

SOME ANALOGIES FROM HISTORY¹

IN THE confident nineteenth century not the least of the things of which we were confident was history. Indeed, in a sense that was the century of history; of the historical school in jurisprudence and politics and economics, of history of philosophy as philosophy, of evolution and embryology as history and historical method in biology. Where the centuries from the twelfth to the sixteenth built on authority and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries built on reason, the nineteenth century built on history.

But if history stood for authority to the last century, as a child of the Reformation it believed in private interpretation of that authority. "The world," said Emerson, "exists for the education of each man. . . . He must transfer the point of view from which history is commonly read, from Rome and Athens and London, to himself, and not deny his conviction that he is the court, and if Egypt or England have anything to say to him, he will try the case; if not let them forever be silent." In other words, history was something known, something given, and that absolute body of fact had authority, although the discovery of its meaning was for the individual reason of each human unit. Fundamentally this point of view survived the philosophical revolutions of the era. In the Hegelian idealistic interpretation, any bit of history was a record of the unfolding of an idea in human experience, and that idea was but a phase or side

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of a universal, an absolute idea. According to the positivist interpretation, which obtained in the latter part of the century, a bit of history was a record of the evolution of institutions by means of a certain inherent power of development whereby they became continuously and progressively better.

Today all such interpretations are discounted. Hegel was the philosopher of history. Let him speak for the century of history. He says: "God governs the world: The actual working of his government—the carrying out of his plan—is the History of the World. This plan philosophy strives to comprehend; for only that which has been developed as a result of it possesses *bona fide* reality. That which does not accord with it, is negative, worthless existence." Perhaps Henry Ford may speak for the present with his famous dictum that History is bunk.

At any rate, there is general agreement that the philosophical interpretations of history in the last century merit Mr. Ford's epithet. At one pole are those who see in history not a discovery of the divine plan, but a product of struggles to satisfy economic wants. At the other are those who see a mere narrative of a unique series of single, unique events. Ideas are but instruments by which we organize or seek to organize disconnected, unrelated single events—all equally significant and equally insignificant. Evolution is but another word for change, and change may take place in all directions—not necessarily in a straight line forward and upward. Evolution is not invariably and inevitably a progress from organism or institution "A" in a straight line to organism or institution "B". It may be a converging development from organisms or institutions "C", "D", and "E". Moreover, relativism now teaches us that there is no forward or upward. There is only a welter of change, a succession of

unique single facts, which affords much harder lessons than those which Emerson urged, which each of us may string upon such theories as suit the exigencies of his argument for the time being. Such is the history which has displaced the confident and orderly body of teaching by which we set so much store in the last century.

In the idealistic interpretations of history, it was conceived that the historian, or at any rate the philosopher of history, could tell us whither we were going since history would reveal the course of unfolding of the idea which alone had reality. In like manner, in the positivist interpretations it was conceived that historian or philosopher of history could show us some part of the way we were going and point out the general direction of that way by discovering the laws of social and political and institutional evolution, whose inevitable and mechanical operation dictated all change and all development.

It is significant, however, that the nineteenth-century interpreters, whether idealist or positivist, demonstrated that we were going and could only go toward a more perfect form of the social, political, and economic order which obtained in that century. The great main lines of social, political, and economic growth had been discovered once for all. It remained for the rest of eternity to work out certain relatively unimportant details. A more perfect realization of the idea of freedom as the last century understood it, a more complete carrying out to its logical details of the régime of freely competing self-sufficient individuals, a more thorough achieving of a social order in which the maximum of abstract individual self-assertion is deemed the highest good, such was the divine plan as revealed by history; such was the net result of the operation of inflexible laws of social development. Perhaps the over-confident assurance with which

the nineteenth century interpreted universal history in terms of itself has had much to do with discrediting historical interpretation in a present which cannot see itself in this picture.

Let us accept the proposition that history does not repeat itself. Let us agree, if you like, that things in time are unique and hence no item of human behavior is ever exactly like any other. Admitting that there is no straight line of progress, and even, if you will, giving up the attractive hypothesis of evolution in a spiral, so that while we never come back to the past, yet we do go over the same ground on another plane—making all these concessions to the fashions of thought of the time, yet it remains that we explain and understand new things, and make them usable for human purposes, by the analogies of familiar old ones. Hence where we used to talk of the lessons of history, we may still speak of some analogies from history. Certain comparisons with past eras, if they cannot tell us whither we are going, may still help us understand where we are.

