

THE DECLINE OF THE WEST

FORM AND ACTUALITY

BY

OSWALD SPENGLER

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
WITH NOTES BY

CHARLES FRANCIS ATKINSON

LONDON : GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

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*Wenn im Unendlichen dasselb
Sich wiederholend ewig fliesst,
Das tausendfältige Gewölbe
Sich kräftig ineinander schliesst;
Strömt Lebenslust aus allen Dingen,
Dem kleinsten wie dem grössten Stern,
Und alles Drängen, alles Ringen
Ist ewige Ruh in Gott dem Herrn.*

— GOETHE.

THIS TRANSLATION IS
DEDICATED TO
ELLINOR JAMES
A FRIEND

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

It must be left to critics to say whether it was Destiny or Incident — using these words in the author's sense — that Spengler's "Untergang des Abendlandes" appeared in July, 1918, that is, at the very turning-point of the four years' World-War. It was conceived, the author tells us, before 1914 and fully worked out by 1917. So far as he is concerned, then, the impulse to create it arose from a view of our civilization not as the late war left it, but (as he says expressly) as the *coming* war would find it. But inevitably the public impulse to read it arose in and from post-war conditions, and thus it happened that this severe and difficult philosophy of history found a market that has justified the printing of 90,000 copies. Its very title was so apposite to the moment as to predispose the higher intellectuals to regard it as a work of the moment — the more so as the author was a simple Oberlehrer and unknown to the world of authoritative learning.

Spengler's was not the only, nor indeed the most "popular," philosophical product of the German revolution. In the graver conjunctures, sound minds do not dally with the graver questions — they either face and attack them with supernormal resolution or thrust them out of sight with an equally supernormal effort to enjoy or to endure the day as it comes. Even after the return to normality, it is no longer possible for men — at any rate for Western men — not to know that these questions exist. And, if it is none too easy even for the victors of the struggle to shake off its sequelæ, to turn back to business as the normal and to give no more than amateur effort and dilettantish attention to the very deep things, for the defeated side this is impossible. It goes through a period of material difficulty (often extreme difficulty) and one in which pride of achievement and humility in the presence of unsuccessful work dynamically together. So it was with sound minds in the post-Jena Germany of Jahn and Fichte, and so it was also with such minds in the Germany of 1919-1920.

To assume the rôle of critic and to compare Spengler's with other philosophies of the present phase of Germany, as to respective intrinsic weights, is not the purpose of this note nor within the competence of its writer. On the other hand, it is unconditionally necessary for the reader to realize that the book before him has not only acquired this large following amongst thoughtful laymen, but has forced the attention and taxed the scholarship of every branch of the learned world. Theologians, historians, scientists, art critics — all saw the challenge,

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and each brought his *apparatus criticus* to bear on that part of the Spengler theory that affected his own domain. The reader who is familiar with German may be referred to Manfred Schroeter's "Der Streit um Spengler" for details; it will suffice here to say that Schroeter's index of critics' names contains some 400 entries. These critics are not only, or even principally, general reviewers, most of them being specialists of high standing. It is, to say the least, remarkable that a volcanically assertive philosophy of history, visibly popular and produced under a catchy title (Reklamtitel) should call forth, as it did, a special number of *Logos* in which the Olympians of scholarship passed judgment on every inaccuracy or unsupported statement that they could detect. (These were in fact numerous in the first edition and the author has corrected or modified them in detail in the new edition, from which this translation has been done. But it should be emphasized that the author has not, in this second edition, receded in any essentials from the standpoint taken up in the first.)

The conspicuous features in this first burst of criticism were, on the one hand, want of adequate critical equipment in the general critic, and, on the other, inability to see the wood for the trees in the man of learning. No one, reading Schroeter's book (which by the way is one-third as large as Spengler's first volume itself), can fail to agree with his judgment that notwithstanding paradoxes, overstrainings, and inaccuracies, the work towers above all its commentators. And it was doubtless a sense of this greatness that led many scholars — amongst them some of the very high — to avoid expressing opinions on it at all. It would be foolish to call their silence a "sitting on the fence"; it is a case rather of reserving judgment on a philosophy and a methodology that challenge all the canons and carry with them immense implications. For the very few who combine all the necessary depth of learning with all the necessary freedom and breadth of outlook, it will not be the accuracy or inaccuracy of details under a close magnifying-glass that will be decisive. The very idea of accuracy and inaccuracy presupposes the selection or acceptance of co-ordinates of reference, and therefore the selection or acceptance of a standpoint as "origin." That is mere elementary science — and yet the scholar-critic would be the first to claim the merit of scientific rigour for his criticisms! It is, in history as in science, impossible to draw a curve through a mass of plotted observations when they are looked at closely and almost individually.

Criticism of quite another and a higher order may be seen in Dr. Eduard Meyer's article on Spengler in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, No. 25 of 1924. Here we find, in one of the great figures of modern scholarship, exactly that large-minded judgment that, while noting minor errors — and visibly attaching little importance to them — deals with the Spengler thesis fairly and squarely on the grand issues alone. Dr. Meyer differs from Spengler on many serious questions, of which perhaps the most important is that of the scope and origin of the Magian Culture. But instead of cataloguing the errors that are still to be

