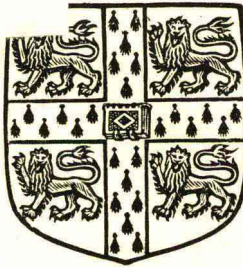


THE NEW CAMBRIDGE MODERN HISTORY

VOLUME I
THE RENAISSANCE
1493-1520

EDITED BY
G. R. POTTER



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PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

Europe-centered history
THIS book was planned and written well over twenty years ago. The Introduction, to which this is an addendum, was written, somewhat hurriedly, in 1956.¹ In what ways would it have been different if written in 1975? The book itself would, of course have been different. Professor Potter's team of authors was the team then at his disposal, and there were doubtless writers he would have liked to enlist had he been able². But I suspect that the very chronological limits of the volume and its place in related series imposed severe limitations on available choices. As Sir George Clark writes below (p. xxxiv), Lord Acton had produced the masterly design of the *Cambridge Modern History*; the *Medieval History* came out of the same Press (1911-36) and then there was a reversion to the beginning, as one might say, with the *Ancient History* (1923-39), quite apart from other works on the *British Empire* and other areas. Hence a fresh *Cambridge Modern History* had to be tailored to fit existing models. Its first two volumes had surely to be called 'Renaissance' and 'Reformation' respectively.

Of all the changes that have overtaken historical scholarship in recent times, it may be suspected that a desire to jettison the old hard-and-fast division between 'medieval' and 'modern' has pride of place. This yearning is frequently satisfied by the device of using the word Renaissance to mean primarily not a cultural crisis spread over a period, but a period itself. In the U.S.A. indeed Renaissance conveniently covers the centuries between Petrarch and Vico; and in this volume the 'Renaissance' of the title covers a survey of the main developments in most aspects of European History within an era over-precisely described in the title as running from 1493 to 1520. Such a use of the word to denote an epoch, however long or short, obliterates the ideological sense of the word. Everything that happens within the time span can be labelled 'Renaissance', just as anything that happened in Victorian Britain can be labelled 'Victorian'. This is quite a reasonable way out of the difficulty, provided one does not confuse the two interpretations of the word. As explained below (p. 2) the harbingers of what a later age would regard as the physical sciences were in no way humanist in their interests. In the new school curriculum, the major innovation of the Renaissance (along with

¹ When Professor Potter was appointed cultural attaché in Germany the present writer undertook to provide an introduction and see the volume through the Press.

² Professor Potter writes: 'The planning of this volume was influenced by wise editorial "instructions" from Sir George Clark and by the inability of two distinguished authors to write chapters originally allocated to them. Renaissance scholarship in 1950 when the first invitations were sent out was in an unusually transitional state.'

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parallel developments in the fine arts), there was naturally a small place allowed to the gentlemanly subject of mathematics. But the time-table was overwhelmingly devoted to Latin. Latin was no longer treated as necessary because one needed it to read the Scriptures and the Missal, but because it was the language of Cicero and Vergil, of truth and beauty in their own right. By means of Latin one might attain the supreme ability—the ability to communicate. Of course such communication was often not in Latin, although a surprising amount of it was. But even when people wrote or spoke in Italian, French or the other vernaculars, those of them who were literate, who were important, had all been to the same sort of grammar school; they all knew the basic Latin classics and the Bible. Even those who had no interest whatever in learning, but only an appropriate place in society, had had the ablative absolute instilled into them, often at a heavy price: what Ascham was later to call ‘beating nature’.

The use of the word ‘Renaissance’ as a period, then, should encourage us to transcend, as contemporaries perforce had to, those frontiers of convenience adopted by historians as temporal divisions. It has been by neglecting such artificial boundaries that much new light has been thrown, for example, on Thomas More and Luther. It is clear from Professor Elton’s preface to the paperback edition of the second volume of the *N.C.M.H.* the degree to which current Reformation research has begun to emphasize the medieval antecedents and influences in much sixteenth-century religious thought.

