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Preserved Smith

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

## I. PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT WORK

The best excuse for writing the history of anything is the intrinsic interest of the subject. Most men of past generations have thought, and many men still think, of politics as the warp and woof of social life. History for a long time therefore treated chiefly politics. Then came the economists to arouse the interest of scholars and of the public in the production and distribution of wealth. Economic history rightly absorbs much attention, for it illumines, with its new searchlight, many a dark corner of the past, and explains many features of present-day society.

But to many men today the most interesting thing about society is its culture; just as the most interesting thing about an individual is his thought. Indeed, it has begun to be suspected that even politics and economics, each sometimes worshipped as a First Cause, are but secondary effects of something still deeper, namely, of the progress of man's intellectual life. The present volume aims to exhibit, as a unified whole, the state and progress of modern culture. There is the more reason for doing this, as it has hardly ever been done. Histories of literature, of science, of philosophy, of learning, of religion, and of all branches of them, as well as of many other particular divisions of culture, there are; but hardly any history of that complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, morals, law, customs, opinions, religion, superstition, and art.

Like the epic poet the historian must always begin in the middle of the plot. The roaring loom of time weaves

but one seamless web from which for purposes of examination a fragment must be torn. Even though ragged edges betray the fragmentary character of any narrative, some attempt must be made to define the topic, the period, and the social group treated. The present work will confine itself to the North Atlantic peoples in modern times.

The cultural group is usually different from the political. The peoples of Europe west of Russia and Turkey, and their children in their colonies, have a common culture, descended in part from Greece, Rome, and Judea, modified by the Teutonic conquest of the Middle Ages, and still further altered and developed by the extraordinary achievements of modern science. This culture now dominates the world; military conquest and commercial contact have imposed it on all peoples.

It must be recognized, of course, that the culture of all members of the white races is not the same. There are infinite varieties and shades not only as between geographical divisions of the earth but as between the strata of the classes. Perhaps the differences between the culture of the several classes is now more important than that between the various nations of the white race. In a sense, a history of culture is really a history of the intellectual class. Civilization is imposed by the leading classes on the masses, often against their stubborn opposition, generally without their full knowledge of what is taking place, and always without their active co-operation.

The period selected for treatment in this work is the last four hundred years. Whether the division of history into great eras is purely arbitrary, depending on the convenience of the student, or whether it corresponds to some objective change in the underlying material (thought, or culture)—a change as real as that from ice to water or from water to steam, or as real as the change from one season to another in the year,—is a deep problem as yet unsolved. That the former alternative is the true one is made probable by the fact that the periods into which

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history seems naturally to fall differ for different nations and for different subjects. One chronological scheme suits England, another Japan; the dates most important in the history of mathematics are not remarkable in the history of music.

For the annals of world culture dates of universal import must naturally be selected. The common division of the ages into ancient, medieval, and modern, was first introduced into church history in the seventeenth century, and from that taken over into general history. The dividing lines at the fall of the Roman Empire and at the beginning of the Reformation (say 476 and 1517) have little to commend them to the student of culture. Among the large number of chronological schemes proposed to replace the traditional one, those which seem to have the most to recommend them are the following. (1) A division depending on the shift of commerce and the center of civilization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, about 1500. (2) A division depending on technical progress in the use of stone or metals, distinguishing a stone age, a bronze age, an iron age, and a steel age. (3) A division depending on the status of the laboring class, distinguishing a gentile system (Asiatic), a servile system (Greek and Roman), a feudal system (medieval), and a capitalistic system of production (modern). (4) A division depending on the perfection of man's methods of communicating his thoughts, distinguishing an ancient period from the development of language to the invention of the alphabet, a middle period to the invention of typography (in Europe, about 1440), and a modern period from that time to the present, when perhaps the radio, phonograph and cinema are introducing the contemporary and future age. It will be observed that three out of these four schemes discover an important break in the fifteenth century. But the transition was gradual and did not fully announce its import until the dawn of modern science dazzled the world in the works of Copernicus and Vesalius (1543). The decisive factors in the creation of modern culture were the invention of printing (c. 1440),

the geographical discoveries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the rise of capitalism at the same time, and the growth of science. The century from 1440 to 1543 may be regarded as an age of transition from the first (or second) great era of world history to the second (or third) great era. For the present history of culture the year 1543 has been selected as a convenient starting point.

Certain general characteristics mark off the modern from all previous periods of history. The first of these is the growth of world unity. Before the discoveries of Columbus and Magellan there could be no such thing as universal history, because there could be no such thing as a world society. But the continued exploration of the globe and the vast improvement of means of travel and of communication have made civilization a unified whole. A second note of modern times is the enormous increase of wealth and of population. The growth of population depends on the increase of wealth, and that, in the last analysis, is due to the improvement of technical methods of production and to the exploitation of the natural resources of America. Thirdly, only in modern times have vast democracies arisen and spread over practically the whole earth. This equalization of the various classes is in the main dependent on the cheapening of knowledge through the invention of printing. As a corollary to this development must be noted the spread of popular education. Fourthly, modern society is secular to an extent unknown in any previous age. Religion has decayed among the highly educated classes, and to some extent even among the masses; superstition has been banished to dark corners; and tolerance has won a hard, but notable victory over the forces making for persecution and bigotry. This development is due directly to the growth of modern science, which may be taken as the fifth note of modernity. To the historian of culture the rise and development of the natural sciences in the last four centuries may well seem the most distinguishing characteristic of modern times, and perhaps the most important

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event (if, for convenience, a protracted process, still unfolding, may be called an event) in all history. In addition to material conquests, the triumphs of science have produced a new mentality, not, indeed, as yet among the masses, but among the intellectuals, who constitute a small, but important and leading, class. If we may speak of their mentality as the modern spirit, it is, as distinguished from the spirit of earlier ages, rational, free, forward-looking, and self-conscious. To trust reason rather than tradition or authority, to assert the liberty of the individual, to look to the future rather than to the past, to regard truth as relative and subjective rather than as absolute and objective, are the notes of the modern spirit.