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found in Spengler's vast ordered multitude of facts, Eduard Meyer honourably bears testimony to our author's "erstaunlich umfangreiches, ihm ständig präsent, Wissen" (a phrase as neat and as untranslatable as Goethe's "exakte sinnliche Phantasie"). He insists upon the fruitfulness of certain of Spengler's ideas such as that of the "Second Religiousness." Above all, he adheres to and covers with his high authority the basic idea of the parallelism of organically-living Cultures. It is not necessarily Spengler's structure of the Cultures that he accepts — parts of it indeed he definitely rejects as wrong or insufficiently established by evidences — but on the question of their being *an* organic structure of the Cultures, a morphology of History, he ranges himself frankly by the side of the younger thinker, whose work he sums up as a "bleibende und auf lange Zeit hinaus nachhaltig wirkende Besitz unserer Wissenschaft und Literatur." This last phrase of Dr. Meyer's expresses very directly and simply that which for an all-round student (as distinct from an erudite specialist) constitutes the peculiar *quality* of Spengler's work. Its influence is far deeper and subtler than any to which the conventional adjective "suggestive" could be applied. It cannot in fact be described by adjectives at all, but only denoted or adumbrated by its result, which is that, after studying and mastering it, "one finds it nearly if not quite impossible to approach any culture-problem — old or new, dogmatic or artistic, political or scientific — without conceiving it primarily as 'morphological.'"

The work comprises two volumes — under the respective sub-titles "Form and Reality" and "World-historical Perspectives" — of which the present translation covers the first only. Some day I hope to have the opportunity of completing a task which becomes — such is the nature of this book — more attractive in proportion to its difficulty. References to Volume II are, for the present, necessarily to the pages of the German original; if, as is hoped, this translation is completed later by the issue of the second volume, a list of the necessary adjustments of page references will be issued with it. The reader will notice that translator's foot-notes are scattered fairly freely over the pages of this edition. In most cases these have no pretensions to being critical annotations. They are merely meant to help the reader to follow up in more detail the points of fact which Spengler, with his "ständig präsent, Wissen," sweeps along in his course. This being their object, they take the form, in the majority of cases, of references to appropriate articles in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which is the only single work that both contains reasonably full information on the varied (and often abstruse) matters alluded to, and is likely to be accessible wherever this book may penetrate. Every reader no doubt will find these notes, where they appertain to his own special subject, trivial and even annoying, but it is thought that, for example, an explanation of the mathematical Limit may be helpful to a student who knows all about the Katharsis in Greek drama, and *vice versa*.

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In conclusion I cannot omit to put on record the part that my wife, Hannah Waller Atkinson, has taken in the work of translation and editing. I may best describe it by saying that it ought perhaps to have been recorded on the title page instead of in this place.

C. F. A.

January, 1926.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

At the close of an undertaking which, from the first brief sketch to the final shaping of a complete work of quite unforeseen dimensions, has spread itself over ten years, it will not be out of place to glance back at what I intended and what I have achieved, my standpoint then and my standpoint to-day.

In the Introduction to the 1918 edition — inwardly and outwardly a fragment — I stated my conviction that an idea had now been irrefutably formulated which no one would oppose, once the idea had been put into words. I ought to have said: once that idea had been understood. And for that we must look — as I more and more realize — not only in this instance but in the whole history of thought — to the new generation that is *born* with the ability to do it.

I added that this must be considered as a first attempt, loaded with all the customary faults, incomplete and not without inward opposition. The remark was not taken anything like as seriously as it was intended. Those who have looked searchingly into the hypotheses of living thought will know that it is not given to us to gain insight into the fundamental principles of existence without conflicting emotions. A thinker is a person whose part it is to symbolize time according to his vision and understanding. He has no choice; he thinks as he has to think. Truth in the long run is to him the picture of the world which was born at his birth. It is that which he does not invent but rather discovers within himself. It is himself over again: his being expressed in words; the meaning of his personality formed into a doctrine which so far as concerns his life is unalterable, because truth and his life are identical. This symbolism is the one essential, the vessel and the expression of human history. The learned philosophical works that arise out of it are superfluous and only serve to swell the bulk of a professional literature.

I can then call the essence of what I have discovered "true" — that is, *true for me*, and as I believe, true for the leading minds of the coming time; not true in itself as dissociated from the conditions imposed by blood and by history, for that is impossible. But what I wrote in the storm and stress of those years was, it must be admitted, a very imperfect statement of what stood clearly before me, and it remained to devote the years that followed to the task of correlating facts and finding means of expression which should enable me to present my idea in the most forcible form.

To perfect that form would be impossible — life itself is only fulfilled in death. But I have once more made the attempt to bring up even the earliest

portions of the work to the level of definiteness with which I now feel able to speak; and with that I take leave of this book with its hopes and disappointments, its merits and its faults.

The result has in the meantime justified itself as far as I myself am concerned and — judging by the effect that it is slowly beginning to exercise upon extensive fields of learning — as far as others are concerned also. Let no one expect to find everything set forth here. It is *but one side* of what I see before me, a new outlook on *history and the philosophy of destiny* — the first indeed of its kind. It is intuitive and depictive through and through, written in a language which seeks to present objects and relations illustratively instead of offering an army of ranked concepts. It addresses itself solely to readers who are capable of living themselves into the word-sounds and pictures as they read. Difficult this undoubtedly is, particularly as our awe in face of mystery — the respect that Goethe felt — denies us the satisfaction of thinking that dissections are the same as penetrations.

Of course, the cry of "pessimism" was raised at once by those who live eternally in yesterday (*Ewiggestrigen*) and greet every idea that is intended for the pathfinder of to-morrow only. But I have not written for people who imagine that delving for the springs of action is the same as action itself; those who make definitions do not know destiny.

By understanding the world I mean being equal to the world. It is the hard reality of living that is the essential, not the concept of life, that the ostrich-philosophy of idealism propounds. Those who refuse to be bluffed by enunciations will not regard this as pessimism; and the rest do not matter. For the benefit of serious readers who are seeking a glimpse at life and not a definition, I have — in view of the far too great concentration of the text — mentioned in my notes a number of works which will carry that glance into more distant realms of knowledge.