One change which has certainly affected Renaissance studies (as also and *a fortiori* classical and medieval studies) has been the dramatic decline in the amount of Latin taught in the schools of at any rate the English-speaking world. This is admittedly a process which began a long while back, but until the Second World War most boys or girls proceeding to read any kind of Arts at the university would have been given some kind of training in Latin. In the last quarter of a century the scene has been dramatically transformed in Britain and the Commonwealth; in the countries of North America the decline has been less pronounced, but only because Latin had never been so generally taught in the secondary schools. The results of this change are manifold. One is the difficulty many students experience in reading the older canonical works which, although written in their own language, have a fair amount of quotation and allusion in ‘the obscurity of a learned language’. Text-books and even monographs must now provide translations or at any rate ample clues for the interpretation of such material. This may or may not be all loss: it is occasionally no bad thing for a scholar to make up his mind exactly what his text means. Further, there has been a quite remarkable increase in the quantity and quality of Renaissance texts available in translation. Writers like More and Erasmus were, of course, translated more or less

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in their own day, so far as their more popular books were concerned. But 'Tudor translations' are notoriously unreliable, and in any event involve the comprehension of archaic or obsolete words and phrases. Later translations, especially those produced in the nineteenth century, were all too frequently hack works, debased 'modernisations' of earlier and erratic versions, devoid of literary merit and innocent of any pretence at scholarship. (A good example of this can be found in the English versions of Platina's *Lives of the Popes*.) But in the last couple of decades a quite new standard has been attained. Two enterprises are so ambitious and impressive that they must be instanced.¹ In 1963 there appeared the second volume (but the first to be published) of the Yale edition of the complete works of Thomas More: *The History of King Richard III*. More had himself produced an English version of this which was printed on facing pages by the Yale editor, R. S. Sylvester. The next volume to appear (vol. 4, 1965) was *Utopia*, with a scrupulously revised text and translation by Edward Surtz S.J., and a long and authoritative introduction by J. H. Hexter. The series continues. Meanwhile an even more staggering programme has been initiated in Toronto, a complete English version of the works of Erasmus. Of this the first volume to appear contains his early letters (nos. 1-141 in P. S. Allen's enumeration): this section of the *Correspondence*, translated by R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, is edited by Wallace K. Ferguson and was published in 1974. The editorial board cautiously avoids stating how many volumes the scheme will ultimately entail.

Many other lesser examples can be found in all modern languages of texts printed with translations, or of translations treated with the care and precision which enable the reader to rely on them with confidence and with a learned commentary which goes much of the way to dispense the scholar from recourse to the original. It would naturally be absurd to imply that the preparation of critical editions of Renaissance texts without translation has stopped. Erasmus is again a case in point. An international team has embarked on a new and revised recension of the Leyden *Opera omnia* of 1703-6. The first instalment of this appeared at Amsterdam in 1969.

Another development, not unique to Renaissance studies, but most prominent in that area, is the publication of collections of essays by different authors, organised round a theme. Three such works have proved influential: *Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (1960), *Florentine Studies*, ed. N. Rubinstein (1969), and *Renaissance Venice—Essays*, ed. John Hale (1973). The emphasis on Florence and Venice reflected in the titles of these books not unfairly represents the direction of most Italian

¹ It is fair to say that in medieval history the trail was blazed long ago with 'Les classiques de l'histoire de France au moyen âge' and the Columbia 'Records of Civilization'. The 'Nelson's Medieval Texts', now continued as the 'Oxford Medieval Texts', began in 1949.

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research, at least by British and American scholars; other centres have been relatively neglected, despite (for example) the exciting prospects suggested by the relevant volumes of the 'Treccani degli Alfieri' *Storia di Milano*. Rome in the early Renaissance awaits its historian, although there are some excellent works now available in the fields of *urbanistica* and the fine arts: one may instance T. Magnuson's *Studies in Roman Quattrocento Architecture* (1958) and L. D. Ettlinger's *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo* (1965). This concentration of research, especially in English, on Florence and Venice, reflects traditional sentiment of a non-scholarly kind and also library facilities well above the Italian average. And of course both towns have remarkable archives, often nowadays exploited by scholars anxious to bridge the gap between sociology and history. The shadow of the computer lies over the Renaissance.

