

THE CRISIS OF PARLIAMENTS

english history 1509—1660

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'This is the crisis of parliaments: we shall know by this if parliaments live or die.' SIR BENJAMIN RUDYERD, 1628

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THE SHORT OXFORD HISTORY OF THE MODERN WORLD

General Editor: J. M. ROBERTS

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

ONE way in which changes in historical taste and outlook are reflected—though sometimes slowly—is in the forbidding demands of examiners and makers of syllabuses. This series is meant to be of practical value to the students and teachers who have to meet them. But such demands themselves are only reflections of deeper and more important changes in historical thinking. And that thinking must be reflected directly, as well as indirectly, in new historical books. The Short Oxford History of the Modern World is consciously designed to take account of the most important recent historical work. It seems worth while, therefore, to say what the developments are which have been thought important and how the principles of design of this series are related to them.

One obvious change in recent historical activity has been a geographical widening of the history we study. Parts of the world hitherto neglected, or comparatively neglected, by historians bred in the western tradition of scientific history are now for the first time attracting interest and attention. In part this is a reflection of our humanitarian and political concerns: we are coming to realize that we live in one world, and believe we ought therefore to know more about the parts of it with which we are unfamiliar. In part, too, it reflects changes in what is available as source-material. Whatever the source, the impulse is beginning to make its mark in schools and colleges. They now need books about Latin America, Africa, or Asia on the scale and at the level of those which in the past introduced them to European or English history.

This series will include such books, but also others on more familiar and traditional areas of study. There is, after all, a great need for the achievements of up-to-date scholarship to be given wide currency in English and European history. Consequently, this series is tripartite. It consists of a series of four volumes on modern European history, in which the British Isles are treated as a part of European society as a whole. The second group of four volumes is more specialized, being confined to English history. The third group will be larger and will contain introductory volumes, covering fairly long periods, on those areas and countries which are only now beginning to be studied widely. Some of

these are conceived as of continental scope, the projected volume on Latin America, for example. Those on the United States and Russia, on the other hand, limit themselves to a single political entity. In each case, the

books in this stream are distinguished by being about a big and important topic for which good introductory manuals are not yet easily available.

The unity which binds these books together, although they will have different levels of detail and scope, is that they all deal with the 'modern world' referred to in the title of the series. This phrase, however, is to be read in a special sense and it is this which makes the series a whole. The subject-matter of The Short Oxford History of the Modern World is limited in time, but the chronological limitation is not the same for each book. Conventionally, series of books on the Modern History of different countries line up all their runners at approximately the same starting-gate and get them off together, whether in 1400, 1500, 1600, or any other dramatic, convenient, or merely 'significant' moment. In this series we follow a different scheme. The latest era of world history is here defined thematically, not chronologically. It is the era in which the fundamental institutions of modern European society first take shape and then spread round the world.

Some of these institutions are so widespread that we too readily take them for granted—the national sovereign state, for example. Yet this is even in Europe only a recent innovation and in many parts of the world it did not appear until after 1945. Formally representative political systems (whether real or fictitious) are another of Europe's institutional exports to the world, and there are economic ones, too, such as capitalism, or ideological ones such as Marxist communism or Christianity. In all these instances (and many others could be cited), we have examples of a process by which European gradually became World civilization. Sometimes this has produced new examples of developed 'Western' societies; sometimes it has led to more striking disruptions of tradition and eventually to altogether new institutions and cultural forms. The process, however it ends, defines an era by the break it provides with the past. This era begins at different times in different countries: in roughly 1500 in west European history, in about 1800 in the case of Russia, and at an even later date in the history of China, for example. These are the epochs in the history of different countries and regions in which can be discerned the processes which eventually tie them into the single world in which we live.

Besides moving to different rhythms, it is another consequence of this that not all the books in The Short Oxford History of the Modern World will have the same pattern. Differences in presentation are needed to bring out differences of national and regional life. But they will form a coherent series in a methodological sense too. They will have in common a deliberate effort to incorporate recent research and recent thinking which has begun to change the conventional shape of historical writing. This affects both their organization and the proportions of their subject-matter. The core of a good history must be the provision of the essential basic information which is necessary to the exercise of historical imagination and judgement. But lately ideas about what basic information is needed have been changing, for example by a new emphasis on society and its structure at the expense of the traditional political narrative. Historians and their public-which includes even examiners-have begun to think that it may be more revealing to study, say, the growth of cities in nineteenth-century England and its repercussions, than, say, the party struggle. This is only one example of the recent rapid popularizing of the old idea that history is more than past politics. This series attempts to take account of this. Many of its authors are young scholars who, because of their own research interests, are familiar with what is going on at the frontier of current historical work. They and their colleagues will seek to absorb into their accounts the flood of social, cultural, demographic, and many other sorts of monograph which has poured out since 1945 to confuse and muddle the ordinary historical student and the general reader.

