economic and social conditions of life in the country and in the towns. The changes in agricultural conditions have therefore been traced from the time of the Saxon settlements, through the medieval period and the agrarian revolution of the eighteenth century, down to the last parliamentary enactment pertaining to land and the conditions of its tenure. Still more, if we are to have a living and comprehensive picture of life in those islands, must we learn something of that great industrial revolution which, measured by its consequences, is one of the great overruling facts of the modern world. The most outstanding of these consequences, all through the subsequent years, have been indicated down to the accession to office of the Labor Ministry.

Of one other thing it seems well here to speak. The history of thought and the development of science have been sketched, from John Scotus Erigena to Herbert Spencer, and from Roger Bacon to Charles Darwin; and in dealing with these intellectual aspects of human activity an effort has been made to show how they have affected life, especially how they have enriched and made progressive and more humane the life of our own time. Two things stand out in this last study. We have in our possession at last, such has been the progress of scientific method, the conditions of secure and effective thinking; and more and more as the years go by, despite the outbreaks of war and their attendant periods of discouragement, humanitarian ideals are molding society. The latter of these two facts will be found illustrated in the many pages devoted to altruistic thought and deeds, from the translations of continental books that Alfred the Great made for the benefit of his people to the putting into operation of the National Insurance Act. All of these things speak eloquently of social idealism; and history, if it is not to be innocuous, if it is to have a vital part in the education of our youth, must always be concerned with social idealism. What is education? Is it only a system of study? Is it only rule and measure, method and process? Or is it also the freeing of a man's hand, the invigorating of his will, and the firing of his soul, for the great adventure of life? This book has been written in the belief that the only education that counts is that which vitalizes and inspires.

A dual system of dates has been used in the book. For Kings

and Popes and other rulers the dates of their reigns and pontificates are given, while for all others the dates are those of birth and death.

I wish to give my hearty thanks to all who have helped me with the book: to Professor George L. Burr, of Cornell University, who, after reading several of the earlier chapters and many pages in later ones, made a number of suggestions and sent a generous word of encouragement; to Professor James F. Baldwin, of Vassar College, whose admirable scholarship saved me from many slips; to Professor Winfred T. Root, of the University of Wisconsin, who indicated several very desirable changes; and, finally, to Professor Dana C. Munro, of Princeton University, whose careful and thoughtful reading discovered many opportunities for amendment.

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NORTH AMERICA
North Pole
ASIA
BRITISH ISLES
EUROPE
ATLANTIC
OCEAN
AFRICA

A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE BRITISH ISLES

CHAP. I

AT no distant date in geological history the British Isles were attached to the neighboring continent, a fact that accounts for the unusual shallowness of their surrounding seas. And ever since their separation their story has been closely connected with that of the mainland of which they once formed a part. If one should turn a terrestrial globe so as to make those islands the point nearest to the eye, it would be seen that they are situated almost in the geometrical center of all the land on the face of the earth. Yet this central geographical position has not always served to put the British Isles in the midst of civilization, even in the midst of western civilization. It did not do so until long after Columbus discovered America. For more than two thousand years of written history they were on the confines of civilization. Beyond them, so men thought, were only the impenetrable ice-fields of the north and in the west the trackless and untraversed ocean. Britain was the last important territorial acquisition of the Roman Empire in its time of strength and was the first to be relinquished in the period of its decay. But after the discoveries of Columbus, in addition to being the center of the land hemisphere of the planet, England gradually became the center of Occidental civilization. Its modern history is in large measure the story of its adaptation, step by step, to its ever-widening social environment. For it is a general rule that nations, as well as individuals, grow by contact with the outside world. Thus in the course of its history it has possessed the geographical and social qualities of insularity and universality. The quality of insularity, dominant before the days of Columbus, enabled the inhabitants to live comparatively undisturbed. Invasions were less frequent than those to which the continental countries were subjected, and they were far more gradual in character. This comparative relief from

General Situation of the Islands

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the fear of invasion lessened the number of men and the amount of material required for defense and permitted the devotion of a greater energy to the affairs of civilization. Yet the insularity was not so pronounced as to forbid the influence of continental civilization. The island was not so remote as to hear no rumors of what was going on in the greater world across the narrow sea. It was "insulated yet not isolated."

