Europe and Beyond

1870-1978 SECOND EDITION

H.L. Peacock

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by

Herbert L. Peacock

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by the same author:
A History of Modern Britain, 1815–1974
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Preface

THIS book is designed to give the history student a comprehensive picture of European history over the last century and at the same time to provide the detail necessary for examination work. At Ordinary Level the work meets the needs of those pupils capable of a full treatment of the period. For those who omit History at Ordinary Level and proceed straight to the Sixth Form course the book should ease the rather sharp transition. I hope the Advanced Level student will also find the book helpful as an introduction to more detailed work.

Since 1945 the interrelation of Europe and the other great continents has become increasingly close in both political and economic terms. This book attempts to recognise this fact by the inclusion of chapters on, for example, the history of the United States since the Civil War, the history of India and of the new states of Africa, while the significance for Europe of events in South-east Asia is also stressed. I also considered it useful to include a general survey of developments in Great Britain, as part of Europe, during the period under consideration. I hope the work will help to give some understanding of crucial developments in the modern world since 1870.

April 1974 H. L. Peacock

Preface to Second Edition

In this new edition, the chapters on the United States, France, Great Britain, Europe and Europe and the Third World have all been up-dated to the end of 1978.

November 1978 H. L. Peacock

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Introduction

THE CRUSHING defeat of Napoleon III by Prussia and her allies at Sedan heralded many dramatic changes in Europe. The Napoleonic Empire gave way to the Third Republic, whilst the King of Prussia was soon to be elevated to German Emperor. Taking advantage of the international disruption of the Franco-Prussian War, the Italian monarchy completed the process of unification by marching into Rome, and the Pope retired to the Vatican. Russia, too, seizing the opportune moment, launched warships on the Black Sea and fortified her southern ports in repudiation of the terms she had had to accept at the end of the Crimean War in 1856.

But it was not just in Europe that frontiers were being redrawn: the United States, recovered from the traumas of civil war, was fulfilling her 'manifest destiny' in the great drive of adventurers, settlers, and, in time, administrators to the west. And a similar destiny was being worked out as Russian colonists and garrisons advanced east and south to the borders of China and the heart of central Asia. Yet in 1870 the United States was still on the periphery of European affairs and much of the rest of the world hardly touched them at all. Apart from British India and the British colonial settlements, Europe had no great territorial stake in the outside world. But this too was soon to change. The carve-up of Africa and the forcible intrusion of western trade into the ancient and exclusive empires of China and Japan were soon taking place at an ever accelerating pace. The expansion of Europe was not simply a matter of political influence or the pursuit of glory. The industrial revolution which had first transformed Britain was taking root in Germany, America, France, Belgium and even Russia. The first two of these countries were soon to overtake Britain in most measures of economic achievement and the search for markets and raw materials was to add a new, intensely competitive element to the old political rivalries.

It was a time of great intellectual challenge too. Even as the empires of Europe were being constructed, there were liberal critics of the process in England—where for the first time a sizeable body of working people had the vote in Parliamentary elections. On the continent of Europe, Bismarck was facing the challenge of Marxist and other brands of socialism and the Czars sought to crush the regular resurgence of revolutionary terrorists and anarchists. The serfs of Russia had been emancipated only a decade before and the slaves of the United States liberated even more recently. In neither case were the results those hoped for by liberal reformers, but they were full of portent for the future.

By 1974 many of these themes both in and outside Europe had been played out. The great colonial empires had risen and then almost entirely

vanished. The centres of power had moved from the protagonists of European politics in 1870 to America, Russia, and China, both now transformed by revolution and, in economic terms, Japan. Germany was once more divided, Britain was once more wracked by the problems of Ireland, but on the other hand the peoples of a large part of Western Europe were seeking a new role in a venture of economic and political co-operation that would have seemed inconceivable a hundred or even fifty years before.

This book is an attempt to trace and explain these great changes. The account is given from a European point of view but, as will soon be apparent, the history of Europe after 1870 has increasingly to be considered in a world-wide context.

1. Great Britain, 1870–1914

BETWEEN 1870 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Britain witnessed the emergence or development of nearly every major issue which was to face her in the twentieth century. Such matters as Ireland, education, imperialism, Britain's international role, the growth of trade unionism and of the Labour Party, the part to be played by the State in promoting and safeguarding conditions of work and in administering new social services, graduated taxation, the widening of the franchise: all these topics of keen political debate in 1870 were to remain major issues for most of the twentieth century.