The purpose of general books has, of course, always been to reduce to manageable thinking the detailed scholarship of the specialists. But another recent historical tendency has made it all the more important that this should be done. This is the problem, facing teachers of history at all levels, of the crumbling of boundaries which delimited and land-marks which directed their studies. The conventional separation of English and European history is now often an encumbrance to understanding the many processes in which this country was as much involved as any continental state: industrialization is an example. Another would be our changing views of the importance of certain dates. 1917, for example, or 1941, can be defended as much more significant breaks in the continuity of European history than 1914 or 1939. In some places, old guidelines seem almost to have disappeared altogether.

In part these changes arise because much new evidence is becoming available; in part it is because research has addressed itself to old evidence in a new way; in part it is a matter of changing perspective. More fundamentally, it reflects a basic truism about history: that it is theoretically boundless, a continuing debate, and that historians in each generation re-map and re-divide its subject-matter in accordance with their interests and the demands of society.

This series tries to provide a new map. It is bound to be provisional; that is of the nature of general history. But general history can be scholarly in its standards and imaginative in its presentation. Only by combining both qualities can it provide the authoritative guidance which each generation of readers needs if it is to pick its way through the flood of specialized studies now pouring from what has become one of our major cultural industries.

J. M. R.

September 1969

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PREFACE

A PREFACE, like a wedding speech, must necessarily be composed largely of thanks. My thanks are due, first, to John Roberts, General Editor of this series, for offering me the commission to write this book, and for never doubting that it would appear. He has been the most helpful General Editor an author could hope for, combining exemplary patience with a remarkable expertise in a period not his own. I have found the commission an education in itself, and for this, too, I owe him my thanks. My thanks are due to the Clarendon Press for more sorts of helpfulness than can well be enumerated. All textbooks are to some extent co-operative efforts, and the preparation of this book has given me a deep sense of gratitude to other scholars working on the period. There has probably been no time since about 1900 when the general standard of work being done on this period was as high as it is today, and the work of several hundred historians has been used to enrich this book. I would like to thank them all. More specifically, I would like to thank the following people, who have read parts of this book in draft, and have made a number of illuminating comments, and saved me from innumerable errors: Patrick Collinson, Robin Du Boulay, Ivor Fishbone, Anthony Fletcher, Tresna Fletcher, Roger Highfield, Peter McCormack, Bob Moore, Wendy Moore, Valerie Pearl, Ian Roy, Bertrand Russell, Horace Sanders, Vivian Sanders, Jack Scarisbrick, Nicola Sutherland, Christopher Thompson, Michael Thompson, Nicholas Tyacke, and Austyn Woolrych. For any errors which remain, I alone am responsible. I would also like to join the long and growing list of historians who have acknowledged the seminar of Sir John Neale and Professor Hurstfield at the Institute of Historical Research. I would like to thank my sister-in-law, Vivian Sanders, for typing the whole work, and for undertaking the highly skilled and very lengthy task of correcting the manuscript to Clarendon Press House Rules. Above all, I would like to thank my wife. She has offered all the traditional form of help. In addition, she is responsible for far more of the reading and research which have gone into this book than is indicated in the footnotes, she has taken a very large share in the formulation of the argument, and she has given expert criticism, historical, literary, and editorial, to the resulting product. Since acknowledgement is insufficient, I would like to ask her to accept the dedication instead.

CONRAD RUSSELL

Bedford College, London February 1970

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I INTRODUCTORY

Many of the king's subjects have no ground to live upon, as they have had before time, and occupations be not always set on work all alike, and therefore the people still increasing, and their livings diminishing, it must needs come to pass that a great part of the people shall be idle, and lack livings, and hunger is a bitter thing to bear.

Discourse of the Common Weal, 1549, p. 48

more used in the sumptuous and costly array and apparel accustomably worn in this realm, whereof hath ensued ... such sundry high and notable inconveniences as be to the great manifest and notorious detriment of the common weal, the subversion of good and politic order in knowledge and distinction of people according to their estates preeminences dignities and degrees, and to the utter impoverishment and undoing of many inexpert and light persons inclined to pride mother of all vices . . . [no person worth less than £100 a year may wear] any satin damask silk chamlet or taffeta in his gown coat with sleeves or other outermost apparel.

An Act for the Reformation of Excess in Apparel, 24 Henry VIII, c.13

Evidence and its limitations

HISTORIANS may learn much from students of art, architecture, or archaeology. Nevertheless, history is essentially the study of the past by means of written records. Historians are therefore necessarily confined to those subjects on which people have not merely made, but kept, written records. How much the story we tell may be distorted by this process, it is hard to say. If the author of a newsletter reports a violent ambush and attempted murder in Fleet Street, does this prove that such goings-on were normal in Fleet Street, or that the event was recorded because it was so unusual as to be surprising? If six men are brought to trial for saying Anne Boleyn was a bawd, does this prove that such an opinion was general, or that the opinion that she was an honest woman was so common

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