Coast-line, Rivers, and Canals of England

Politically the islands have had four main divisions, England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland; and these political groups correspond to pronounced geographical differences. We shall therefore divide our description of the geography of the islands into four parts in conformity with the four natural sections. First, then, we have to deal with the geography of England. The English coast-line is so deeply and so frequently indented with the mouths of rivers and with bays that no part of the interior is more than seventy miles from tidal water. Projections as well as indentations serve to fret the coast-line, particularly on the west; yet on the south and east there are long stretches in which the shore is uninflected. The formation of the coast varies very greatly. Where the hills approach the sea the land terminates abruptly in majestic cliffs; whereas in the places where the plains extend to the sea the shore is made up of low and shifting banks of shingle or of sand. The numerous rivers of England enabled ocean-going vessels to penetrate far into the interior in early times, and even today, when there is a great difference between deep-sea vessels and inland water-craft, they permit coast-wise traffic to such an extent that it may truthfully be said that no part of the country is more than two hours' journey by railway from the sea. The estuaries of the more important rivers, especially those of the Thames, the Mersey, the Tyne, the Humber, and the Severn, are among the most important waterways in the world. All of these rivers are connected with one another by canals which have a total length of some four thousand miles. Thus, roughly speaking, the part of England that lies between London and Hull, on the east side, and between Bristol and Manchester, on the west, is covered with a veritable web of waterways. But this interlacing canal system, which converges upon the London market, is by no means as efficient as it might be. Most of it was built in the pre-railway period and its panic-stricken proprietors were able by means of opposing the proposed railway charters in Parliament to compel the railway companies, as the price of securing acts, to purchase canal shares, so that today the railways own about one-third of the canal mileage. As a consequence of this proprietorship and of the well-established fact that railway transportation, even of low-class

freight, possesses many advantages over transportation in canal barges, the canals have been very largely sacrificed to the railways. Some have become derelict, and others are maintained only in an imperfect condition. They lack uniformity in width and depth, in the size of locks, and in the headway under bridges. With the single exception of the Manchester Ship Canal, which revived the commerce of that great manufacturing city, virtually nothing has been done to improve them in the last ninety years; and whether it would be profitable to make extensive alterations in the systems is a disputed question. Rivers and canals, as means of transportation, have been largely supplanted in recent times in the British Isles, as elsewhere, by railways; and no other country is better served with railways than the United Kingdom. And for seagoing service, British shipping is by far the greatest mercantile marine in the world.

The Natural Divisions of England

The total area of England is 50,874 square miles; and as regards its general character it falls into three distinct regions, the southeast, the center, and the north and west. The first of these natural districts can be roughly indicated by a concave line beginning at the mouth of the Exe, passing through Coventry, and ending at the mouth of the Tees. South and east of this line the land is made of rock so recent in its formation and so soft in its character that it has been able to offer only a slight resistance to the erosion of wind and weather. It is an undulating and level country. It is undulating where its more resistant parts have survived the process of weathering in the form of ridges of limestone and chalk; and it is level where the comparatively long and leisurely rivers flowing from the uplands have distributed their alluvium. The chalk and limestone plateaus of this region are very thinly populated. They are grass-covered districts, with patches of beechwood, devoted principally to the pasturing of sheep. The lower lands are very fertile and are therefore used for agriculture. If a line be drawn from Durham, skirting the Pennine Range and ending at the Lake District, and another beginning at Chester, striking the Severn at Shrewsbury and then following the river to Bristol, one would roughly inclose the central region of England, a great plain from whose surface rise here and there a few outcroppings of the mountains of the region of which we have still to speak. On the confines of this plain, and in several places within its borders, lie the rich coal fields which have added so much to the wealth and power of England. Its textile, metal, pottery, and leather industries have given it a dense population. Its flat surface and low level have facilitated the construction of railways and canals, and the railway junction at Crewe is one of the greatest centers of transportation