Down to the 1520's, when this volume has its formal terminus, the new humanities and the new arts were more actively pursued in Italy than elsewhere. As yet only Erasmus, Budé and More had attained the stature of the greater Italian scholars and men of letters, and they have been accorded due recognition in recent years. Other questions remain without any answers, other authors with only partial treatment. Far too little attention has been paid as yet to northern cultural influences in Italy during the *quattrocento*, and much more light could be thrown on the Italian contributions to trans-Alpine 'prehumanism'. Of most countries it is true that our knowledge is still very much what it was a quarter of a century ago. France, however, has been very much better served. The energy of Franco Simone has resulted in a number of important books, and notably his *Il Rinascimento Francese* (1961); more recently we have been presented by Eugene F. Rice with his fundamental edition of the *Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Related Texts* (1972): '... the efforts of Lefèvre and his circle to reform instruction in the faculty of arts during the last decade of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth mark the critical stage in the adaptation of the cultural program of Italian humanism to the educational tradition of the University of Paris'. Lefèvre was a clear case of the old or medieval mingling with new ideas, and the same interesting amalgam can be seen in the German Abbot Johannes Trithemius, to whom Klaus Arnold has devoted a welcome study (1971). And, if much awaits investigation, specialists in the period now at last have their own *Bibliographie internationale de l'humanisme et de la Renaissance*, an annual which first came out at Geneva in 1966 with a survey of works published in 1965.

The present volume of the *N.C.M.H.* is entitled *The Renaissance* and in the preceding paragraphs some account has been taken of changing influences on and new contributions to the study of Renaissance civilisation. Many more remarks might have been made under this head. There is, for example, a new and stimulating interest in rhetoric, and an attempt

to see how the assumptions deriving from classical and medieval rhetorical theory have to be mastered if we are properly to understand what humanists were trying to say. There is a new and lively activity to be seen in the history and achievements of humanist historians. For the period covered in the following pages original reflections are expressed by Felix Gilbert in his study of *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (1965), the two historians who, from Ranke onwards, have dominated the interpretation of the Italian and European background of this epoch. Some valuable work has also been devoted to the rich interaction, just beginning at this time, between law and history; see, for instance, Donald K. Kelley's *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship* (1970), and compare too the perceptive remark below at p. xx.

It would be beyond the present writer's competence and the space allotted to these brief additional remarks to indicate even the most important works in all the subjects covered in the following chapters which have materially added to our knowledge since this book first came out. The attempt would in any case produce a list even more idiosyncratic than the handful of titles in cultural history already given. What may be indicated in conclusion are one or two of the ways in which our general assumptions may have altered in the interval.

One oppressive experience to which we are all at present exposed on an unprecedented scale is inflation. Nowadays this exercises a distinct restraint on discussions of what used to be called 'The Price Revolution of the Sixteenth Century'. Economists now freely admit that they cannot explain, let alone control, our predicament; likewise economic historians are more reticent when dealing with the milder upheavals of the mid-1500's, whose beginnings in foreign exploration and exploitation are touched on below.

Another closed episode was reopened when the late Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Or rather a whole range of attitudes and actions, formerly regarded as irreversibly incompatible with the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, once again emerged as possibilities. The role and authority of an ecumenical council was one such matter. Church historians of the medieval and Renaissance periods had accepted that the efforts of conciliarists at Constance and Basle had been frustrated by Trent and finally annihilated by the subservience of Vatican I (1869-70), which saw the proclamation of papal infallibility as a dogma. Now once again the place of the bishop in church government may be re-examined historically; 'head and members' has taken on renewed actuality. Beyond that the question of a married priesthood, of the endowment and financial control of the Roman Church even in areas where it is 'official', of the Cup for the laity (already an issue in Bohemia as Hus lay in prison at Constance), all these burning topics may now freely be debated by Roman Catholic historians, and for

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others have lost their confessional bitternesses. They went with simplification of the Roman liturgy and the use in it of the vernacular (a further blow for Latin!). In these and other ways what had seemed final paragraphs may become the beginnings of new chapters.

