

BOOKS

[*Equality, Decadence, and Modernity: The Collected Essays of Stephen J. Tonsor*, Gregory L. Schneider, ed., ISI Books, 343 pages]

The Art of History

By John Lukacs

"HISTORY," Macaulay once wrote, "begins in novel and ends in essay." This is a terse aphorism. What does it mean? The historian, like the novelist, tells a story, a story from some portion of the past; they describe, not define. The novelist has it easier: he can invent people who did not exist and events that did not happen (though he, too, not unlike the historian, is bound to the framework and the background of a particular time and place, in order to render his story plausible). The historian cannot describe people and things that did not exist; he must limit himself to men and women who really lived; he must depend on evidences of their acts and words (though, like the novelist, he must surmise something of their minds; not only their actualities but their potentialities; not only what they said or did but how and why). In one word, he must "essay"—a word that is close to "assay" but is more than that—not only weigh the evidence but attempt to find its meaning. Not every historian is capable, or willing, to do that. Even fewer are those who understand that some kind of moral meaning is inherent in every human event and in every human expression. Still fewer are those historians whose vision of history is by and large in accord with their vision of their own task, which is to promote historical understanding together with or even more than historical certainty. Such historians are teachers as well as writers: they teach when they write.

Such a man is Prof. Stephen Tonsor. He wrote more essays than books. But the present volume is more than a collection in the ordinary sense of that word, of this and that piece of writing. These essays must be read together: they are a "co-lection." In the academic circles of professional historians Tonsor is hardly known, perhaps even not at all. This is regrettable, but perhaps right too, because of the nearly inevitable false and corrupting conditions of recognition, publicity, success in the world in which we now live. What is also inevitable is that an understanding of history must be conservative in the widest and deepest sense of this nowadays much corrupted and abused word.

Tonsor's knowledge of history is exceptionally wide, and his understanding of history is exceptionally profound. In science, the rules are always important; in history, often the exceptions. Perhaps this is applicable to scientists and to historians too. History is philosophy teaching by example, said Bolingbroke nearly 300 years and Dionysius of Halicarnassus more than 2,000 years ago: Tonsor is a philosopher because he is a historian, not the reverse. *Sui generis*, but not eccentric: German by origin, Catholic by religion, conservative

pages, a condition that is illustrative of the terse and succinct quality of their author's writing. "Decadence" struggles with the superficially easy but really difficult question of what decadence is, rather than what its many signs suggest. Tonsor, who has read Tocqueville much and very well, deals with the problematic conflict of Equality and Liberty historically and philosophically; here his essays are enriched by his knowledge and respect for the New Testament. Two of the eight parts of this collection, including nine chapters of published and unpublished essays, are observations of how contemporary ideologies and practices adopted by so many representatives of the historical profession have misled and corrupted the proper practice of historiography. That historical thinking and that historical consciousness are necessarily conservative rather than radical should go without saying but, alas, this is seldom the case and in this respect Stephen Tonsor, whether consciously or not, is in accord with Samuel Johnson's profound recognition that we instruct by reminding people of things they know—or at least ought to know. A few of his sentences rise to the level of wise aphorisms. "Liberty and obligation are indissolubly

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in his political convictions. He stands on the shoulders of giants. He knows well, and profoundly understands, the works of the great men who formed our historical comprehension—Burke, Tocqueville, Newman, Acton, Burckhardt. The latter (also largely ignored by the professional academics during his lifetime) told his students, and the world, that history has no specific or scientific method of its own. "*Bisogna saper leggere*," he said in Italian, "one must know how to read." Stephen Tonsor's entire historianship is proof of that.

This collection has eight parts and 29 essays. Few of these are longer than 10

linked. To be free to do anything means to be obligated to do something." This is worthy of Ortega (whom Tonsor evidently read, and whom here and there he cites). "'Historical necessity' is always another name for the abdication of moral responsibility"—an implicit refutation of Victor Hugo's hoary cliché about Ideas Whose Time Has Come.