A marked characteristic of nineteenth-century interpretations of history was preference for certain periods of the historical past as vital and significant and fruitful of instruction, while regarding others as at most negligible. In his essay on history Emerson says: "Every soul must know the whole lesson for itself—must cover the whole ground. What it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know." Likewise Hegel tells us that whatever does not accord with the historically revealed divine plan is simply worthless. Thus this worthless matter is part of the past, but is not part of history. The divine plan is not revealed by the whole record of the past, but by selected parts of it. But what determines what parts reveal the divine plan, and what parts are to be discarded as worthless? Does not the very proposition sug-

gest that the divine plan, as understood in the last century, did not come from history but was first injected into history and then extracted? Is the method of our philosopher of history different from that of the juggler who first puts an egg in his dummy's hair, or his watch in the dummy's pocket, and then draws it forth with an air of discovery? When we note that the periods of the past which reveal the divine plan are or may be made to appear analogous to the ideal which the last century had made for itself, when we note that the last century could see a picture of itself in some periods and not in others, we are justified in refusing to judge our time by the plan so discovered for us, and in hunting in the past independently for analogies more suited to our picture of ourselves.

Let us recall what have been thought of as the great periods, as the eras of primary significance, from which the thinker could plot some part of the course of evolution of civilization. For American purposes they used to be the era of the city-states in Greece, with the rise of Macedon and establishment of Alexander's empire as a tragic ending, the Roman republic with the establishment of the empire as a foreshadowing of the decline and fall that must go with the extinction of political liberty, the era of rising nationalism in western Europe after the Reformation, the Commonwealth, the Revolution of 1688, and the time of Whig supremacy in England, and the era of founding of new self-sufficient commonwealths in America. Much has been said deservedly in praise of these eras. I would not detract from them, if for no other reason, because I was brought up to reverence them. But one thing more remains to be said of them which meant nothing to the last century, yet may mean much to us. They were, as one might say, eras of great small things, of activities of great potential significance car-

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ried on in relatively small self-sufficient localities, of world-wide relations and achievements, not of organized men or organized mankind, but of individual men in and through small states.

In contrast with these great periods of history, wherefrom we might learn something of the course of universal history, there were the negligible periods, making up much more than half of the story in point of time, and involving the lives and activities of many times more human beings, namely, the Hellenistic world, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Middle Ages, of which the time from the twelfth to the end of the fifteenth century calls specially for our attention.

Recall how these periods were thought of in the last century. Grote speaks of the Hellenistic era as "that gulf of Grecian nullity." Finlay sees in it "a sad spectacle of the debasing influence of wealth and power." The Roman empire from Augustus to the barbarian supremacy in the west, was the stock example of decadence or of degenerative evolution throughout the century of history. Of the Byzantine empire, Lecky says: "The universal verdict of history is that it constitutes, without a single exception, the most thoroughly base and despicable form that civilization has yet assumed. . . . There has been no other enduring civilization so absolutely destitute of all the forms and elements of greatness, and none to which the epithet *mean* may be so emphatically applied." As to the Middle Ages, Hallam says: "This period, considered as to the state of society, has been esteemed dark through ignorance and barbarous through poverty and want of refinement. And although this character is much less applicable to the last two centuries of the period than to those which preceded its commencement, yet we cannot expect to feel, in respect of ages at best imper-

factly civilized and slowly progressive, that interest which attends a more perfect development of human capacities and more brilliant advances in improvement. . . . We begin in darkness and calamity; and though the shadows grow fainter as we advance, yet we are to break off our pursuit as the morning breathes upon us." That is, we are in darkness to the morning of the Reformation.

"By my troth," said Mistress Quickly, "these are very bitter words."

As to the Middle Ages, men began to feel uneasy about this judgment of them a good while ago. For certain purposes of institutional history, the theory of history as the unfolding of the idea compelled jurists and students of politics to look into those times. It was conceived that we might find in them the simplest forms of modern institutions and thus identify the idea which had been unfolding in their development. But beyond this, it was long held unprofitable to spend much time or labor on that benighted era. As to the Hellenistic world, the Roman empire after the first Caesars, and the Byzantine empire, it has remained for the present generation to find worth in them. They did not accord with the picture of nineteenth-century society, in the image of which the century of history wrought.

What have the eras which were deemed historically worth while in common? What was seen in the Greek city-states, in republican Rome, and in western civilization from the Reformation to the latter part of the nineteenth century which gave them historical value? What have the supposedly negligible eras in common? What was seen in the Hellenistic era, in the Roman empire, in the Byzantine empire which seemed to deprive them of historical value? Chiefly the former were capable of interpretation as individualist. They had the appearance of eras of freedom while the latter ap-

peared eras of political subjection. Also western Europe after the Reformation was nationalist and had faith in the local as contrasted with the universal. The ideas of world unity in the Hellenistic era, of a world empire in imperial Rome and Constantinople, and of universal spiritual and temporal authority in the Middle Ages, were alien to the spirit of the century of history. Finally, and not the least, on the one hand we have eras of comparative simplicity of social organization and of life, on the other hand eras of comparative luxury and complexity. True this distinction is not easy to maintain for the case of the Middle Ages. Yet the luxury of ecclesiastical foundations, as compared with the relative poverty of religious societies after the Reformation, and the high degree of economic organization of a feudal society, as compared with the régime of freely competing individuals each carving out his own place in the economic order, sufficed to put that era on the philosophical historian's index.