The spiritual life of pre-Reformation Europe is another field which is somewhat neglected in this volume, for the reason that historians interested in it had not yet published their work, save for the scholars who had dealt with the German mystics and the Brethren of the Common Life. Even the parish clergy, dealt with severely below, often had a worthwhile social role in the many confraternities and guilds of the period, themselves in many aspects 'religious' in the largest sense of the term. Charity and good works were a prominent part of the living and the dying of ordinary people everywhere, as W. K. Jordan has shown for England in his many writings, and as Brian Pullan has shown for Venice. The iconography of such spirituality was the subject of that fine study: Alberto Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (1957).

An equally serious ambiguity surrounds many of the political solutions which used to seem fixed and certain not so long ago. It is now far from easy to ignore the fact that our world may change out of recognition. The old truths seem to have less force: England and Scotland joined by marriage in 1503 led ineluctably to the later United Kingdom; the even more famous marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in the end produced a kingdom of Spain. (I notice with some shame that on p. 5 below I wrote of the 'final emergence of a pattern of international relationships'.) The dislocations resulting from the Second World War, it seemed twenty-five years ago, would sooner or later be cancelled out: there would again be—to take a case in point—one Germany, just as France, Spain, the U.K. would remain unchanged. In our own day devolution has everywhere powerful advocates and there is no state large or small which can be sure that its past will determine its future. 'Nothing is inevitable until it has happened.' The consequences of any public event are quite incalculable. All of this is a further reminder that 'definitive history' is no longer on the agenda (see below pp. xxiv–xxvi), despite the authoritative appearance and the continued viability of the Cambridge Histories.

January 1975

D. H.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND THE MODERN HISTORIAN

BY SIR GEORGE CLARK

THE original *Cambridge Modern History*, to which the present series of volumes is the successor, was planned by the first Lord Acton in the year 1896, and its publication was completed when the atlas volume appeared in 1912.¹ It has been familiar ever since as a standard work, both a book of reference and a book to read, and it was the most influential survey in the English language of the history of the five previous centuries as they appeared to the scholars of that time. In British universities history, as a subject for examinations, was then attracting considerable, and growing, numbers of candidates. The same interest spread downwards into the schools and outwards through the ranks of educated men and women, bringing with it a demand for historical books and for new kinds of historical books. This change in the content of education was due to many changes in the public mind. One body of educational reformers promoted the teaching of history, while another promoted that of natural science, as alternatives to the more established subjects, especially the Greek and Latin classics; but the propaganda within the educational world echoed opinions which were current outside it. There was a utilitarian demand for more knowledge of history, appropriate enough at a time when British governments were assuming new functions at home and becoming more closely involved in international politics, so that the public had to discuss many issues which could scarcely be explained except in their historical setting. There was also an enthusiasm for history as a literary study, enlarging the mind, training political judgment and even confirming moral character. The imposing figures of the two historians who had become bishops, Stubbs and Creighton, stood among the eminent Victorians. The imperialistic mood of the time had but recently lost its historian, Sir John Seeley. Above all there was a belief that a new science of history, more impartial and more exact than anything previously practised, had provided a key to the past and the future. Samuel Rawson Gardiner was demonstrating what the method could do for English history, and a number of historians were available who had trained themselves in the same arduous technique. Yet there was a shortage of recent English books on continental history. There were few, if any, on a large scale worth mentioning except Creighton's

¹ An account of the planning and editing, fuller than that which follows here, is in the *Cambridge Historical Journal*, VII (1945), pp. 57 ff.

