

THE TREND OF HISTORY

Origins of Twentieth Century Problems

BY

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TO

W. D. W.

I GRATEFULLY DEDICATE
THIS BOOK

PREFACE

We are standing on the threshold of an unpolitical age. Politics has fallen from its high estate. Since the floodgates of political privilege have been opened, and participation in political affairs has been vouchsafed to all, we find everywhere a progressively increasing apathy in matters relating to politics. The preëminence of the State politically conceived, has been called into question. Its sovereignty has been shorn of many of its mystical characteristics. Other forms of corporate organisation are pressing for recognition. We may in turn see arising before our eyes a new, great social institution. Like feudalism it is in its essence unpolitical. As Lord Bryce has pointed out "feudalism was a social and legal system, only indirectly and by consequence a political one." We may to-day note that "industrialism," which may serve to denominate this new institution, is a social and economic system, only indirectly political. Such would appear to be the trend of history.

History is the book of life of mankind. Its function is primarily interpretative. Historical interpretation means the selection of those relevant factors out of the mass of past events which stand in significant relation to the present moment. Every age may thus be said to have historical ties which at first sight seem incongruous. In our own times the interest in guild organisation, the assertion that occupation or function rather than geographical distribution is destined to become the basis of more adequate social organisation, hark back to the Middle

Ages, and are closer thereto than to the theories of State and the political practice which were still more or less universally accepted before the World War. Thus history must ever be written afresh, for after a few years such writing inevitably becomes obsolete, except as of literary or antiquarian interest. But history itself is never obsolete. The historical present is the outcome of a past which it is the purpose of history to trace. In our own times the transformation which is taking place in the theory of social organisation requires that the method of historical writing be revised.

Hitherto history has generally been conceived in an exclusively political sense as a record of the *res gestae*, and of the men who brought them to pass. As long as politics remained dominant it was natural that history should have remained primarily political in character. But we can now perceive that political history or any other partial survey of events in their isolation, such as is embodied in a biography or even in a national history, is no longer adequate. History must henceforth be approached from an institutional, not from an individual or national standpoint. The theoretical background of social practice must be inquired into. In this brief survey I would point the way to this new method of history. To trace through the tangled maze we call the course of events the logical antecedents and coefficients thereof is to discover the trend of history, the process of social life. Such is the purpose of this volume.

The chaotic state of mind which exists so widely among all manner and condition of persons is in a great measure due to the fact that the relevant factors of history, the connective tissue between the past and the present, are obscure. The great obsolete mass of dead matter incorporated in the average historical survey illustrates

significantly the point I wish to make. I would not infer that political data have been omitted from this book. On the contrary as it reviews a predominantly political period, in fact traces in outline the rise, maturity and decay of modern political practice, politics has found a large place therein. But I have endeavoured in so far as possible to present the theory of the age and illustrate it by the practice of politics, and I trust that I may have succeeded in a measure in pointing beyond this theory and practice to the newer theory that was being developed.

Though politics can no longer be held to be pivotal, in history, we cannot disregard the fact that the aim of politics is to arrive at some workable functioning of what we term social life. But in this politics has no exclusive monopoly. Religion, politics and economics are the three great regulative factors of human intercourse subsumed under the term—Society. At various epochs the principal emphasis has been placed now on one, now on another of these elements, according to a certain historically relevant relationship which may be traced. It is a one-sided distortion of historical truth to attempt to claim absolute preëminence for any one of these factors, though the dominance first of one and then of another is confirmed by a perusal of history. As a consequence the manner and mode of the civilisation of a given epoch, the cultural life of a period is colored by the dominant characteristic of the age, be it religious, political or economic.

In this first volume I would present for your consideration the origins and background of present-day social phenomena. I would trace in this new historical spirit the course of relevant events which has led up to those of the epoch which we may conveniently call our own. It is sheer pedantry or an utter misunderstanding of the aim of history to declare that the events of his own times are

too vivid, too fresh for an historian to undertake to interpret them. In point of fact the only history that is adequate is contemporary history; that is, history that is related to the present. All the research of historians, all the delvings of students into texts and yellowed parchments to eke out the minutiae of facts, which Macaulay nearly a century ago significantly termed the "mere dross of history," are in themselves worthless unless linked up with the current of events.