With the gradual decline of the old Whig party and the emergence of the Liberal party in the 1860s the stage was set for the clear two-party division between Liberal and Conservative which had developed since the eighteenth century. But politics were being transformed at the same time by a new democratic element as a result of the enfranchisement of working men in the Second Reform Act of 1867, which gave the vote to the skilled workers in the towns. Both the Conservative and Liberal parties were now becoming increasingly concerned to secure the allegiance of the working class whose political importance was further strengthened by the Third Reform Act of 1884, which enfranchised the agricultural worker. The importance of the workers, both as voters and as trade unionists, partly explains the increasing emphasis which both parties placed on the reform of social conditions. The new interest of the middle class in reform, and the activities of numerous reforming and a smaller number of near-revolutionary organizations, all exerted their pressures either directly or indirectly on Parliament. Moreover, the Education Act of 1870 was to produce a largely literate working class for the first time. This growth of literacy was possibly the most striking social development during this period. Its consequences were profound. It was a fundamental pre-requisite of the huge growth in the circulation of popular newspapers and periodicals which itself had political consequences. For the first time in British history a very broad public had at least a superficial acquaintance with what was happening in politics and society.

Whilst still dominated by the upper and middle classes, the two main parties gradually responded to these changing conditions. By 1914 they were both claiming to be 'progressive' parties in the widest sense of the word, though their interpretation of what was progressive or reactionary varied considerably. And, as we shall see, they differed profoundly both on points of principle and in their methods of handling such critical issues as the Irish question or the growth of the empire.

Gladstone's First Ministry

The election of 1868, which returned the Liberals to power under Gladstone, proved as important a landmark in social and political history as had the return of the Whigs after the Reform Act of 1832. The period of Gladstone's first premiership witnessed a spate of important social reforms. As we have seen, one of the most important of these was Forster's Education Act of 1870 which began the creation of a national system of elementary education. It sprang from the Newcastle Commission of 1861 which had disclosed an appalling state of illiteracy and ignorance amongst the people of the new towns produced by the Industrial Revolution. It continued the modest grants to church schools but allowed the setting up of school boards and the levying of rates in those areas where provision for the education of the poor was inadequate. Secondary education also received its first very limited instalment of state surveillance through the Endowed Schools Act, 1869, which provided for the better use of the endowments of grammar schools. The University Test Act of 1871 removed the old disabilities imposed on Nonconformist members of Oxford and Cambridge Universities – disabilities dating back to the religious-political feuds of the seventeenth century.

In the armed forces a number of important breaks were made with long-established customs which were a handicap to efficiency. The Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny had given a serious jolt to those who thought the old army, unchanged in its organization since Waterloo, was unbeatable. The defeat of France by Prussia in 1870 was another warning to Britain that new military and political forces had arisen in Europe, based on an efficient system of military training. The Secretary for War, Edward Cardwell, had a hard fight against the forces of tradition, which continued a rearguard action against change until the end of the century. However, not only did Cardwell succeed in radically altering the organization of the regiments for the better and reducing the onerous burden of long service overseas, but, by the issue of a Royal Warrant, which effectively circumvented the opposition of the House of Lords, he abolished the old practice of the sale and purchase of commissions. In general his reform greatly improved the standing of the army in the eyes of the people and encouraged a better type of recruit than hitherto.

Gladstone's administration also saw the beginnings of the modern, professionalized Civil Service. The old system of family recommendation was done away with and a competitive examination system took its place. The Foreign Office remained for many years the one exception to the system of open competition. Gladstone was also concerned to regulate the position of the trade unions, whose growing importance was signified by the establishment of the Trades Union Congress in 1868. In 1870 they were still in a semi-conspiratorial position that forced them to register as Friendly Societies if they wished for any legal recognition and meant that

use of the strike weapon could still entail severe legal penalties. The Trade Union Act of 1871 gave the unions a clear legal right to own property and have it protected by the law. On the other hand, the trade unions were deeply dissatisfied when the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed, making peaceful picketing by strikers illegal in practice.

