A HISTORY OF MODERN GERMANY

The Reformation

BY

HAJO HOLBORN

Yale University

ALFRED A. KNOPF  *NEW YORK: 1959*

L. C. Catalog card number: 59–5991

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK
PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

FIRST EDITION

TO ANNEMARIE

Foreword

HISTORIANS WILL READILY AGREE that the unity of the West in its social and cultural institutions as well as in its political life has been so marked as to make it impossible to treat the history of any of the European nations in isolation. But the history of Germany in particular defies almost every attempt to trace even a relatively autonomous national development over a longer period of time. In the Middle Ages Germany identified herself so intimately with the ideas of Christian universalism that German history seemingly merged with the general history of Europe. The dissolution of all political authority which followed the defeat of the medieval German emperors left only local or at best regional centers of political power. Where these grew strong, either they extended their influence into the non-German world, as for example in the case of the Hanseatic League in northern Europe, or, as in the case of Switzerland and the Netherlands, they began to develop a distinct national character of their own. Universalism and regionalism blurred the contours of a national German history.

For a while the Protestant Reformation seemed destined to create a German nation through the unity of faith. But whereas England, France, and other European countries emerged from the age of the religious wars strengthened in their national coherence by a common religion, Germany experienced a religious struggle of such a destructive intensity that it resulted in a lasting division. For a long time thereafter practically two Germanies existed side by side, and new political divisions followed the religious rift. The two major German states, Austria and Prussia, conducted their policies in the eighteenth century without giving heed to the common fate of Germany. In the following century, when nationalism swept the Continent, Germany achieved political unification only by the exclusion of Austria.

Germany, broken up internally through most of her history, felt

the impact of general European history more directly and intensely than any of the other big European nations. Her outward geographical forms changed vastly through the ages, and the continuity of her cultural and political development was interrupted by repeated catastrophes. But in spite of this lack of unity and continuity in German history, there has never been any doubt among the German people, and for that matter among their neighbors, that a German nation existed even at times when this nation was completely incapable of common political action and its civilization was torn asunder or flooded by foreign influences. Tenuous and dependent on outside forces as the development of the German nation may appear, the largest people of Europe displayed its own distinctive traits and made contributions to the growth of European culture which sprang from its own resources.

The complexity of German history has, no doubt, been responsible for the fact that no complete histories of Germany are in existence which satisfy the reasonable demands of an educated reader. Modern historical research originated largely in Germany. But although the father of critical historiography, Leopold von Ranke, devoted many of his numerous writings to the history of Germany, he always selected individual periods of German history as subjects of his great works, beginning in 1839 with his *History of Germany in the Age of the Reformation.* The trend of more recent historical research toward ever greater specialization has interfered even with the production of comprehensive histories of certain periods.

During the last century the number of publications in the field of German history has been immense, but among them there has been no readable work that would introduce an interested public to the general course of German history and at the same time combine a sufficiently detailed narrative with an interpretation of the greatest possible objectivity. This task cannot be accomplished by simply tying together a string of histories of individual epochs, because events or movements may acquire a very different significance depending on whether they are viewed in the light of a single age or that of the whole history of a nation. Moreover, in the contemplation of the total course of the history of a nation, new problems come into view which deserve close and serious study by themselves. By refusing to write general history German professional historians have left these problems that are most intimately related to the ultimate interpretation of German history outside of their critical review. Unwittingly they have thus facilitated the spread of conceptions of German history which were

either plainly amateurish or grossly political, a tendency we have seen at its worst in the falsification of German history by the Nazis. It is obvious that the development of a strong public spirit capable of sustaining the new democratic institutions of present-day Germany calls for a fresh study of the German past. This reappraisal ought to be absolutely frank and should not hesitate to criticize even cherished traditional ideals, although it is inevitable that in such a search historic sources of strength will be revealed which will encourage creative endeavor in the future. But the understanding of German history is essential also for Americans. The lack of a clear conception of German history proved a severe handicap in the formation of American war aims and postwar policy and should not be allowed to confuse our policies in the future. Equally important, however, is a knowledge of the origins of modern German culture, which has been a powerful ferment of modern Western civilization, and particularly of American civilization.