And now, finally, I feel urged to name once more those to whom I owe practically everything: Goethe and Nietzsche. Goethe gave me method, Nietzsche the questioning faculty — and if I were asked to find a formula for my relation to the latter I should say that I had made of his "outlook" (*Ausblick*) an "overlook" (*Überblick*). But Goethe was, without knowing it, a disciple of Leibniz in his whole mode of thought. And, therefore, that which has at last (and to my own astonishment) taken shape in my hands I am able to regard and, despite the misery and disgust of these years, proud to call a *German philosophy*.

OSWALD SPENGLER.

Blankenburg am Harz,
December, 1922.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE complete manuscript of this book — the outcome of three years' work — was ready when the Great War broke out. By the spring of 1917 it had been worked over again and — in certain details — supplemented and cleared up, but its appearance in print was still delayed by the conditions then prevailing.

Although a philosophy of history is its scope and subject, it possesses also a certain deeper significance as a commentary on the great epochal moment of which the portents were visible when the leading ideas were being formed.

The title, which had been decided upon in 1912, expresses quite literally the intention of the book, which was to describe, in the light of the decline of the Classical age, one world-historical phase of several centuries upon which we ourselves are now entering.

Events have justified much and refuted nothing. It became clear that these ideas must necessarily be brought forward at just this moment and in Germany, and, more, that the war itself was an element in the premisses from which the new world-picture could be made precise.

For I am convinced that it is not merely a question of writing one out of several possible and merely logically justifiable philosophies, but of writing *the* philosophy of our time, one that is to some extent a natural philosophy and is dimly presaged by all. This may be said without presumption; for an idea that is historically essential — that does not occur within an epoch but itself makes that epoch — is only in a limited sense the property of him to whose lot it falls to parent it. It belongs to our time as a whole and influences all thinkers, without their knowing it; it is but the accidental, private attitude towards it (without which no philosophy can exist) that — with its faults and its merits — is the destiny and the happiness of the individual.

OSWALD SPENGLER.

Munich,
December, 1917.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I

IN this book is attempted for the first time the venture of (predetermining history, of following the still untravelled stages in the destiny of a Culture, and specifically of the only Culture of our time and on our planet which is actually in the phase of fulfilment) — the West-European-American.

Hitherto the possibility of solving a problem so far-reaching has evidently never been envisaged, and even if it had been so, the means of dealing with it were either altogether unsuspected or, at best, inadequately used.

Is there a logic of history? Is there, beyond all the casual and incalculable elements of the separate events, something that we may call a metaphysical structure of historic humanity, something that is essentially independent of the outward forms — social, spiritual and political — which we see so clearly? Are not these actualities indeed secondary or derived from that something? Does world-history present to the seeing eye certain grand traits, again and again, with sufficient constancy to justify certain conclusions? And if so, what are the limits to which reasoning from such premisses may be pushed?

Is it possible to find in life itself — for human history is the sum of mighty life-courses which already have had to be endowed with ego and personality, in customary thought and expression, by predicating entities of a higher order like "the Classical" or "the Chinese Culture," "Modern Civilization" — a series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence? For everything organic the notions of birth, death, youth, age, lifetime are fundamentals — may not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has as yet extracted? In short, is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?

The decline of the West, which at first sight may appear, like the corresponding decline of the Classical Culture, a phenomenon limited in time and space, we now perceive to be a philosophical problem that, when comprehended in all its gravity, includes within itself every great question of Being.

⌋ If therefore we are to discover in what form the destiny of the Western Culture will be accomplished, we must first be clear as to what culture *is*, what its relations are to visible history, to life, to soul, to nature, to intellect, what the forms of its manifestation are and how far these forms — peoples, tongues

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and epochs, battles and ideas, states and gods, arts and craft-works, sciences, laws, economic types and world-ideas, great men and great events — may be accepted and pointed to as symbols.

II

The means whereby to identify dead forms is Mathematical Law. The means whereby to understand living forms is Analogy. By these means we are enabled to distinguish polarity and periodicity in the world.

It is, and has always been, a matter of knowledge that the expression-forms of world-history are limited in number, and that eras, epochs, situations, persons are ever repeating themselves true to type. Napoleon has hardly ever been discussed without a side-glance at Cæsar and Alexander — analogies of which, as we shall see, the first is morphologically quite unacceptable and the second is correct — while Napoleon himself conceived of his situation as akin to Charlemagne's. The French Revolutionary Convention spoke of Carthage when it meant England, and the Jacobins styled themselves Romans. Other such comparisons, of all degrees of soundness and unsoundness, are those of Florence with Athens, Buddha with Christ, primitive Christianity with modern Socialism, the Roman financial magnate of Cæsar's time with the Yankee. Petrarch, the first passionate archæologist (and is not archæology itself an expression of the sense that history is repetition?) related himself mentally to Cicero, and but lately Cecil Rhodes, the organizer of British South Africa, who had in his library specially prepared translations of the classical lives of the Cæsars, felt himself akin to the Emperor Hadrian. The fated Charles XII of Sweden used to carry Quintus Curtius's life of Alexander in his pocket, and to copy that conqueror was his deliberate purpose.

Frederick the Great, in his political writings — such as his *Considerations*, 1738 — moves among analogies with perfect assurance. Thus he compares the French to the Macedonians under Philip and the Germans to the Greeks. "Even now," he says, "the Thermopylæ of Germany, Alsace and Lorraine, are in the hands of Philip," therein exactly characterizing the policy of Cardinal Fleury. We find him drawing parallels also between the policies of the Houses of Habsburg and Bourbon and the proscriptions of Antony and of Octavius.

Still, all this was only fragmentary and arbitrary, and usually implied rather a momentary inclination to poetical or ingenious expressions than a really deep sense of historical forms.