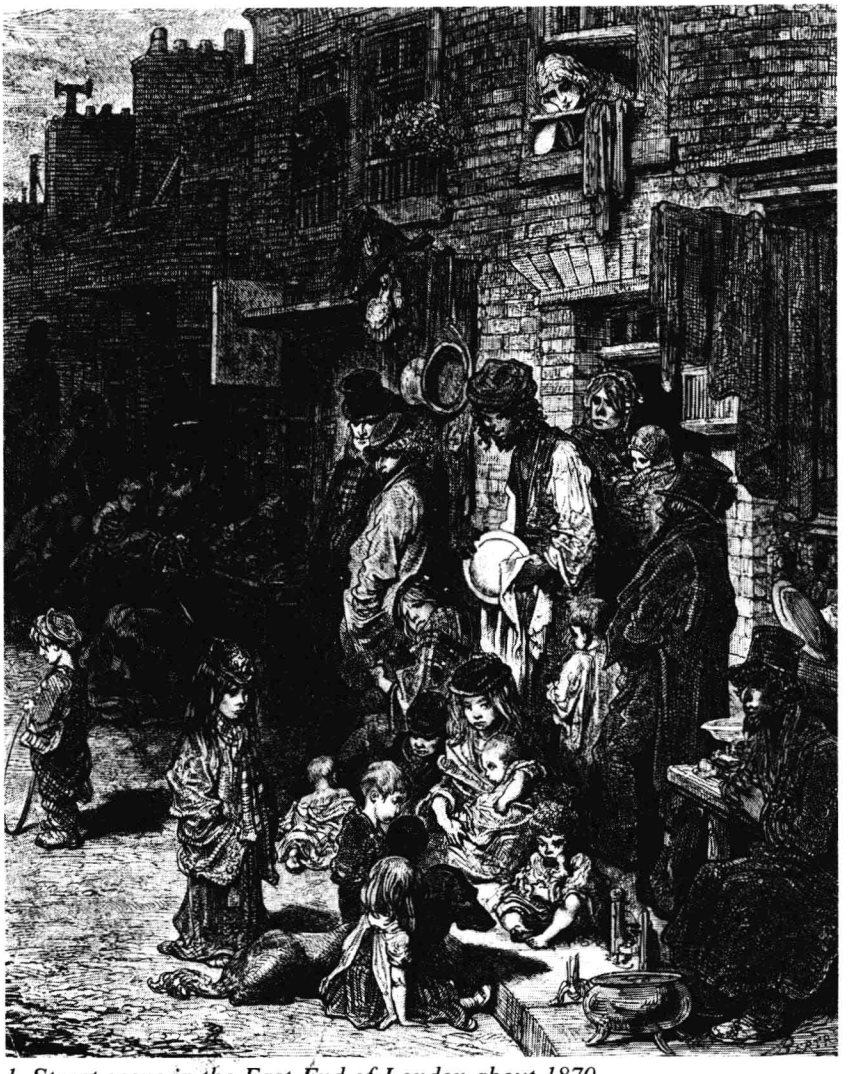
The Secret Ballot Act of 1872 (a reform demanded by the Chartists in the period 1836 to 1848) greatly reduced intimidation and corruption at elections. Thus the period opens with the extension of parliamentary democracy by the Second Reform Act of 1867 and the Ballot Act of 1872, while a clear reduction in class privilege was made in various areas where such privileges stood in the way of efficiency and even prejudiced Britain's position in the world.

Ireland, the unresolved problem of these years, also deeply concerned Gladstone, to such an extent that he was prepared to stake his political reputation on its solution. The agitation of the Fenian Society in the 1860s and the use of the bomb outrage as a political weapon in Britain itself had disturbed upper and middle-class complacency and focused attention once again on the whole Irish problem. Although he took no measures to end landlordism in Ireland and create a landowning peasantry, as the Radical wing of his party came to demand, Gladstone did attempt to reduce the excesses of landlords with the Irish Land Act of 1870, by which a tenant was to be secure so long as he paid his rent and was to receive damages if evicted for any reason other than non-payment. Fair rents were to be decided by Land Courts which proved, however, too biased in the landlords' favour to achieve real justice in this respect. At the same time Gladstone introduced a Coercion Act which aimed to reduce violence by giving special powers of arrest and trial to the authorities.

