# WESTERN SOCIETIES

Documentary
History
Volume II



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# WESTERN SOCIETIES

# A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

#### **VOLUME II**

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# **WESTERN SOCIETIES**

### A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

#### **VOLUME II**

# PREFACE

HISTORIANS are always asking new questions of the past; that is why we need new collections of sources from time to time. This one includes readings drawn from many different types of material—poems, plays, chronicles, government records, letters, diaries, treatises of various kinds. In studying these sources we can enter into the life of past generations on their own terms, so to speak. Such study enhances our own personalities by making us more aware of the whole range of human thought and feeling. Historical study can also help us to understand our present-day society better by learning how its various characteristics—ideas and institutions, achievements and dilemmas—grew out of the life of the past.

Some of the new questions that historians ask arise out of contemporary concerns. Many students nowadays want to know more about women's roles and patterns of family structure in earlier times. Modern interest in ecological problems has led us to ask how people in other ages viewed their relationship to the natural environment. Concern over a possible future era of "diminishing expectations" may stimulate questions about earlier theories of human progress (or regression or cyclical recurrence). Experience of social change in the modern world encourages new forms of writing on social history and especially on the sources of social conflict. The difficulties that many "less developed countries" encounter in seeking to "modernize" their economies redirect our attention to the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and demographic expansion that first created a modern society in the Western world. In making the present collection we have tried to bear in mind all these interests of recent historians.

The most evident change in the teaching of history at American colleges during the past decade has been the great growth of courses in the history of women and the family. This is proving to be more than a mere passing fashion (if it ever seemed to be that). Scholars in the field have explored new ranges of source material and raised significant new problems for research. It seems important that such work should not remain isolated in courses on Women's History but should be drawn into the mainstream of teaching on the evolution of Western society. One purpose of the present book is to make this task easier. Many readings dealing with women's roles and family relationships are included, and every chapter contains material by or about women.

A major problem for makers of anthologies is that new interests do

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not supplant old ones, but rather supplement them. Historians deal with the whole life of people in society. And to understand the life of any people adequately we need to ask about their religion, their economy, their forms of government, their whole world picture. These are subjects of traditional historical disciplines—"history of religions," "economic history," "political history," "history of ideas." Most teachers of Western Civilization courses will not want to neglect such topics. We have aimed therefore to provide a framework of readings illustrating the traditional themes of Western history, but also to include within the framework many readings related to the newer interests of historians.

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