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History of the Papacy and Seeley's *Life of Stein*. For ordinary purposes it was still necessary to use older writers like Robertson, Coxe, Prescott, Motley and even Carlyle.

Some of these things must have been in the minds of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, one of whom was the great historian Maitland, when in 1896 they invited Lord Acton to consider undertaking the general direction of a History of the World. Acton had entered on his office as Regius Professor of Modern History in the previous year, and he had not decided what work to do in addition to giving his lectures. Of all men he had the strongest faith in the new scientific history. It was for this that he had stood up in the controversies of his younger days when, as an editor of periodicals, he had tried to show that his Church would further her own ends if she encouraged those of science 'which are truth' and those of the State 'which are liberty'. He did not hesitate for long before accepting the Syndics' invitation. 'Such an opportunity', he wrote, 'of promoting his own ideas for the treatment of history has seldom been given to any man.'

Among the adjustments of the plan which preceded Acton's final acceptance was one which must be noticed here. The Syndics cut down their original scheme, so that now it was to include 'Modern History only, beginning with the Renaissance'. There had already been writers before this time who maintained that this familiar, or even customary, division of history into two chapters in or about the fifteenth century was less appropriate to the subject-matter than a division at a later point, perhaps somewhere in the seventeenth. This view attracts historians who wish to minimise the importance of the earlier and emphasise that of the later changes; but for two reasons it seems not to merit much discussion here. In the first place it implies that the divisions of books and chapters belong to the nature of things and not merely to convenience in writing and teaching. Secondly, the *Cambridge Medieval History* has been published, ending where the *Modern History* began, and therefore when the present series of volumes was planned the date for its beginning was no longer an open question. Something may, however, be said about the wider and more substantial problem, whether there is a difference of kind between modern history and other, earlier, sorts of history.

Such a difference between the more and the less remote is implied in many of our habits of thought and speech. More than one Roman author of the first century A.D. discussed the question where it is proper to draw the line which separates the ancients from the moderns. Most people still assume that one or more such lines ought to be drawn, if only to divide up the past into manageable units; but their reasons for thinking so reveal endless disagreements. Some of them give the name of modern to the history of any periods recent enough to have left answers in writing to such questions as we are disposed to ask about them. Ancient or medieval

history, on this view, relates to ages in which men's minds worked differently from ours: for instance they were blind to the advantages of digesting their experience into statistical or even chronologically accurate statements. Some people, however, believe that human nature never changes. They are content to distinguish the remoter ages, which it is hard to understand because our information about them is scanty, from the nearer, which it is equally hard to understand because our information about them is too voluminous. Writers of this latter complexion have, to be sure, looked more favourably on later than on earlier periods, because, as one of them remarked 'Historical science...is always becoming more possible; not solely because it is better studied, but because, in every generation, it becomes better adapted for study'.¹ Unhappily, however, there are some who maintain that the mere notion of modern history is absurd. On the one hand there is the proposition that 'modern history' is a contradiction in terms. History, we are told, is in its essence the reverse of modern; what makes it history is that it is different from our knowledge of the present, so that, unless they start from the assumption that the past is finished and done with, historians cannot be historians at all. However we define it we must recognise that history deals with the past; whatever we may mean by 'modern' we must mean something closely related to the present. The more anything belongs to history, it would seem, the less modern it must be, and conversely the more modern it is, the less it can be historical. If we do not like this, we may turn to the opposing proposition, equally plausible, equally sparkling with paradox, if, perhaps, equally shallow, that 'modern history' is a tautology. All history is modern, or in more familiar words, 'every true history is ideally contemporary',² for if there were no continuity between past and present; if the historian, living as he must live in the present, could not assimilate the past into his present, then he could not know it or write anything about it that was either true or intelligible to his contemporaries.