Thus in the case of Ranke, a master of artistic analogy, we find that his parallels of Cyaxares and Henry the Fowler, of the inroads of the Cimmerians and those of the Hungarians, possess morphologically no significance, and his oft-quoted analogy between the Hellenic city-states and the Renaissance republics very little, while the deeper truth in his comparison of Alcibiades

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and Napoleon is accidental. Unlike the strict mathematician, who finds inner relationships between two groups of differential equations where the layman sees nothing but dissimilarities of outward form, Ranke and others draw their historical analogies with a Plutarchian, popular-romantic, touch, and aim merely at presenting comparable scenes on the world-stage.

It is easy to see that, at bottom, it is neither a principle nor a sense of historic necessity, but simple inclination, that governs the choice of the tableaux. From any *technique* of analogies we are far distant. They throng up (to-day more than ever) without scheme or unities, and if they do hit upon something which is true — in the essential sense of the word that remains to be determined — it is thanks to luck, more rarely to instinct, never to a principle. In this region no one hitherto has set himself to work out a *method*, nor has had the slightest inkling that there is here a root, in fact the only root, from which can come a broad solution of the problems of History.

Analogies, in so far as they laid bare the organic structure of history, might be a blessing to historical thought. Their technique, developing under the influence of a comprehensive idea, would surely eventuate in inevitable conclusions and logical mastery. But as hitherto understood and practised they have been a curse, for they have enabled the historians to follow their own tastes, instead of soberly realizing that their first and hardest task was concerned with the symbolism of history and its analogies, and, in consequence, the problem has till now not even been comprehended, let alone solved. Superficial in many cases (as for instance in designating Cæsar as the creator of the official newspaper), these analogies are worse than superficial in others (as when phenomena of the Classical Age that are not only extremely complex but utterly alien to us are labelled with modern catchwords like Socialism, Impressionism, Capitalism, Clericalism), while occasionally they are bizarre to the point of perversity — witness the Jacobin clubs with their cult of Brutus, that millionaire-extortioner Brutus who, in the name of oligarchical doctrine and with the approval of the patrician senate, murdered the Man of the Democracy.

III

Thus our theme, which originally comprised only the limited problem of present-day civilization, broadens itself into a new philosophy — *the philosophy of the future*, so far as the metaphysically-exhausted soil of the West can bear such, and in any case the only philosophy which is within the *possibilities* of the West-European mind in its next stages. It expands into the conception of a *morphology of world history*, of the world-as-history in contrast to the morphology of the world-as-nature that hitherto has been almost the only theme of philosophy. And it reviews once again the forms and movements of the world in their depths and final significance, but this time according to an entirely different ordering which groups them, not in an ensemble picture

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inclusive of everything known, but in a picture of *life*, and presents them not as things-become, but as things-becoming.

The *world-as-history*, conceived, viewed and given form from out of its opposite the *world-as-nature* — here is a new aspect of human existence on this earth. As yet, in spite of its immense significance, both practical and theoretical, this aspect has not been realized, still less presented. Some obscure inkling of it there may have been, a distant momentary glimpse there has often been, but no one has deliberately faced it and taken it in with all its implications. We have before us two possible ways in which man may inwardly possess and experience the world around him. With all rigour I distinguish (as to form, not substance) the organic from the mechanical world-impression, the content of images from that of laws, the picture and symbol from the formula and the system, the instantly actual from the constantly possible, the intents and purposes of imagination ordering according to plan from the intents and purposes of experience dissecting according to scheme; and — to mention even thus early an opposition that has never yet been noted, in spite of its significance — the domain of *chronological* from that of *mathematical number*.¹

Consequently, in a research such as that lying before us, there can be no question of taking spiritual-political events, as they become visible day by day on the surface, at their face value, and arranging them on a scheme of "causes" or "effects" and following them up in the obvious and intellectually easy directions. Such a "pragmatic" handling of history would be nothing but a piece of "natural science" in disguise, and for their part, the supporters of the materialistic idea of history make no secret about it — it is their adversaries who largely fail to see the similarity of the two methods. What concerns us is not what the historical facts which appear at this or that time *are*, per se, but what they signify, what they point to, *by appearing*. Present-day historians think they are doing a work of supererogation in bringing in religious and social, or still more art-history, details to "illustrate" the political sense of an epoch. But the decisive factor — decisive, that is, in so far as visible history is the expression, sign and embodiment of soul — they forget. I have not hitherto found one who has carefully considered the *morphological relationship* that inwardly binds together the expression-forms of *all* branches of a Culture, who has gone beyond politics to grasp the ultimate and fundamental ideas of Greeks, Arabians, Indians and Westerners in mathematics, the meaning of their

¹ Kant's error, an error of very wide bearing which has not even yet been overcome, was first of all in bringing the outer and inner Man into relation with the ideas of space and time by pure scheme, though the meanings of these are numerous and, above all, not unalterable; and secondly in allying arithmetic with the one and geometry with the other in an utterly mistaken way. It is not between arithmetic and geometry — we must here anticipate a little — but between chronological and mathematical number that there is fundamental opposition. Arithmetic and geometry are *both* spatial mathematics and in their higher regions they are no longer separable. *Time-reckoning*, of which the plain man is capable of a perfectly clear understanding through his senses, answers the question "When," not "What" or "How Many."

early ornamentation, the basic forms of their architecture, philosophies, dramas and lyrics, their choice and development of great arts, the detail of their craftsmanship and choice of materials — let alone appreciated the decisive importance of these matters for the form-problems of history. Who amongst them realizes that between the Differential Calculus and the dynastic principle of politics in the age of Louis XIV, between the Classical city-state and the Euclidean geometry, between the space-perspective of Western oil-painting and the conquest of space by railroad, telephone and long-range weapon, between contrapuntal music and credit economics, there are deep uniformities? Yet, viewed from this morphological standpoint, even the humdrum facts of politics assume a symbolic and even a metaphysical character, and — what has perhaps been impossible hitherto — things such as the Egyptian administrative system, the Classical coinage, analytical geometry, the cheque, the Suez Canal, the book-printing of the Chinese, the Prussian Army, and the Roman road-engineering can, as symbols, be made *uniformly* understandable and appreciable.

