

A SURVEY OF
European
Civilization

ANCIENT TIMES TO 1660

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TO

JOHN AND GRACE MUSSER

*with admiration
and affection*

Editor's Introduction

TEACHING and learning are most effectively conjoined when an alert and informed teacher engages in informal discussion with a small group of alert and informed students. If the subject be history, the students will on their own initiative and with mounting enthusiasm (it is an ideal we are describing) spend much of their time in the library, where they will be provided with tables and the necessary books for an independent study of the subject. Once or twice a week the professor will meet his pupils. In so small a group he may dispense with lectures — those exercises in which students assemble, and amiably and passively sit while the professor, with great advantage to himself, clarifies his ideas by oral discourse. The students also will have an opportunity to clarify their ideas by oral discourse. Teaching and learning will then be conjoined, as they always must be to be any way effective: professor and pupils, each according to his talent, will be both teachers and learners. This ideal system is often realized in the graduate school — in the graduate seminary. Under such ideal conditions, there is obviously no occasion for a textbook.

In our undergraduate colleges, textbooks are nevertheless everywhere in use, and even the professors regard them as indispensable. There are two good reasons for this insistence on the use of textbooks. One is that many students are incapable of studying any subject on their own initiative, but, being docile, they will do what they are told to do, and the simplest thing to tell them to do is to read, on successive Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, successive chapters in a prescribed textbook. The second reason is that the facilities for studying history in the right way are commonly inadequate. If, some bright afternoon, all the students in philosophy, literature, and the social sciences should take it into their heads to invade the library in order to do what they are conventionally expected to do, there would scarcely be standing room for them, to say nothing about tables to work at; and the books and documents called for could be supplied by the distracted attendants to no more than a few of the first comers. The others would perforce turn away, sorrowing no doubt, with nothing for it but to review their lecture

notes and read the prescribed chapter in the textbook. As it is, most of them save time and avoid mental anguish by not going to the library in the first place. It is not wholly their fault. There is a limit to the obstacles that anyone will cheerfully surmount in order to obtain access to books. Hence the textbook is an indispensable substitute for books.

Accepting conditions as they find them, Professors Ferguson and Bruun have prepared these two volumes. Frankly designed to be used as textbooks, they are provided with the customary "select bibliographies" for such further study as the requirements of the instructor, the inclination of the students, and the facilities of the average college library may make desirable or possible. Nevertheless, knowing from experience that the textbook is likely to be the principal source of information for most students, the authors have made their books something more than summary manuals of events. Taken together, the two volumes are sufficiently comprehensive to enable the students, with reasonable mastery of their contents, to obtain an intelligent grasp of the last fifteen centuries of European history. Besides presenting the essential facts with accuracy, they have correlated and interpreted the facts in such a way that the significant events, institutions, and ideas may be understood and not merely "got up" for examinations or tests. Above all they have endeavored to make the story readable, interesting in its own right, and relevant as an explanation of the influences that have made modern civilization what it is. In short, Professors Ferguson and Bruun have attempted to write books that have merit as books, and not merely as textbooks. They have aimed to serve the practical requirements of teaching history in colleges, and at the same time make the student realize that a knowledge of history is an essential part of a "liberal education."

The period covered by these two volumes is commonly divided into three periods — Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation, and Modern. All the conventional labels employed by historians for dividing the history of civilization into periods are largely arbitrary, at best unrevealing, at worst positively misleading. The reason is that, being themselves by-products of the history they profess to clarify, they are easily outmoded by the increase of knowledge. The term medieval, to take but one example, means in itself nothing except a period in between an earlier and a later period. Actually, it originated in a mythical notion of human history, and was retained to indicate a supposedly "dark age" intervening between the golden age of Greek and Roman civilization, and the recovery of classical knowledge brought about by the "renaissance." It therefore took on a derogatory connotation, which it still

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retains: in spite of all that devoted "medievalists" can urge to the contrary, "medieval" is still in common speech a synonym for ignorance and barbarism. Applied to the period between the fifth and the fourteenth centuries, the term means either nothing at all or else something that is not true.

Since textbooks must be adapted to established courses and to conventional practices, Professors Ferguson and Bruun have not thought it wise to dispense with the conventional divisions altogether. But they have made it clear that these conventional divisions are not to be taken too seriously. They have regarded their separate tasks as related parts of a common enterprise, which is to explain the evolution of "western" civilization from Roman times, and by dividing their books into "parts" which have some real relation to the successive aspects of this evolution, and in the brief introductions to the various parts, they have endeavored to correct the mistaken notions that are implied by the terms Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation, and Modern. In short, they have endeavored to make it clear that the history of Europe since the breakdown of the Western Roman Empire exhibits a continuous development without sharp breaks or dramatic dislocations.

CARL L. BECKER

Foreword

IT HAS long been my belief that, to make the foundations of modern European civilization intelligible to students, it is necessary to trace the development of that civilization in an unbroken story, not merely to the point, somewhere about the year 1500, which time-hallowed tradition has recognized as the end of the Middle Ages, but on through the still transitional period that followed, until modern institutions and modern civilization have been firmly established. This task I have attempted to perform in the present volume. The further task of carrying the story of European civilization down through the maze of later centuries to the present time has been left to my friend and colleague, Professor Geoffrey Bruun, who has also contributed the first two chapters of the present volume. To the aid and counsel of the latter the work owes much, as also to the penetrating and constructive criticism of Professor Carl Becker. To both of them my heartiest thanks. I wish also to express my gratitude to another colleague, Professor Wesley Frank Craven, of New York University, and to my wife, for their un-failing patience in correcting proof and for many helpful suggestions.

WALLACE K. FERGUSON

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