Although we are so far from agreeing about what they are doing or why they do it, a very large number of men and women, larger than ever before, spend some or all of their working time on research into modern history. A few of them work by themselves, but, since they use books or manuscripts prepared by other people, even the research of these hermits is a social activity. The great majority belong to organisations of various kinds, research institutes, universities, academies, publishing societies, national or international associations of historians or of students of special branches of history. They contribute to journals, reviews, and research periodicals. Librarians, archivists and museum officials, many of them highly expert, collect, arrange and make available for them an immense

¹ J. S. Mill, 'Additional Elucidations of the Science of History' in *System of Logic* (1843).

² This is the form of the phrase in B. Croce, *Storia, cronaca, e false storie* (1912), p. 2, reprinted in *Teoria e storia della storiografia* (1917), p. 4.

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apparatus comprising both raw and half-finished materials and the finished products of earlier investigation. By correspondence, conferences and other contacts these organisations are linked with one another and with other component parts of the world of science and learning. Those who work in and for them think of research in modern history as a going concern, an immense organisation of workers.

Systematic instruction in methods of historical research has become a settled part of the routine of universities, and there are many text-books setting out its technique. Some are general; others deal with what are portentously called 'auxiliary sciences', such as chronology, bibliography, palaeography, diplomatic, and the study of seals, which is sometimes called sigillography and sometimes, even less gracefully, sphragistics. It has, however, been held that, just as most historians are eclectic in the general ideas which they apply in their work, depending for them on non-historical writers, so most of the actual operations carried out in the course of historical research have been derived from other studies which would not ordinarily be called historical. They are applications of the habits of mind which distinguish scholarly from unscholarly work. Some of these were familiar to lawyers long before they were thought to be necessary for historians. It was not lawyer-like in the sixth century to give an opinion on one particular section of a law without looking through the whole;¹ now it is also not historian-like. In the fifteenth century the jurists of Europe in general were skilful in deciding on the authenticity of old documents and establishing their purport. Ecclesiastics were at work on the relationships of different systems of reckoning time. Classical scholars were improving the emendation of corrupted texts, and in the course of time historians availed themselves of all these older and newer kinds of skill, just as they followed the general movement of thought by eliminating miracles and the influence of the stars from their narratives. In later centuries they took over from natural science the ambition to frame general laws, and to explain particular events or the broader course of history by some evolutionary principle. Along with these governing ideas, they borrowed many devices of detail. Recently they have busied themselves with graphs and curves and statistical tables. Beginning in economic history these have come to be used in such different fields as bibliographical and ecclesiastical history. Some historians regard their task as a special kind of inductive reasoning, distilling the truth from an exhaustive examination of all the available evidence. They aim at 'total cover' of their subject-matter, and this in spite of an uneasy suspicion that the subject-matter even of a narrow, particular history may be in some way inexhaustible. No historian hitherto has had at his command all the sources which might be relevant to his subject; none has ever completed

¹ *Digest*, I, 3, 24: Celsus Lib. VIII digestorum. Incivile est nisi tota lege perspecta una aliqua particula eius proposita iudicare vel respondere.

his work so that no newly emerging source could invalidate it. However limited the subject, and however few the aspects from which it could be approached, the bulk of the relevant materials will be so great that the historian who tries to acquaint himself with all of them must give up the attempt to handle them all for himself. He may trustingly accept what other scholars tell him about this or that outlying field. He may be content to make his contribution to the joint research of some great organisation which provides somewhere for the co-ordination of his discoveries with others. In any case the nearer we come to 'total cover', the further we move from the primitive historian-like exactness. It seems that historians have adopted a miscellaneous collection of other people's tools.