History reveals life in its manifoldness and complexity. In order to introduce some semblance of unity, to take history out of the realm of chronicles, to free it from a parity with fiction or a disparity with romance, we must assure ourselves that it is made understandable in terms of contemporary interest and usage. History in this sense is not merely the book of life, it may if read aright become the book of wisdom of mankind. I do not mean to imply that it should be looked upon as a collection of recipes to be followed in guiding individual action, or that it can serve, as it is so often held, as the *magister vitae* of a person calling himself a statesman. But presenting those events which are closely related to our own times and showing the relationship that exists between the past and the present, not only may we hope to arrive at an understanding of the significance of the course of events, but we may even discern a pattern of purpose in social life. This purposive element is in itself only discernible *a posteriori* and should not be taken as implying some rigid notion of historical causality. For history which recounts the story of the life process in its entirety admits of no such notion as an efficient or final cause. It is nevertheless with these causal factors that history is primarily concerned. It is by weaving them into a unity, by setting forth cogently whatever may serve to explain their mean-

ing, that the course of events, the trend of history is revealed.

In selecting the historical data used to illustrate this inquiry, much had perforce to be abridged, much omitted which might possibly have found a place in these pages. Thus, for example, in discussing the rise of the modern State, the influence of the Counter-Reformation, and the part played by the Jesuits in joining hands with the liberal movement in undermining the concept of the divine right of kings, and their struggle against monarchical absolutism, some might aver, should have been included. This very interesting episode has like others been omitted not only because of the need of limiting the scope of the narrative within reasonable bounds, but also because the Counter-Reformation and the work of its protagonists were historically negative. What the Jesuits sought was the restoration of papal supremacy in matters temporal, and not the positive progress of the new and more liberal political practice. Other omissions might be cited, but a careful study has led me to conclude that in the main their influence was negative, and had no preëminently positive influence on the course of history.

W. K. WALLACE

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THE TREND OF HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

I

IN periods of historical transition, the stress of new ideas is greater than can be equably borne. The passing of the old order is attended by upheavals and disturbances which are in themselves manifestations of this overburdening, and must not be confounded with the positive progress of the new tenets. The natural conservative forces, latent in all living matter, render smooth transition difficult. Reactionary principles remain dominant, relatively intact, until the crumbling process is accelerated and new and more appropriate theories find spontaneous acceptance.

It no longer suffices that the political philosopher, the doctrinaire sociologist, or the ethically-minded economist should seek to discover and array in historically accurate, logically sound argument the factors which contribute to the ideal governance of society. It no longer suffices that the historian, after a minute inquiry into the episodes and events in the life of a people, should present those relevant details which may appear to have led to the rise, grandeur, and fall of empires, so that we may profit by the experiences of the civilisations which have preceded our own. The time is past when the mission of the historian is to arouse the patriotic fervor of his compatriots as a spur to national unity or

political independence, which influenced so much of the historical writing and the so-called philosophy of history during the 19th century. Theories of the *summum bonum*, politically arrived at, or panaceas based on worn-out political creeds into which the historian would seek to breathe a breath of new life can no longer be accepted.

Western civilisation, and in its train that of the rest of the world, has entered upon a new historical epoch. If we are to be in a position to interpret aright the significance of the course of events, to understand the meaning of the historical moment we call the present, we must be equipped to view dispassionately and without prejudice the origin and growth of the State as we know it, and trace the decay of its present constitutional form. To do this we must inquire with greater precision into the plan, investigate with clearer insight the principles upon which the social organisation of our epoch has been built. A new method of historical inquiry, a new historical viewpoint is required.

When, after the barbarian invasions, the political organisation of the Roman Empire was disrupted, men turned in disgust from the secular world and found what solace they could in the contemplation of the glories of the "City of God." In the West, politics in its proper sense disappeared and we have the period known as the Dark Ages, devoid of history. In the course of these centuries, roughly from the end of the 5th to the 10th, the Church entrenched itself firmly and filled the whole life of the individual.

During the long continuance of the domination of the cultural life of Europe by the Church, its control had become so absolute that in order to emancipate mankind from what had come to be recognised as an intolerable servitude, it was felt that a new theory of social organ-