The election of 1874 resulted in defeat for Gladstone, partly due to the variety of 'vested interests' he had antagonized by his reforms. His licensing acts had offended the powerful brewing interests, the religious denominations had been offended by the raising of general rates by the new School Boards for the new non-denominational elementary schools, the trade unions disliked the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and there were critics of Gladstone's non-committal foreign policy at the time of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

Disraeli's Second Ministry

The pace of reform was increased by Disraeli during the Conservative administration of 1874 to 1880. The process of state intervention went several important steps further. In his efforts to meet the grievances of the trade unions, new legislation strengthened still further the legal position of the unions: peaceful picketing was legalized; and the right to strike was strengthened by the removal of vestiges of the old laws dating back to 1825



1 Street scene in the East End of London about 1870.

against combinations 'in restraint of trade'. Breaches of contract between employer and worker now came under the civil law for both, whereas previously the civil law, usually involving lesser penalties, had applied to the employer only, leaving the full weight of the criminal law to fall upon the employee. Other important reforms affecting wide sections of the people were introduced. Of these the Public Health Act of 1875, which codified previous regulations and introduced important new ones, such as the appointment of local Medical Officers of Health and the introduction of regulations to reduce food adulteration, was the point of departure for all future health regulation in Britain. Experience had shown the upper

and middle-classes that merely to live in districts separate from the dwellings of the town working class was no longer a safeguard to themselves. New and more accurate scientific knowledge of the origins of infectious disease was a powerful factor leading to more governmental control of local sanitary conditions, and led eventually to extensive schemes of slum clearance. It was only much later in the century that local authorities were given any powers of compulsory slum clearance; there were many areas in which working-class housing remained very bad, and festering centres of crime and disease lasted long into the next century. However, the Artisans' Dwellings Act of 1876 gave local authorities the right to demolish insanitary properties, though it did not compel them to do so. Important changes were made in other directions. The Plimsoll Act reduced the dangers to seamen of racketeering shipowners; the Education Act of 1876 imposed fines for non-attendance at school without permission – the real beginnings of compulsory education, which Forster's Act of 1870 had shied away from; the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 codified previous regulations and brought small workshops and factories under the inspectors' surveillance. In all these respects the influence of Disraeli's earlier ideas of 'Tory democracy' (the alliance of the upper classes and the workers under the Tory banner against the middle-class Liberals), ably carried out in the main by his Home Secretary, Richard Cross, were clearly evident. Much of this legislation and his popular imperial policies created what the earlier working-class pioneers would have regarded with horror and amazement – the 'Conservative working-man'.

On the other hand the defeat of Disraeli in the election of 1880 was due not only to Gladstone's powerful attack on Disraeli's pro-Turkish and anti-Russian policies, but to a number of setbacks for British land forces abroad, especially in South Africa, and also to the serious depression which had afflicted British agriculture after 1873 and for which the government had no constructive policies to offer.

Gladstone and Ireland

The whole period from Gladstone's second government of 1880, through successive Liberal and Conservative administrations to 1895, is dominated by the Irish problem. Gladstone's earlier legislation had not substantially improved the situation. Opposition to landlordism and to British control reached new critical heights in his second administration of 1880 to 1885. A serious famine in 1879 had created widespread distress and disorder, a situation made worse by landlords continuing to create larger landholdings by means of evictions. This in its turn led to outbreaks of arson and general destruction of landlords' property. The Irish Land League, founded by Michael Davitt, came increasingly under the domination of

Charles Stuart Parnell, whose ultimate aim was the achievement of Irish self-government. Landlords who refused to accept the rentals proposed by the local Land League associations were subjected to siege, destruction of property and compulsion on their servants to leave them. Gladstone adopted severe policies under the terms of a new Coercion Bill for Ireland, but at the same time introduced a Second Irish Land Bill in 1881 which attempted to give more security of tenure and to establish fair rents. For this latter purpose he established special land courts which were to fix fair rents in disputed cases. Parnell and the Land League refused to cooperate with the courts, which were always regarded as biased towards the Protestant landlords, and Parnell put all his energies into the agitation for Home Rule. Gladstone came to an agreement with Parnell designed to stop outrages and the no-rent campaign, but the Phoenix Park murders, in which the new Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish, and his Under-Secretary were killed, created strong anti-Parnell feeling in Britain, especially when they were followed by fresh bomb outrages. Parnell's eighty followers in the House of Commons were responsible for Gladstone's defeat and resignation in 1885. However, in 1886, during his Third Ministry, Gladstone introduced the First Home Rule Bill. Partly due to dissensions within the Liberal party between Gladstone's supporters on the one hand and the supporters of the Radical Joseph Chamberlain and the old-style aristocratic Whig elements under Lord Hartington on the other, the Bill was narrowly defeated by 30 votes, and Gladstone resigned.