But at once the fact presents itself that as yet there exists no theory-enlightened art of historical treatment. What passes as such draws its methods almost exclusively from the domain of that science which alone has completely disciplined the methods of cognition, viz., physics, and thus we imagine ourselves to be carrying on historical research when we are really following out objective connexions of cause and effect. It is a remarkable fact that the old-fashioned philosophy never imagined even the possibility of there being any other relation than this between the conscious human understanding and the world outside. Kant, who in his main work established the formal rules of cognition, took *nature* only as the object of reason's activity, and neither he himself, nor anyone after him, noted the reservation. Knowledge, for Kant, is mathematical knowledge. He deals with innate intuition-forms and categories of the reason, but he never thinks of the wholly different mechanism by which historical impressions are apprehended. And Schopenhauer, who, significantly enough, retains but one of the Kantian categories, viz., causality, speaks contemptuously of history.¹ That there is, besides a necessity of cause and effect — which I may call the *logic of space* — another necessity, an organic necessity in life, that of Destiny — the *logic of time* — is a fact of the deepest inward certainty, a fact which suffuses the whole of mythological religions and artistic thought and constitutes the essence and kernel of all history (in contradistinction to nature) but is unapproachable through the cognition-forms which the "Critique of Pure Reason" investigates. This fact still awaits its theoretical formulation. As Galileo says in a famous passage of his *Saggiatore*, philosophy,

¹ One cannot but be sensible how little depth and power of abstraction has been associated with the treatment of, say, the Renaissance or the Great Migrations, as compared with what is obviously required for the theory of functions and theoretical optics. Judged by the standards of the physicist and the mathematician, the historian becomes *careless* as soon as he has assembled and ordered his material and passes on to interpretation.

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as Nature's great book, is written "in mathematical language." We await, to-day, the philosopher who will tell us in what language history is written and how it is to be read.

Mathematics and the principle of Causality lead to a naturalistic, Chronology and the idea of Destiny to a historical ordering of the phenomenal world. Both orderings, each on its own account, cover the whole world. The difference is only in the eyes by which and through which this world is realized.

IV

Nature is the shape in which the man of higher Cultures synthesizes and interprets the immediate impressions of his senses. History is that from which his imagination seeks comprehension of the living existence of the world in relation to his own life, which he thereby invests with a deeper reality. Whether he is capable of creating these shapes, which of them it is that dominates his waking consciousness, is a primordial problem of all human existence.

Man, thus, has before him two *possibilities* of world-formation. But it must be noted, at the very outset, that these possibilities are not necessarily *actualities*, and if we are to enquire into the sense of all history we must begin by solving a question which has never yet been put, viz., *for whom* is there History? The question is seemingly paradoxical, for history is obviously for everyone to this extent, that every man, with his whole existence and consciousness, is a part of history. But it makes a great difference whether anyone lives under the constant impression that his life is an element in a far wider life-course that goes on for hundreds and thousands of years, or conceives of himself as something rounded off and self-contained. For the latter type of consciousness there is certainly no world-history, no *world-as-history*. But how if the self-consciousness of a whole nation, how if a whole Culture rests on this ahistoric spirit? How must actuality appear to it? The world? Life? Consider the Classical Culture. In the world-consciousness of the Hellenes all experience, not merely the personal but the common past, was immediately transmuted into a timeless, immobile, mythically-fashioned background for the particular momentary present; thus the history of Alexander the Great began even before his death to be merged by Classical sentiment in the Dionysus legend, and to Cæsar there seemed at the least nothing preposterous in claiming descent from Venus.

Such a spiritual condition it is practically impossible for us men of the West, with a sense of time-distances so strong that we habitually and unquestioningly speak of so many years before or after Christ, to reproduce in ourselves. But we are not on that account entitled, in dealing with the problems of History, simply to ignore the fact.

INTRODUCTION

What diaries and autobiographies yield in respect of an individual, that historical research in the widest and most inclusive sense — that is, every kind of psychological comparison and analysis of alien peoples, times and customs — yields as to the soul of a Culture as a whole. But the Classical culture possessed no *memory*, no organ of history in this special sense. The memory of the Classical man — so to call it, though it is somewhat arbitrary to apply to alien souls a notion derived from our own — is something different, since past and future, as arraying perspectives in the working consciousness, are absent and the "pure Present," which so often roused Goethe's admiration in every product of the Classical life and in sculpture particularly, fills that life with an intensity that to us is perfectly unknown.

This pure Present, whose greatest symbol is the Doric column, in itself predicated the *negation of time* (of direction). For Herodotus and Sophocles, as for Themistocles or a Roman consul, the past is subtilized instantly into an impression that is timeless and changeless, *polar and not periodic* in structure — in the last analysis, of such stuff as myths are made of — whereas for our world-sense and our inner eye the past is a definitely periodic and purposeful organism of centuries or millennia.