in the world. The immediate neighborhood of the mines and the factories has been greatly disfigured with the refuse of the furnace and a pall of smoke; but the central plain as a whole is a smiling land, leafy with woods and flowering hedges and rich in pasture, given to a gentle mellowness and made companionable by the long subjection of the earth to the hand of man. With its cattle-grazing, its sheep and horse-rearing, it is the very heart of rural England, pictured for us in the novels of George Eliot. There are still many little towns in central and southern England untouched by the fever of modern life, lost amid their tilth and pasture, their ancient sanctuaries guarded by noble trees. The restfulness of the rural scenery is striking in its contrast to the energetic activity of the great manufacturing towns with their congested populations, rows of grimy houses, fiery furnaces, belching chimneys, and great heaps of cinder and of slag. The third region is comprised of the mountainous districts,—the Pennine Chain and the Lake District in the north, and in the south-west the Cornwall-Devon peninsula. These two districts taken as a whole are, of course, thinly populated, and depend chiefly upon their mineral products and manufactures. Aside from these things it is to the raising of live-stock rather than to agriculture that their farming lands are devoted. The Lake District possesses in the unusual beauty of its scenery an additional resource. Every year many visitors come to see its lakes and mountains. The tin mines of Cornwall, in the second of these two districts, were worked in the earliest historic times of England and they, together with the important fisheries, support a population unusually dense for a highland district.

The Climate of England

Because of the fact that the normal direction of the wind is from the south-west across a vast area of relatively warm water which accumulates in the north-east of the Atlantic, the climate of England is much milder than one would naturally expect to find it in so northern a latitude. It is also a very equable climate, varying only twenty-one degrees between mean temperatures of the coldest and the hottest months, and yet it has a seasonal range sufficient to make it stimulating at all times. The westerly wind has the effect of warming the air in winter and of cooling it in summer. The strength of this prevailing wind is sufficient to carry the oceanic influence into the heart of the country, so that all parts of the islands share in the advantages it bestows; yet in winter the temperature falls steadily from west to east and in summer it rises steadily in the same direction. A great amount of vapor arises from the warm water of the Atlantic and is carried by the wind to the British Isles, where, as it comes into contact with the colder land, it falls in rain. Much of this is intercepted by the mountain

ranges and precipitated on the western coasts, which thus form a belt of rainy country; but not a little is conveyed to the low-lying lands of the east. Oftentimes, therefore, the skies are low, the soft cloud stooping as though it would walk the earth. Yet as a rule the rains are not heavy. Jeremy Taylor described the average English rainfall correctly when he spoke of "a soft slap of affectionate rain." The clouds are usually disburdened by a gently falling moisture, and as a consequence the meadows are immortal and the country has a perpetual aspect of freshness and peace. The climate of England seems to be one of the most suitable for the development of civilization that is to be found on the planet.

Physical Appearance of England

There were once great forested areas in England, vast lowland stretches thickly set with oak and wide spaces of the downs densely covered with beech; but now they have almost entirely disappeared. Only here and there, such as the New Forest in Hampshire, the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, and Epping Forest near London, do the deep forests of old linger in well defined woodland areas. More meager remains are preserved as nesting places for game birds, principally pheasants. The extraordinarily rich appearance of central England is due to the high and luxuriant hedges that divide the little fields, and still more to the frequent trees. The well-known and true remark that in central England one always seems to be coming to a great woodland yet never reaches it is due to the fact that there are endless series and lines of hedgerow elms, a tree brought to the island by the Normans, and numerous patriarchal oaks now isolated and regnant in the midst of their fields. In early times, too, in the south-east, but principally in the east, there were great fens, or marshes; and most of the valleys were impassable morasses, or covered with impenetrable forest tangle. These desolated wildernesses of shallow waters and reedy holms, inhabited only by noisy water-fowl, have all been drained. The flat open lands of parts of Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, and Lincoln, known as Fenland, have been changed into fertile fields kept from their former conditions by an extensive system of dykes and ditches. The soil is black, and great quantities of root crops, such as beets and turnips, are grown for fattening cattle. In addition these eastern counties grow wheat and barley and have great fisheries. The chief fishing ground is the Dogger Bank, from which the catch is brought to Grimsby, Yarmouth, and Lowestoft. The villages of this district sit astride ridges. They are pleasantly wooded, and each has an ancient church.