In this *History of Modern Germany*, I have undertaken a reassessment of the last five centuries of German history. Actually, the first volume, which attempts to show the transformation of medieval Germany under the impact of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, has in places to reach even further back, in order to clarify some developments that came to a head in the sixteenth century. Since the age of the Reformation was the historic period in which Germany exercised her greatest influence on the rest of Europe, while at the same time she was deeply exposed to the political and cultural movements of other countries, the book had to present also many aspects of the general European history of this epoch. The present volume, entitled *The Reformation*, has been designed to be used by itself by all those readers who are chiefly interested in the Reformation. A considerably larger volume, *Germany Since 1648*, also usable by itself, will bring the history down to 1945.

At the moment of the publication of this work I remember with profound gratitude the men who instructed me in history, and particularly in German history. It was my good fortune to study under great teachers at the University of Berlin in the years after 1920. Friedrich Meinecke was my foremost teacher from the first day I entered the university. From him I received the major part of my professional training, and it should be recorded that in his lecture courses he gave his students a much broader and more many-sided historical education than might be judged on the strength of his published works, which reflect dis-

tinctly his own predilections. My relations with Friedrich Meinecke, which soon became close and intimate, lasted to his death in 1953. We managed to remain in contact even after I had left Germany following the Nazi revolution of 1933.

Friedrich Meinecke awakened my lasting interest in intellectual history, but he also prepared me for an understanding of the work of his eminent friend, Otto Hintze, in constitutional history. Simultaneously Adolf von Harnack and Karl Holl introduced me to the history of Christian religion and of the Church. The universal scope of historical learning and the liberal concept of religion that characterized Harnack, as well as Holl's deep Lutheran piety combined with his sharp analytical mind, remain unforgettable. The dynamic personality of Ernst Troeltsch aroused my early concern about the history of philosophy and philosophy in general. His philosophical criticism of civilization and society made me receptive to many of the ideas of Max Weber, whose spirit was still alive in the members of the sociological school whom I met as colleagues when I began my career as an academic lecturer at Heidelberg University in 1926. Here, too, I found in Hans von Schubert a revered friend, from whom I learned to view religion not only as a movement of ideas but also as a force in the life of the people.

While I remain conscious of these and many other formative influences on my historical thinking and still regard myself as standing in the tradition of Leopold von Ranke, my own reflections on history, past and present, have led me to new conceptions in many respects. My transformation into an American has given me a broader perspective on all things German. Many political or intellectual issues over which Germans like to feud lose their significance if looked at from a distance. Even more important was my growing inclination to evaluate historical phenomena on a comparative level. Seen in this light many events and ideas of German history assume, I believe, their proper proportions. This revision of my view of the history of Germany gained still another dimension through the contemplation of contemporary events in Germany. The rise of the Nazi empire raised profound doubts about any interpretation of German history that could not account for the disastrous forces dominating Germany in those years. Many explanations were offered to the public. The most facile one was the assertion that all Germans were congenitally wicked. Clearly this was no historical but rather a biological explanation, logically indistinguishable from the racialist doctrines of the Nazis themselves. On the other hand we heard the accusation that the German spiritual tradi-

tion had been contaminated at an early stage by the worship of power. From Luther to Hitler or at least from Hegel to Rosenberg, so it was argued, theories of power had been prevalent in German thought. But then it had to be admitted that there was another Germany representing a universalist and peaceful philosophy, and it remained entirely unexplained why one or the other Germany should have gained full control of the nation. Neither biological materialism nor an abstract idealism provide a safe basis for answering the historical questions posed by recent events.