2 The eviction of an Irish peasant family, 1886.

During his second and third administrations Gladstone had considerable problems to face in foreign affairs. In South Africa, the Dutch Boers defeated the British at Majuba Hill in 1881 and Gladstone accepted the independence of the Transvaal under a vague British suzerainty. The nationalist revolt in Egypt in 1882 under Arabi Pasha resulted in the British bombardment and occupation of Alexandria, the defeat of Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir, and his subsequent capture. The Radicals at home were opposed to Gladstone's occupation policy, while the imperialists in his cabinet thought he had not gone far enough and should have sent forces immediately into the Sudan. In 1884 these divisions of opinion came to a head when General Gordon, sent to the Sudan to organize the evacuation of Egyptian forces, was beseiged at Khartoum by the forces of the Mahdi and murdered before the relieving force belatedly sent by Gladstone had arrived. The death of Gordon produced a considerable public reaction against Gladstone.

On the home front an important move towards more complete parliamentary democracy was made by the Third Reform Act of 1884 which gave the vote to householders and £10 rent-paying lodgers in the countryside, as in the towns under the 1867 Act. This added about 2,000,000 voters to the roll. A Redistribution Act continued the process of reducing the unevenness of size between constituencies in terms of population, and new measures were introduced against bribery and corruption in elections.

The Salisbury Administration

Gladstone was succeeded by Lord Salisbury and a Conservative government from 1886 to 1892. The Irish problem continued to dominate affairs under this ministry. The new Secretary of Ireland, Arthur Balfour, was responsible for increasingly severe measures against disorder, extending trial without jury to all offences against law and order, but at the same time introducing new financial assistance to peasants wishing to purchase their holdings. The Land League and Home Rule movement continued as violent an agitation as ever. There followed the abortive attempt by a conspirator to implicate Parnell in the Phoenix Park murders and his dramatic exoneration by the special investigating body, the Parnell Commission. As if sufficient complication was not already involved in the whole Irish question, in 1890 Parnell was cited as co-respondent in a divorce case brought by one of his supporters, Captain O'Shea, against his wife Katherine O'Shea. This affair was well exploited by Parnell's opponents so that opinion swung against him and he lost his hold on the Irish party. His death in 1891 at the age of forty-five left the Irish movement divided and weakened, with a consequent strengthening of British control for some years to come. Constructive measures were also under-

taken by the Land Purchase Act of 1890 which enabled the peasants to receive a government loan for the full amount of the purchase and by the creation of the Congested Districts Board whose main purpose was to promote the development of industries in the poorer districts and to assist emigration. Other remedial measures were introduced over the next twenty years, but this did not prevent another major crisis just before the Great War of 1914 (see p. 14). Gladstone's last attempt to introduce Home Rule by his Second Home Rule Bill in 1893 was this time defeated by the opposition of the House of Lords.

In purely English affairs Salisbury's administration introduced progressive changes in local government. The County Councils Act of 1888 set up these new councils to carry out the numerous administrative duties formerly undertaken by JPs. The London County Council was also established.

One very important Act passed by the Conservatives was the Education Act 1902, usually known as the Balfour Act. This abolished the school boards throughout the country, and made county and county borough councils responsible not only for elementary but also for the provision of secondary education, with the exception that non-county boroughs with a population of over 20,000 were to be the authorities within their own areas. Despite opposition from the non-conformists, who opposed continued support for Church schools, this act laid the foundations of the modern educational system. It allowed in particular for secondary education for able but poor children with the provision of scholarship places at secondary schools provided by the local authorities.

However, as the Royal Commission on Trade and Industry had stressed in 1886, British education, especially in technical fields, lagged far behind that of her commercial and industrial rivals such as Germany.

In foreign affairs this period of Conservative rule continued to be what was described by a Canadian statesman in 1896 as one of 'splendid isolation'. Britain in these years continued to be on bad official terms with both France and Russia. The former resented the British expansionist policy in Egypt which had resulted in the ending of the old system of Dual Control by Britain and France, while Britain continued on the anti-Russian course set by Disraeli. However, Salisbury was not as inactive in foreign affairs as 'splendid isolation' would imply. In 1887 Britain made an important agreement with Italy and Austria by which Italian support was assured for the British occupation of Egypt in return for Britain's promise of assistance to Italy in the event of a French naval attack upon her in the Mediterranean. Both Austria and Italy agreed to come into line with Britain's anti-Russian policy in the Balkans. In imperial affairs, with the ardent support of the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, Salisbury promoted British expansion both commercially and territorially and reached important agreements with Germany, France and Portugal (see p. 86). This was the period of rapid British commercial expansion in