It is thus that this book is worth not only reading but reading and rereading. Gregory L. Schneider's introduction is both modest and excellent. I have one quibble with Schneider's collection, which is that it includes a tad too much of Tonsor's relatively recent political

writings. In "Why I Am a Republican and a Conservative," Tonsor wrote, "We have, as Republicans, always believed that we must convince the outside world of the blessing of the American system by our example rather than by the force of arms... We, as Republicans... must be prepared to fight, but only when our national interest is involved... I have not always been a Republican, though I think it unlikely that I shall ever cease now to be one. ... I am a Republican in politics because I believe in nonintervention in foreign affairs..." "We must not become the policeman of the world. Our interest in the Third World must be predicated on the idea of benign neglect." These first sentences are taken from Tonsor's unpublished papers, the last two from a publication less than five years ago. Allow me to wonder: what does Stephen Tonsor, Republican and conservative, think now? ■

John Lukacs is the author of Remem-bered Past: John Lukacs on History, His-torians, and Historical Knowledge.

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[*Christina, Queen of Sweden: The Restless Life of a European Eccentric*, Veronica Buckley, Fourth Estate, 384 pages]

The Cat-and-Mouse Queen

By R.J. Stove

SOME NATIONS FORGET NOTHING; others forget everything. Squarely in the first group is France, whose entire political life for two centuries has been a series of footnotes to the Revolution, and where even such unanticipated modern horrors as a huge Islamic immigrant underclass are still defended by pious governmental bluster about the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Squarely in the second group is Sweden, whose pre-modern self is at such variance with its modern self that it seems to inhabit not merely a different age but a different planet. When one contemplates Sweden's public image of today—a lukewarm welfarist despotism tempered by assassination, a land at once Erastian and atheistic, a society passionless even in its sexual manias—it requires a heroic paradigm shift to envisage Sweden as (a) a swashbuckling military power, (b) feared by every other regime in Europe, and (c) so inflamed by theological disputes as to resemble some latter-day Protestant version of Byzantium. Yet such Sweden was.

At no time did Swedes inspire more fear, hatred, and respect than in the 17th century. And no Swedish monarch ever inspired more amazement, distrust, and devotion than Christina, who succeeded to the Swedish throne in 1632 at the age of six; who abandoned that throne in 1654; and who died 35 years afterwards, as object lesson as any King Lear in the dangers of combining power mania with self-abasement mania.

Christina's father, Gustavus Adolphus—"the Lion of the North"—fell in that most Pyrrhic among victories, the battle of Lützen, which left the Swedish

army triumphant but its leader a corpse, slain, some said, by his own troops. To the particular sufferings of life in the paternal shadow of a military genius, Christina added the more generalized miseries of the deformed. "As a baby she had apparently been dropped," Veronica Buckley tells us, "and her injuries had left her noticeably lopsided in the upper body, with one shoulder higher than the other; the portraits show her in tactful semi-profile." Unable to ingratiate by her appearance, Christina sought to overawe by her learning and emerged from her curriculum's severity with what could well have been the best classical education any of her compatriots had yet attained. Her intellect never failed her, though her common sense often did.

All her life Christina derived a kind of gymnastic pleasure from pretending—to herself as to others—that two and two could equal anything from three to 428, that the straight should be crooked, that the plain places should be rough, and that the shortest distance between two points was a spiral. Such a mind as hers will almost always succeed in local politics, however much it fails on a wider stage. So in Christina's case. Sweden's redoubtable prime minister, Axel Oxenstierna, had enjoyed almost absolute status as Gustavus Adolphus's confidant; the young queen cut Oxenstierna down to the size of a mere *primus inter pares*, while retaining a certain fondness for him. For years she kept her cousin and chief suitor, Karl Gustavus, dangling with a "will I, won't I" campaign of meticulous indirection, which managed both to guarantee his interest in marrying her and to render any such marriage impossible.

Buckley maintains that "Christina's hesitancy was not the result of callousness ... not a cat-and-mouse game," but one would like further data to substantiate this character reference since cat-and-mouse games exercised so overwhelming an allure over her at every other stage of her career. In any event, Karl Gustavus could not have held her attention, let alone her love, for long. Universally esteemed as a military