The division of the last great age into smaller periods is necessary for purposes of narrative and analysis. I have therefore subdivided the whole epoch into four chronological sections, each to be treated in one volume. This first volume will exhibit the history of culture from Copernicus to Newton (1543-1687). As the scientific rebirth is the most distinguishing trait of the period, I have called it, after Bacon, The Age of the Great Renewal (*Instauratio Magna*).

### 2. THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PERIOD 1543-1687

The vast cultural changes which took place during this century and a half worked themselves out against a political background itself ever changing under the impact of cultural forces. Of these determining factors the least important, and the most overrated, is the Renaissance. Defining that word in the proper sense of the rebirth of classical antiquity, we can attribute little to the Renaissance except some instruction to the generation emerging from medievalism in the art, literature, morals, philosophy, and science of the ancient Greeks. This was valuable to an age that had much to learn, but it was soon outgrown and thereafter acted as an oppression rather than as an emancipation. The ideal of the humanists was in the past; they looked backward not forward; they derided or opposed all the

progressive or emancipating forces in their own age except those for which some analogy could be found in antiquity.

Considerably more important for the history of the sixteenth and seventeenth century is the Reformation, though that, too, was in some respects a reactionary movement, the return to an ideal of a long past age and the revival in some respects of the medieval spirit, just as it was, in other ways, being outgrown. But on the other hand the Reformation ushered in momentous forward movements, both consciously and unconsciously. In the large sphere of religion it represented the growing individualism and the philosophic monism of modern times. Though far from being very tolerant or very rational, the Protestants were driven, by the logic of their revolt, to be a little more tolerant and a little more rational than their forefathers or than their Catholic brothers. More progressive was the new Protestant ethics, emphasizing the virtues of industry, giving a good conscience to the activities and desires of the rising merchant classes, and thereby making Calvinism and capitalism allies.

But probably the positive effects of the Reformation were less decisive in the long run than were its undesigned, or negative, results. Luther and his followers, by rending the unity of the Western church, divided Europe into two armed camps, and at the same time struck a hard blow at all authority and tradition. The fierce persecutions and the devastating wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the direct and baleful consequences of the religious hatred born of the schism; but after they had passed away a freer field than before was left to reason, tolerance, and secularism.

More important even than the Reformation was the commercial revolution which raised the merchant class into the dominant position in the state and left the hitherto privileged classes of clergy and nobility in a much reduced situation. An economic shift is always followed by a political, and then by an ethical and cultural revolution. When money, and not birth or sacred character, became the key to power



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in the state the political institutions and the artistic and moral ideas of society were bound to change. To a considerable extent, the cultural changes of modern times have been but the working out, in various fields, of the logical consequences of the rise of capitalism.

Politically, the first effects of the rise of the bourgeoisie took two forms—the growth of despotism and the formation of republics. In countries like France and Spain, in which the third estate was unable to match the power of the second and first estates unaided, and where a powerful army was needed for protection against foreign foes, the bourgeoisie sought and found in the monarch the ally, and then the master, who cast down their common foes at home and abroad. But in England and Holland, and still more in the North American colonies, the third estate became so strong that it was able not only to pillage the church and to curb the feudal nobility but to dispense with the burdensome aid of the king and to establish republics.

A fourth factor in the evolution of Europe was the influence of the new geographical discoveries. By them at first the imagination of the time was deeply stirred; but presently, and with surprising rapidity, the material effects of commerce with the newly accessible continents began to make themselves felt. The center of world culture and of world power was shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. A stream of wealth pouring into the laps first of Portugal and Spain and then of Holland and England upset the balance of power and laid the foundations of new experiments in civilization. Sea-power became the “abridgment of empire”; wars for trade and colonies began to take the place of wars for religion and conquest. And new settlements, west of the Atlantic, laid the foundations of states destined to become as powerful and as civilized as their mother countries.

Perhaps the rise of nationalism should be included among the formative factors of modern culture. In all ages the devotion of the individual to his group has been a strong and a constant, because a biological, factor. But in different

ages the group varies. The Middle Ages felt the compulsion of two great international states, the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. The medieval man, moreover, owed a strong local allegiance to the city or to the dukedom or to the county which constituted a group smaller than the kingdom or empire of which it was a part. But in modern times the national state has been the strongest group in the world, and the one within which all forms of cultural life tend to take shape. Even in religion national churches have largely taken the place of the universal church. The Holy Roman Empire, not quite killed until the time of Napoleon, received hard blows with the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648).

In that age of poor communications the differences between the several nations were greater than they are now. The light of culture shone strong on the central nations of Western Europe—England, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. In the penumbra round about lay Scandinavia, Scotland, Portugal, Spain, and Poland. Ireland to the west and Turkey and Russia to the east then lay outside the circle of European civilization.

After taking the lead in the age of the Reformation, Germany sank in prosperity and in culture during the century from the outbreak of the Schmalkaldic War to the end of the Thirty Years War. From the fearful havoc caused by this last conflict the nation did not really recover for another century. Not less destructive to civilization than the vital and economic losses was the moral decline. The peasantry were reduced to serfdom; the inhabitants of the cities were ruined; the princes, though impoverished, established an absolutism in which the popular elements of government (the Estates, or local Diets) were suppressed and the army took the leading position as an instrument of government. As the authority of the emperor relaxed, the Empire became a loose confederacy of states. Among these Brandenburg, under the Great Elector (1640-88), began to take the leading position which was later to make it, under