But it is just this background which gives the life, whether it be the Classical or the Western life, its special colouring. What the Greek called Kosmos was the image of a world that is not continuous but complete. *Inevitably*, then, the Greek man himself was not a series but a term.¹

For this reason, although Classical man was well acquainted with the strict chronology and almanac-reckoning of the Babylonians and especially the Egyptians, and therefore with that eternity-sense and disregard of the present-as-such which revealed itself in their broadly-conceived operations of astronomy and their exact measurements of big time-intervals, none of this ever became *intimately* a part of him. What his philosophers occasionally told him on the subject they had heard, not experienced, and what a few brilliant minds in the Asiatic-Greek cities (such as Hipparchus and Aristarchus) discovered was rejected alike by the Stoic and by the Aristotelian, and outside a small professional circle not even noticed. Neither Plato nor Aristotle had an observatory. In the last years of Pericles, the Athenian people passed a decree by which all who propagated astronomical theories were made liable to impeachment (*εἰσαγγελία*). This last was an act of the deepest symbolic significance, expressive of the determination of the Classical soul to banish distance, in every aspect, from its world-consciousness.

As regards Classical history-writing, take Thucydides. The mastery of this man lies in his truly Classical power of making alive and self-explanatory the events of the *present*, and also in his possession of the magnificently *practical*

¹ In the original, these fundamental antitheses are expressed simply by means of *werden* and *sein*. Exact renderings are therefore impossible in English. — Tr.

outlook of the born statesman who has himself been both general and administrator. In virtue of this quality of *experience* (which we unfortunately confuse with the historical sense proper), his work confronts the merely learned and professional historian as an inimitable model, and quite rightly so. But what is absolutely hidden from Thucydides is perspective, the power of surveying the history of centuries, that which for us is implicit in the very conception of a historian. The fine pieces of Classical history-writing are invariably those which set forth matters within the political present of the writer, whereas for us it is the direct opposite, our historical masterpieces without exception being those which deal with a distant past. Thucydides would have broken down in handling even the Persian Wars, let alone the general history of Greece, while that of Egypt would have been utterly out of his reach. He, as well as Polybius and Tacitus (who like him were practical politicians), loses his sureness of eye from the moment when, in looking backwards, he encounters motive forces in any form that is unknown in his practical experience. For Polybius even the First Punic War, for Tacitus even the reign of Augustus, are inexplicable. As for Thucydides, his lack of historical feeling — in our sense of the phrase — is conclusively demonstrated on the very first page of his book by the astounding statement that before his time (about 400 B.C.) no events of importance had occurred (*οὐ μεγάλα γενέσθαι*) in the world!¹

Consequently, Classical history down to the Persian Wars and for that matter the structure built up on traditions at much later periods, are the product of an essentially mythological thinking. The constitutional history of

¹ The attempts of the Greeks to frame something like a calendar or a chronology after the Egyptian fashion, besides being very belated indeed, were of extreme *naïveté*. The Olympiad reckoning is not an era in the sense of, say, the Christian chronology, and is, moreover, a late and purely literary expedient, without popular currency. The people, in fact, had no general need of a numeration wherewith to date the experiences of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers, though a few learned persons might be interested in the calendar question. We are not here concerned with the soundness or unsoundness of a calendar, but with its currency, with the question of whether men regulated their lives by it or not; but, incidentally, even the list of Olympian victors before 500 is quite as much of an invention as the lists of earlier Athenian archons or Roman consuls. Of the colonizations, we possess not one single authentic date (E. Meyer, *Gesch. d. Alt. II*, 442. Beloch, *Griech. Gesch.* I, 2, 219) "in Greece before the fifth century, no one ever thought of noting or reporting historical events." (Beloch, I, 1, 125). We possess an inscription which sets forth a treaty between Elis and Heraclea which "was to be valid for a hundred years from this year." What "this year" was, is however not indicated. After a few years no one would have known how long the treaty had still to run. Evidently this was a point that no one had taken into account at the time — indeed, the very "men of the moment" who drew up the document, probably themselves soon forgot. Such was the childlike, fairy-story character of the Classical presentation of history that any ordered dating of the events of, say, the Trojan War (which occupies in their series the same position as the Crusades in ours) would have been felt as a sheer solecism.

Equally backward was the geographical science of the Classical world as compared with that of the Egyptians and the Babylonians. E. Meyer (*Gesch. d. Alt. II*, 102) shows how the Greeks' knowledge of the form of Africa degenerated from Herodotus (who followed Persian authorities) to Aristotle. The same is true of the Romans as the heirs of the Carthaginians; they first repeated the information of their alien forerunners and then slowly forgot it.

Sparta is a poem of the Hellenistic period, and Lycurgus, on whom it centres and whose "biography" we are given in full detail, was probably in the beginning an unimportant local god of Mount Taygetus. The invention of pre-Hannibalian Roman history was still going on even in Cæsar's time. The story of the expulsion of the Tarquins by Brutus is built round some contemporary of the Censor Appius Claudius (310 B.C.). The names of the Roman kings were at that period made up from the names of certain plebeian families which had become wealthy (K. J. Neumann). In the sphere of constitutional history, setting aside altogether the "constitution" of Servius Tullius, we find that even the famous land law of Licinius (367 B.C.) was not in existence at the time of the Second Punic War (B. Niese). When Epaminondas gave freedom and statehood to the Messenians and the Arcadians, these peoples promptly provided themselves with an early history. But the astounding thing is not that history of this sort was produced, but that there was practically none of any other sort; and the opposition between the Classical and the modern outlook is sufficiently illustrated by saying that Roman history before 250 B.C., as known in Cæsar's time, was substantially a forgery, and that the little that we know has been established by ourselves and was entirely unknown to the later Romans. In what sense the Classical world understood the word "history" we can see from the fact that the Alexandrine romance-literature exercised the strongest influence upon serious political and religious history, even as regards its matter. It never entered the Classical head to draw any distinction of principle between history as a story and history as documents. When, towards the end of the Roman republic, Varro set out to stabilize the religion that was fast vanishing from the people's consciousness, he classified the deities *whose cult was exactly and minutely observed by the State*, into "certain" and "uncertain" gods, i.e., into gods of whom something was still known and gods that, in spite of the unbroken continuity of official worship, had survived in name only. In actual fact, the religion of Roman society in Varro's time, the poet's religion which Goethe and even Nietzsche reproduced in all innocence, was mainly a product of Hellenistic literature and had almost no relation to the ancient practices, which no one any longer understood.