Yet the Rankean preference for the history of states, or of states and Churches, cannot alone give us an adequate understanding of history either, nor does the simple addition of the history of ideas provide more than a partial insight into the process of history. To be sure, ideas, more than any other expressions of life, reveal human motives and aspirations. They also establish a connection over the ages and for that matter even between civilizations. But it would be erroneous to assume that man possesses the capacity of expressing the full range of his aims in clear ideas and, least of all, that he has the ability to direct the course of human affairs more than partially through ideas. If it is the ultimate intent of historical study to comprehend the potentialities of man in history, we must view him in all his struggles within the conditions of his existence, from the necessity of making a living and of adjusting to the social and political order that surrounds him to the actions through which he intervenes in the historical process, as well as to the thought through which he attempts to transcend his narrow station.

The belief that we can hope to understand history only if we try to visualize the totality of historical life has led me to extend the scope of this history of Germany beyond the political and constitutional history to social and economic as well as to religious and intellectual history. These branches of history cannot be separated, although literary exigencies impose some departmentalization. But I have deliberately avoided using the same divisionary pattern through all the periods of German history, because in various ages the forward movement of general history may appear with differing strength in one or the other field of human endeavor.

The present work was begun in 1951. I gratefully acknowledge the grant of a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 1954, which allowed me to devote a full year away from academic duties to research and writing. A visit to Austria as Fulbright professor at the University of Vienna in the spring of 1955 and a stay

in Germany during the summer of 1957 gave me an opportunity for acquainting myself with present-day historical research in both countries.

It proved impossible to document and footnote this book with references to the sources and literature of German history, which are simply enormous. Without some discussion of this literature, for which the available space would not have sufficed, references would have been of little use to any student. Although good bibliographies of German history exist, all of them are probably too big for the beginner. I myself have put together for the graduate student a selective bibliography of the history of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland since 1495 which will appear in *A Guide to Historical Literature*, edited and shortly to be published by the American Historical Association.

I wish to express my thanks to Mrs. Genevieve Highland and Professor Charles M. Gray for their good counsel in improving the style of this volume. The assistance of the members of the College Department of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. is deeply appreciated. Mr. Theodore R. Miller drew the maps using as starting point the drafts prepared by Mr. Anton Zell of Stuttgart and myself for the forthcoming German edition of this book.

The book is dedicated to my wife. Without her untiring co-operation it could not be published at this moment. Not only has she assumed many tedious burdens in the technical preparation of the manuscript; she also has contributed immensely to the improvement of the book itself. Her literary judgment discovered innumerable inaccuracies and obscurities of style, and her critical questioning led to many changes in details as well as in the general contents of my narrative.

I am aware of many shortcomings, even beyond those springing from the sheer size and complexity of the subject. Still, I hope that both the general reader and the student will find the book a reliable source of information and a guide toward an understanding of German history.

HAJO HOLBORN

New Haven, Connecticut

December 15, 1958

A NOTE ON THE TYPE

This book was set on the Linotype in JANSON, *a recutting made direct from the type cast from matrices (now in possession of the Stempel foundry, Frankfurt am Main) made by Anton Janson some time between 1660 and 1687.*

Of Janson's origin nothing is known. He may have been a relative of Justus Janson, a printer of Danish birth who practised in Leipzig from 1614 to 1635. Some time between 1657 and 1668 Anton Janson, a punch-cutter and type-founder, bought from the Leipzig printer Johann Erich Hahn the type-foundry which had formerly been a part of the printing house of M. Friedrich Lankisch. Janson's types were first shown in a specimen sheet issued at Leipzig about 1675. Janson's successor, and perhaps his son-in-law, Johann Karl Edling, issued a specimen sheet of Janson types in 1689. His heirs sold the Janson matrices in Holland to Wolffgang Dietrich Erhardt.

The book was composed, printed, and bound by KINGSPORT PRESS, INC., *Kingsport, Tennessee. The paper was manufactured by* S. D. WARREN COMPANY, *Boston, Massachusetts. The typography and binding designs are by* GUY FLEMING.

Contents

Maps

BY THEODORE R. MILLER

PART

I

The Foundations *of* Modern German History