These appearances are deceptive. There is a method or technique or approach which is distinctive of history, and by which historians make their own contribution to thought. All their subjects belong to the study of human life in the framework of time, and their speciality is to treat their subject-matter as organically related by successiveness, by sequence in time. Any investigator who sets out to digest a confused mass of evidence needs some means of distinguishing what is relevant to his purpose from what is not relevant. He must be able to sift his evidence so that, once he finds a sufficient proof, or the best available proof, for a conclusion, he can discard all the rest as superfluous. He aims at extracting from each item that and only that which it and it alone can contribute to the knowledge of his subject. Lawyers are guided by rules about what kinds of evidence are admissible; scientists plan their experiments so as to yield the answers to set questions. Historians have to sort out their evidence from all the books and manuscripts and material objects which may include relevant information. Among these there may be written or printed documents or material things which actually were parts of the events or times which the historian studies. There are also all the contemporary or subsequent writings, pictures and other objects which give information about former events without having formed parts of them. It may happen that nothing has survived from the event itself, and yet we may have abundant means of knowing about it. There is a general presumption that the historian can make a first rough grading of his materials by trusting his evidence more the earlier it is in time. Many historians distinguish original or primary from secondary authorities. This ceases to be a sharp distinction as soon as anything is included in the primary class besides the materials actually surviving from the events. A report of a speech, in a newspaper or a diplomatic dispatch, may be written immediately after the speech is delivered, but it is not so completely primary as a tape-recording: in however subordinate a way, another personality intrudes and may bring in errors or even falsifications. A summary written afterwards, even by the speaker himself, is still further away. For many kinds of occurrences over long stretches of time memoirs

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and histories afford the best evidence we have, but this is not only more remote; it is tinged with the personalities of the writers. All interpretation rests on the selection of evidence, and whenever evidence has been selected, whether by chance or deliberately, the selection governs any possible interpretation. Since, either intentionally or by accident, all our authorities have been selected, this means that they must all be examined in the light of all that we can know about their lost context.

The distinction between primary and secondary authorities is thus neither as simple nor as useful as it appears at first sight. Historians who regard their work as the answering of questions, even when they know that its progress must change the form of the questions themselves, are disposed to approach the primary authorities through the secondary. There are obvious advantages in doing this. If a historian confined himself to studying only the first-hand authorities or the nearest that he could get to first-hand, he might spend hours in deciphering manuscripts which had already been printed and could be read in as many minutes. If, among printed works, he read only the original documents, he would have to do over again for himself whatever his predecessors had done that might lighten his task. Strictly speaking it is impossible to derive historical knowledge only from primary authorities. Merely by knowing that such authorities exist and where he is to find them, the historian knows something about them from outside. The disputes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries about the authority of scripture and tradition in ecclesiastical matters turned on similar issues, and John Selden annihilated the argument that belief and practice should or could be founded on the authority of scripture alone. He said: 'Say what you will against tradition, we know the signification of words by nothing but tradition. . . take these words, *In principio erat verbum*. How do you know those words signify, *In the beginning was the word*, but by tradition, because someone has told you so.'¹ As history cannot be founded on knowledge of primary authorities alone, the best way not to be misled by the errors and accretions or omissions of later writers is to study these later writers and then work back from them to their sources.

It does indeed often happen that a historian sets out to correct an authorised version but fails to free himself from its assumptions and adduces new evidence without seeing that it is decisive. Others who, for any reason, are free from his assumptions, see the effect of this evidence more clearly, and it is natural to infer that the way to see everything clearly is to empty the mind of all assumptions whatsoever. This is one, but only one, of the reasons why some historians exalt primary and despise secondary authorities. Another is that the approach from secondary authorities involves the temptation to read history backwards. Some eminent historians condemned the imperfections of one age by comparison

¹ *Table Talk*, ed. S. H. Reynolds (1892), p. cxxvii.