Mommsen clearly defined the West-European attitude towards this history when he said that "the Roman historians," meaning especially Tacitus, "were men who said what it would have been meritorious to omit, and omitted what it was essential to say."

In the Indian Culture we have the perfectly ahistoric soul. Its decisive expression is the Brahman Nirvana. There is no pure Indian astronomy, no calendar, and therefore no history so far as history is the track of a conscious spiritual evolution. Of the visible course of their Culture, which as regards its organic phase came to an end with the rise of Buddhism, we know even less than we do of Classical history, rich though it must have been in great events

between the 12th and 8th centuries. And this is not surprising, since it was in dream-shapes and mythological figures that both came to be fixed. It is a full millennium after Buddha, about 500 A.D., when Ceylon first produces something remotely resembling historical work, the "Mahavansa."

The world-consciousness of Indian man was so ahistorically built that it could not even treat the appearance of a book written by a single author as an event determinate in time. Instead of an organic series of writings by specific persons, there came into being gradually a vague mass of texts into which everyone inserted what he pleased, and notions such as those of intellectual individualism, intellectual evolution, intellectual epochs, played no part in the matter. It is in this *anonymous* form that we possess the Indian philosophy — which is at the same time all the Indian history that we have — and it is instructive to compare with it the philosophy-history of the West, which is a perfectly definite structure made up of individual books and personalities.

Indian man forgot everything, but Egyptian man forgot *nothing*. Hence, while the art of portraiture — which is biography in the kernel — was unknown in India, in Egypt it was practically the artist's only theme.

The Egyptian soul, conspicuously historical in its texture and impelled with primitive passion towards the infinite, perceived past and future as its *whole* world, and the present (which is identical with waking consciousness) appeared to him simply as the narrow common frontier of two immeasurable stretches. The Egyptian Culture is an embodiment of *care* — which is the spiritual counterpoise of distance — care for the future expressed in the choice of granite or basalt as the craftsman's materials,¹ in the chiselled archives, in the elaborate administrative system, in the net of irrigation works,² and, necessarily *bound up therewith*, care for the past. The Egyptian mummy is a symbol of the first importance. The body of the dead man was *made everlasting*, just as his personality, his "Ka," was immortalized through the portrait-

¹ Contrast with this the fact, symbolically of the highest importance and unparalleled in art-history, that the Hellenes, though they had before their eyes the works of the Mycenaean Age and their land was only too rich in stone, *deliberately reverted to wood*; hence the absence of architectural remains of the period 1200-600. The Egyptian plant-column was from the outset of stone, whereas the Doric column was wooden, a clear indication of the intense antipathy of the Classical soul towards duration.

² Is there any Hellenic city that ever carried out one single comprehensive work that tells of care for future generations? The road and water systems which research has assigned to the Mycenaean — i.e., the pre-Classical — age fell into disrepair and oblivion from the birth of the Classical peoples — that is, from the Homeric period. It is a remarkably curious fact, proved beyond doubt by the lack of epigraphic remains, that the Classical alphabet did not come into use till after 900, and even then only to a limited extent and for the most pressing economic needs. Whereas in the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Mexican and the Chinese Cultures the formation of a script begins in the very twilight of dawn, whereas the Germans made themselves a Runic alphabet and presently developed that respect for writing as such which led to the successive refinements of ornamental calligraphy, the Classical primitives were entirely ignorant of the numerous alphabets that were current in the South and the East. We possess numerous inscriptions of Hittite Asia Minor and of Crete, but not one of Homeric Greece. (See Vol. II, pp. 180 et seq.)

statuettes, which were often made in many copies and to which it was conceived to be attached by a transcendental likeness.

There is a deep relation between the attitude that is taken towards the historic past and the conception that is formed of death, and this relation is expressed in the *disposal of the dead*. The Egyptian denied mortality, the Classical man affirmed it in the whole symbolism of his Culture. The Egyptians embalmed even their history in chronological dates and figures. From pre-Solonian Greece nothing has been handed down, not a year-date, not a true name, not a tangible event — with the consequence that the later history, (which alone we know) assumes undue importance — but for Egypt we possess, from the 3rd millennium and even earlier, the names and even the exact reign-dates of many of the kings, and the New Empire must have had a complete knowledge of them. To-day, pathetic symbols of the will to endure, the bodies of the great Pharaohs lie in our museums, their faces still recognizable. On the shining, polished-granite peak of the pyramid of Amenemhet III we can read to-day the words "Amenemhet looks upon the beauty of the Sun" and, on the other side, "Higher is the soul of Amenemhet than the height of Orion, and it is united with the underworld." Here indeed is victory over Mortality and the mere present; it is to the last degree un-Classical.

v

In opposition to this mighty group of Egyptian life-symbols, we meet at the threshold of the Classical Culture the custom, typifying the ease with which it could forget every piece of its inward and outward past, of *burning the dead*. To the Mycenaean age the elevation into a ritual of this particular funerary method amongst all those practised in turn by stone-age peoples, was essentially alien; indeed its Royal tombs suggest that earth-burial was regarded as peculiarly honourable. But in Homeric Greece, as in Vedic India, we find a change, so sudden that its origins must necessarily be psychological, from burial to that burning which (the Iliad gives us the full pathos of the symbolic act) was the ceremonial completion of death and the denial of all historical duration.

