

The New REPUBLIC

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The Adolescence of Clio

An Introduction to the History of History, by James T. Shotwell. New York: Columbia University Press. \$4.00.

THE historian is presumably interested far beyond all other members of the human tribe in problems of genesis and development. Yet historians have exhibited a strangely non-historical attitude towards their own subject, as is witnessed by the fact that there is not at this late date a single work in any language giving a comprehensive account of the development of the science and literature of history. There are some excellent monographs on special periods of the development of history, such as those by Olmstead, Bury, Peter, Wattenbach, Fueter, Flint and Gooch, but there exists no adequate general account of the growth of historiography as a whole and a unity. This strange situation is not due to the fact that historians have deliberately avoided the task or minimized its importance, but rather because the preparation of a history of historical writing would have involved exhibiting an interest in the history of thought and culture and would have required some considerable degree of reflection and analysis. Not only have such interests and such a mode of mental exertion been repugnant to the respectable historians since Ranke, Stubbs and Freeman, but absorption in such a subject as the history of history would have required a complete deviation from concern with the acceptable and highly esteemed subject-matter of approved historical writing—military episodes, dynastic changes, diplomatic entanglements, party alignments and mutations, and anecdotes concerning distinguished gentlemen in the rôles of generals, diplomats, pirates, robber-barons, tyrants, political grafters and plutocratic practitioners of Machtpolitik.

Yet nothing is more needed as an aid to the historian than a competent account of the development of the science of history, in order that one may have a proper sense of the nature, problems and difficulties of his subject and an adequate appreciation of the superior nature of modern historiography. Nothing could more surely indicate the need for a history of history than the fact that a former

president of the American Historical Association in his presidential address maintained the thesis that Thucydides and Tacitus were not only relatively but absolutely the greatest of all historians, or the attitude of another distinguished American professor who closed his course on modern European history with the events of December 31, 1869, on the ground that no one could write or teach reliable history concerning events falling within his own generation, and who yet contended time and again that Thucydides and Tacitus, both strictly historians of contemporary events, far surpassed all modern devotees of Clio.

The proper person to prepare the most useful sort of a history is not a philologist or an ultra-critical specialist in textual or literary criticism, but rather one who has an unusual grasp upon the history of human thought and culture in general, who has real powers of philosophic analysis, who is informed with respect to the methods and results of the allied social sciences, and who is thoroughly acquainted with, and appreciative of, the latest tendencies and developments in his own science of history. Fairly adequate accounts of the historical writings of particular epochs and areas are already available; what is now needed is a person of the critical and synthetic power to weld these monographic contributions into a coherent and unified whole. Such qualifications are possessed by Professor Shotwell to a degree not surpassed by any other living historian and equalled by very few. He has been one of the leaders in the development of an interest in the history of thought and culture; his philosophic grasp is so well recognized that one of his colleagues once remarked that his greatest service lay in keeping the department in touch with the cosmic processes; he is almost unrivalled among historians in his knowledge of the social sciences as a group; and he has been second only to Professor James Harvey Robinson as a protagonist of the newer history in this country. As editor-in-chief of the great Carnegie Endowment Social and Economic History of the World War he is in charge of incomparably the most extensive historical enterprise ever undertaken—one which makes Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War seem like the work of a puny and primitive amateur by comparison. From such a per-

son we may expect a magisterial synthesis of the development of history, and this first installment of the work is in no important sense a disappointment.

The present work is the first of a series of two or three volumes designed to cover the whole field of the history of history. It sketches the development of historiography from the legends of primitive peoples through the historical writing of the Patristic period. After chapters on the nature and meaning of history, prehistoric myths and legends, the development of the art of writing and book-making, and the discovery of the science of chronology and the introduction of a time-perspective in history, the work gets fairly under way with a discussion of the few and fragmentary contributions made to history by the Oriental peoples from the Egyptians to the Persians. The Hebrew contribution to history is believed to be of sufficient importance to receive a separate section of five chapters. Greek, Roman, and Patristic historiography each receive a section, the longest of which is, appropriately, devoted to the Greek historians. The work closes with a reprint of the brilliant article on *The Interpretation of History*, contributed a decade ago to the *American Historical Review*.