with the successes of another or judged by results, or judged by the standards of their own time. Others may avoid these errors and yet may unconsciously see the earlier period through the eyes of their own, or of some intermediate time. It has been said, for instance, that Johan Huizinga, in spite of all his learning and sympathy, saw the age of Erasmus too much from the point of view of the eighteenth century; and indeed scholars who value lucidity of thought and expression must always find it hard to depart from the judgments of the eighteenth century. To study history forwards would be to plunge into the moving stream of events, identifying oneself in imagination with the time, knowing and feeling only what could be known and felt then. This is what Samuel Rawson Gardiner tried to do: he worked through mountains of contemporary books, pamphlets, statutes, dispatches, and letters, day by day and year by year, not looking ahead into the next batch of materials to see what the outcome of anything was going to be. And any historian may be overtaken by the feeling that he has left and forgotten his own circumstances and become one with the world of the old book or parchment in his hand. This feeling comes most perfectly to those who are very learned and yet keep alive the poet in them; but there are many more to whom it seems to be an end worth pursuing in itself, and worth transmitting by the magic of good writing to every reader who can receive it. Nor is this only a question of emotional experience: the scientific historian also will prize the authenticity of the best sources. If he can reconstruct the past, and eliminate from his mind everything that came to pass afterwards, he will have isolated the pure object of his study. Many teachers of historical method, therefore, advise their pupils to go straight to the original authorities and to master them first. The most austere adherents of this doctrine give no references in their footnotes to the works of previous historians, or to any of their contemporaries except the compilers of such monographs as approximate to the character of mere précis of materials. They do indeed use dictionaries, catalogues, and works of reference of many other kinds; but these too appear to be impersonal, as innocent of bias or interpretation as the *Nautical Almanac*. The technique of using them, the application of auxiliary sciences, has its own innocent delights, and 'pure history' seems to be an end in itself, an aesthetic activity, untroubled by utilitarian aims or pressure from the outer world.

This was not the attitude of the historians who created the *Cambridge Modern History*. There were, of course, many varieties of method within their school, and no convenient name has been found for describing their highest common factor. They are sometimes called liberal historians; but the word 'liberal' has many meanings. On the Continent it often carries an implication of unfriendliness to churches or even to religion; but in England among the great writers of this school were the bishops, Stubbs and Creighton, and the zealous Roman Catholic Lord Acton. In some

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respects they carried on the eighteenth-century attitude, especially in rejecting as untrue what seemed inherently improbable; in others, from the early days of their greatest master Leopold von Ranke, they were influenced by the romantic movement, which emphasised the differences, insuperable as it was supposed, between races, or nationalities, or times. What they had in common is most easily seen from their relation to their sources. During the nineteenth century the sum of historical knowledge received enormous additions from the opening of archives. Governments had for a considerable time admitted approved persons to read among their accumulated papers, and had even spent large sums on printing selections of documents relating to earlier times. Now, one by one, they opened their repositories more freely. All of them still kept some papers under lock and key, and drew a line between the older papers which were open to search, and those so close to the present that they must be reserved; but well before the end of the century it was normal for a civilised capital to have some virtually public search-rooms where official historical records were accessible. Most of the historians who used them were learned in the printed literature of their subjects, and most of them worked either alone or with the help of at most a few copyists. Confronted by enormous masses of papers most of which had been unread from a time soon after they were written, they had no temptation to try to read every word that bore on their subjects. That had to wait until inventories and catalogues were much improved not only in the official archives but in the great libraries as well. They could only pick out the plums, and these were the records from which the accepted version could be corrected, or a decision made between conflicting versions. Nineteenth-century historians, like nineteenth-century scientists, prided themselves on their discoveries: to Acton Ranke was first and foremost a pathfinder. The advance of historical studies appeared as the detection of error by the touchstone of accurate knowledge. Much importance was therefore attached to emending texts so as to restore the authentic words of documents which had been garbled or misread. Next, the ranking of authorities was studied. Like the classical scholars who studied the derivation of manuscripts, the historians invented systems for tracing back historical statements to their sources, and so were able to reject the derivative and draw their own conclusions from the primary. They looked with little favour on probabilities or corroborative evidence. They scored so many successes in disposing of lies or legends by the confrontation of crucial facts that they came to think of facts as the indestructible atoms by the adding of which together true history could be composed. With something of this sort in mind they looked forward to a future when it would be possible to write 'definitive history'.

Historians of a later generation do not look forward to any such prospect. They expect their work to be superseded again and again. They