From this moment the plasticity of the individual spiritual evolution was at an end. Classical drama admitted truly historical motives just as little as it allowed themes of inward evolution, and it is well known how decisively the Hellenic instinct set itself against portraiture in the arts. Right into the imperial period Classical art handled only the matter that was, so to say, natural to it, the myth.¹ Even the "ideal" portraits of Hellenistic sculpture are

¹ From Homer to the tragedies of Seneca, a full thousand years, the same handful of myth-figures (Thyestes, Clytemnestra, Heracles and the like) appear time after time without alteration, whereas in the poetry of the West, Faustian Man figures, first as Parzeval or Tristan, then (modified always into harmony with the epoch) as Hamlet, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and eventually Faust or Werther, and now as the hero of the modern world-city romance, but is always presented in the atmosphere and under the conditions of a particular century.

mythical, of the same kind as the typical biographies of Plutarch's sort. No great Greek ever wrote down any recollections that would serve to fix a phase of experience for his inner eye. Not even Socrates has told, regarding his inward life, anything important in our sense of the word. It is questionable indeed whether for a Classical mind it was even possible to react to the motive forces that are presupposed in the production of a Parzeval, a Hamlet, or a Werther. In Plato we fail to observe any conscious evolution of doctrine; his separate works are merely treatises written from very different standpoints which he took up from time to time, and it gave him no concern whether and how they hung together. On the contrary, a work of deep self-examination, the *Vita Nuova* of Dante, is found at the very outset of the spiritual history of the West. How little therefore of the Classical pure-present there really was in Goethe, the man who forgot nothing, the man whose works, as he avowed himself, are only fragments of a *single great confession!*

After the destruction of Athens by the Persians, all the older art-works were thrown on the dustheap (whence we are now extracting them), and we do not hear that anyone in Hellas ever troubled himself about the ruins of Mycenæ or Phaistos for the purpose of ascertaining historical facts. Men read Homer but never thought of excavating the hill of Troy as Schliemann did; for what they wanted was myth, not history. The works of Æschylus and those of the pre-Socratic philosophers were already partially lost in the Hellenistic period. In the West, on the contrary, the piety inherent in and peculiar to the Culture manifested itself, five centuries before Schliemann, in Petrarch — the fine collector of antiquities, coins and manuscripts, the very type of historically-sensitive man, viewing the distant past and scanning the distant prospect (was he not the first to attempt an Alpine peak?), living in his time, yet essentially not of it. The soul of the collector is intelligible only by having regard to his conception of Time. Even more passionate perhaps, though of a different colouring, is the collecting-bent of the Chinese. In China, whoever travels assiduously pursues "old traces" (Ku-tsi) and the untranslatable "Tao," the basic principle of Chinese existence, derives all its meaning from a deep historical feeling. In the Hellenistic period, objects were indeed collected and displayed everywhere, but they were curiosities of mythological appeal (as described by Pausanias) as to which questions of date or purpose simply did not arise — and this too in the very presence of Egypt, which even by the time of the great Thuthmosis had been transformed into one vast museum of strict tradition.

Amongst the Western peoples, it was the Germans who discovered the mechanical clock, the dread symbol of the flow of time, and the chimes of countless clock towers that echo day and night over West Europe are perhaps the most wonderful expression of which a historical world-feeling is

capable.¹ In the timeless countrysides and cities of the Classical world, we find nothing of the sort. Till the epoch of Pericles, the time of day was estimated merely by the length of shadow, and it was only from that of Aristotle that the word *ᾠρα* received the (Babylonian) significance of "hour"; prior to that there was no exact subdivision of the day. In Babylon and Egypt water-clocks and sun-dials were discovered in the very early stages, yet in Athens it was left to Plato to introduce a practically useful form of clepsydra, and this was merely a minor adjunct of everyday utility which could not have influenced the Classical life-feeling in the smallest degree.

It remains still to mention the corresponding difference, which is very deep and has never yet been properly appreciated, between Classical and modern mathematics. The former conceived of things *as they are*, as *magnitudes*, timeless and purely present, and so it proceeded to Euclidean geometry and mathematical statics, rounding off its intellectual system with the theory of conic sections. We conceive things as they *become* and *behave*, as *function*, and this brought us to dynamics, analytical geometry and thence to the Differential Calculus.² The modern theory of functions is the imposing marshalling of this whole mass of thought. It is a bizarre, but nevertheless psychologically exact, fact that the physics of the Greeks — being statics and not dynamics — neither knew the use nor felt the absence of the time-element, whereas we on the other hand work in thousandths of a second. The one and only evolution-idea that is timeless, ahistoric, is Aristotle's entelechy.

This, then, is our task. We men of the Western Culture are, with our historical sense, an exception and not a rule. World-history is *our* world picture and not all mankind's. Indian and Classical man formed no image of a world in progress, and perhaps when in due course the civilization of the West is extinguished, there will never again be a Culture and a human type in which "world-history" is so potent a form of the waking consciousness.

VI

What, then, is world-history? Certainly, an ordered presentation of the past, an inner postulate, the expression of a capacity for feeling form. But a feeling for form, however definite, is not the same as form itself. No doubt we feel world-history, experience it, and believe that it is to be read just as a map is

¹ It was about 1000 A.D. and therefore contemporaneously with the beginning of the Romanesque style and the Crusades — the first symptoms of a new Soul — that Abbot Gerbert (Pope Sylvester II), the friend of the Emperor Otto III, invented the mechanism of the chiming wheel-clock. In Germany too, the first tower-clocks made their appearance, about 1200, and the pocket watch somewhat later. Observe the significant association of time measurement with the edifices of religion.

² Newton's choice of the name "fluxions" for his calculus was meant to imply a standpoint towards certain metaphysical notions as to the nature of time. In Greek mathematics time figures not at all.