The details of Professor Shotwell's analysis of the merits and defects of the writers on history down to the close of the Patristic period would interest only the technically trained historian, but his general estimates are significant to all who have any concern with history or literature. While the Egyptians and Babylonians have left many valuable archaeological and written sources for the history of their achievements, they produced little or nothing in the way of systematic historical narrative, which the Hebrews must be assigned the honor of having first created. This appears at its best in the Jahvist history in Samuel and the opening of the Book of Kings, and in First Maccabees. While the Old Testament is handled in a purely secular manner, what it loses in religious uniqueness it gains in significance as history and literature. Of the Greek historians, Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius only are worthy of inclusion in the first rank. Herodotus contributed the most interesting and vivid narrative and approached the closest to producing a history of civilization, but his work was diffuse, digressive and marred by exaggerations and misconceptions. Thucydides was more straight-forward in his narrative and more severely critical, but it would be absurd to place him in the same class as a scientific historian with moderns like Fustel, Rambaud, Maitland and Turner. His approach was that of the poet craving the dramatic. He had no grasp whatever on those deeper social and economic forces operating in human society which Aristotle so clearly perceived. He had no conception of time-perspective. He ignored Athenian civilization and concentrated on the details of petty battles and military preparations. The political history was interpreted from the naïve standpoint of a theory of personal causation. He followed the general procedure of antique historiography in inventing speeches for his characters, by which device he presented most of the political and diplomatic history in his work. Of the trio Polybius was far the most profound and scientific, and the twelfth book of his *History of Rome* constitutes the first great treatise on historical science. Yet even he conceived of history as primarily something to be written from personal observation and the reports of eye-witnesses, and he was contemptuous of those who, like Timaeus, compiled histories solely by the use of documents. The simple-minded Xenophon is sufficiently characterized

as an excellent stylist and a good memoir-writer. Later Greek historical writing was paralyzed by the dominance of the rhetoric of Isocrates and his school and followers. History became a branch of aesthetic rather than a science of accurate narrative.

Among the Romans the most profound contribution to the historical point of view was contained in Lucretius's remarkable poem, *De Rerum Natura*, "the most marvellous performance in all antique literature." Caesar produced the unrivalled war-memoirs of antiquity. Sallust was an excellent stylist, but was ignorant of geography and chronology and suffered by leisurely detachment from the events he described. In one sense he was a modern, namely, that he originated the method of hiring impecunious scholars to do his research work. Livy was the great national historian of Rome, contributing the epic of the development of the Roman world-state. Yet, whatever his excellencies as a stylist and patriotic stimulant, he was a poor scientific historian. His work was built upon the naïve assumption of religious causation. There were frequent lapses into moralizing. He had no critical or discriminating sense in the use of sources. He was a victim of the rhetorical standards, and invented hundreds of imaginary speeches for his characters. The content of his work was such as to make it but "a vast repertory of archaic wars." Tacitus, though the greatest of Roman historians and an avowed disciple of Thucydides, is unreliable because of the large subjective element in his writing. Like Juvenal he was not in sympathy with his times. The disastrous moralizing element in his writings was so strong that he held it to be "history's highest function to let no worthy action be uncommemorated, and to hold the reprobation of posterity as a terror to evil words and deeds." Yet Tacitus was unrivalled among antique historians as a character-painter and a narrator of crises and dramatic events. As a scientific historian, however, he cannot be said in any way to approach the best of present-day writers on the subject.

Inadequate as was the historiography of pagan antiquity that of the Patristic age was infinitely worse. "There is no more momentous revolution in the history of thought than this, in which the achievements of thinkers and workers, of artists, philosophers, poets, and statesmen, were given up for the revelation of prophets and a gospel of worldly renunciation." Among the new elements introduced by Christianity which degraded history were the all-absorbing interest in eschatology, the reliance upon faith rather than verifiable truth, the wide acceptance of allegory, the unchastened belief in miracles, the grotesque and unique importance assigned to Jewish and Christian history and the sharp differentiation between sacred and secular history, and the sanctification of a definite but absurd chronology. Eusebius, the systematic Patristic historian, exhibited most of these weaknesses, yet his work was relatively one of "scholarly accuracy combined with great learning," and embodied many precious documents which exist today only by virtue of their inclusion in his *Church History*.

Not only is Professor Shotwell's work one of high scholarship and interpretative profundity, but it is also admirably written, and the stylistic effort rarely demands a sacrifice of accuracy. The only regret that the reader or the student of history will have in closing the book is that the other volumes will not follow in rapid succession.

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