Industries of England

The chief industries of England are commerce, manufactures, mining, farming, and fishing. Commerce is based upon the manufactures, the mining, and the fishing; and its predominating char-

CHAP. I

acteristic is the large importation of food-stuffs and raw materials and the large exportation of manufactures. And manufacture, which is very wide and varied and shows marked capacity for still further expansion, is based upon the mining, the farming, and the importation of raw materials. Only in the last two hundred years has coal been worked in England on a large scale, but now it is the most important of all the minerals found in the island. Its production requires the services of a million men. It is found in fields some three thousand miles in extent; and from its first extensive utilization is dated the great Industrial Revolution which has profoundly and irrevocably altered the conditions of human society. The other important minerals, stated in the order of their value, are iron, clay and shale, sandstone, limestone, igneous rocks, salt, and tin; and of these the first is greatly preponderant. The coal fields are to be found chiefly where the mountainous region merges into the central plain, and above all other places on the eastern flank of the Pennines. Yet the vast field of anthracite coal in South Wales, so accessible to ships and favorably situated for export to foreign lands, is one of the greatest economic assets of the islands. Iron is found not far from the coal deposits. Some of the lesser deposits of iron have been worked out, and in some of the richer districts the ore is becoming increasingly difficult to pursue. Consequently the importation of iron ore, chiefly from Spain, is increasing. The great metal-working industries are mainly carried on in as close proximity as possible to the coal fields and the deposits of iron ore. The district most distinctly committed to this industry is that known as the "Black Country" of which the chief town is Birmingham; but metal manufacture is also carried on to a considerable extent in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The manufacture of porcelain and pottery, although widespread, is carried on principally in a district in north Staffordshire known as "The Potteries." The second broad class of industry in England is textile manufacture, of which the three main divisions are cotton, wool, and linen, and which in its entirety in the islands requires the service of one and a quarter million workers. The cotton industry, which constitutes more than one half of the entire textile manufacture, belongs almost exclusively to south Lancashire, and Manchester is its principal town. The manufacture of cotton is so largely confined to Lancashire because much of the raw cotton comes from America to Liverpool. There is also another reason. A moist atmosphere is needed for spinning the better kinds of cotton. The fibre becomes brittle and breaks when the air of the mill is too dry. The western slope of the Pennine Hills is moist with the wet winds that blow from the Atlantic.

The woolen industry is located chiefly in Yorkshire; while nowhere in England is linen manufactured as extensively as it is in Ireland. The silk industry is carried on in Staffordshire and Cheshire; and hosiery and lace manufactures are to be found in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Leicestershire.

English Agriculture

A considerable part of the area of England, though not as much as might be, is devoted to agriculture, which is extremely diversified. Wheat, barley, and oats constitute almost exclusively the grain crops. Fruit is grown to a rather large extent in central and southern England, especially in Kent; and it is in Kent that hops are principally grown. Market-gardening is found profitable in the neighborhood of the great towns; and the Channel and Scilly Isles furnish flowers as well as vegetables for London. Live-stock is raised in the Midlands, and in Somersetshire and those parts of the mountainous region affording hill-pasture. No other country in the world has attained such a high degree of perfection in the improvement of breeds of live-stock as England. The newer countries, such as the United States, Australasia, and Argentina, have been filled with British stock, and the export trade in pedigree animals is still extensive. The density of sheep in the British Isles is far greater than that in any other country. In the United Kingdom agriculture is still the chief occupation, both as regards the annual value of the product and the number of people employed; and yet in some respects it is the most unorganized and backward of all the industries, a matter of grave concern for the economic, and indeed the social, welfare of the people. When we come to the study of England in our own time we shall see that the shrinkage of the area of tillage, and the decline in the number and condition of the laboring population of the country districts, form a very disquieting feature of contemporary British life.

Fisheries

The British seas abound in fish. Fishing stations are found at intervals on all the English coasts; they are more numerous in the east than elsewhere, and most important of them all is Grimsby, at the mouth of the Humber. By far the most valuable of the fish is the herring; but important, too, are the haddock, cod, plaice, and hake. The total annual value of the fish landed in the islands is sixty million dollars.

Geography and History

The structure and position of England have both helped to determine its political history. The civilizing influences of the continent found no great obstacle of sundering sea or mountain barrier to hinder their entrance into the island. The same conditions invited Anglo-Saxon invaders before whose oncoming the earlier inhabitants, the Celts, fled to the mountains of the north and west. When the English were settled in their new home the com-

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