In the world of today, beneath the surface at any rate, in law and in politics the cult of the local is giving way to a revived faith in the universal. The self-sufficient individual is being replaced by the individual in relation. The régime of free competitive self-assertion is being supplanted by one of cooperation. It is not to be wondered at that men begin to feel there were other great eras than those which had been recognized from the Reformation to the end of the nineteenth century. It is not to be wondered at that men begin to see great things, or at any rate things worthy of study and reflection and capable of better uses than as horrible examples, in Hellenistic civilization, in the Roman empire from Trajan to Diocletian, in the Byzantine empire and in the Middle Ages.

Certain analogies of the present to the Hellenistic era are obvious. There has been a diffusion of western European

civilization over the world as then there had been a diffusion of Greek civilization. New centers of wealth and population had sprung up and taken the leadership from the Greek city-states. One might well compare the relation of New York and Chicago to Europe with that of Alexandria and Antioch to Greece. In respect of culture and art and libraries and museums as well as in respect of wealth and population, the parallel is suggestive. It is suggestive in respect of the migration of books and works of art. It is suggestive in respect of the dispersion of races and peoples. It is suggestive in respect of the relative economic position of the old and the new world. Europe of today, unstable politically and in straits financially, may well be compared with Greece, wasting by internal strife after the Peloponnesian war, decaying both in its political and in its economic order.

There are no less striking analogies between the present and the era of imperial Rome. Then, as now, there had been world-wide economic unification through improved transportation. Then, as now, an urban industrial society had replaced a rural agricultural society. Then, as now, cities had grown and were growing at the expense of country. Then, as now, great urban centers were replacing a multitude of local municipalities in agricultural communities. Moreover, the strengthening of executive authority throughout the world and the rise of delegated legislation suggest at once the devolutions of political power which in time turned the first citizen of a republic into an absolute monarch. When the Supreme Court of the United States is willing to hold that Congress may leave the final interpretation of a statute to an administrative officer and that his interpretation is binding on the courts, we are coming to something very like a Roman *lex regia*. Indeed, the reasons given by Chief Justice White for upholding the exercise by the Interstate Com-

merce Commission of what had always been considered legislative powers are substantially those given in Justinian's Institutes for the devolution of legislative powers upon the Roman emperor. Explaining Chief Justice White's opinion, Chief Justice Taft says: "The utter inability of Congress to give the time and attention indispensable to these powers in detail forced the modification of the rule." Justinian tells us that lawmaking power passed from the Roman people because the electorate had become "so increased that it was difficult to assemble it together for the purpose of enacting statutes." Economic unifications, mixture of races, complexity of social and economic organization, diffusion of luxury and wealth, accumulation of huge populations of workers in great centers, and a general condition of bigness and complexity ally us to the Roman empire rather than to the Roman republic.

Interest in the Byzantine empire has grown steadily in the present century. Men have been saying that an empire which stood strong for nine centuries and fought an obstinate rear-guard fight for two more, which put the Roman law in its final form, which built St. Sophia and gave the world a type of church architecture which has stood for all subsequent time, which preserved Roman administration and Greek culture and gave impetus to the revival of learning in the West, whose coinage was the greater part of the portable wealth of Europe in the Middle Ages—that such an empire could not have been so utterly decadent, so utterly mean after all.

From the discovery of the new world and the Reformation, from which we date the modern world, the emphasis has been on change. Social control by organization gave way to economic control through competition. Where the problem had been to keep men in their appointed grooves, it became one of setting them free to make and remake new

grooves for themselves. The Reformation, the Puritan Revolution, the rise of the Whigs and English Revolution of 1688, the American Revolution, the French Revolution—five great revolutions in three hundred years, or one in every other generation—made political instability seem the rule, and the political interpretation of history identified this instability with progress. Stability of institutions was held to be stagnation. But now that pioneering has been done, now that those who are in distress and those who are in debt and those who are discontented cannot find a convenient Adullam at hand in an adjacent wilderness, now that we have to find how to live together in crowded communities, from which we cannot withdraw to set up new ones of our own, stability is something sought for. The example of an empire which stood for eleven centuries, in which three-fourths of the emperors ascended the throne in the orderly process of government, and the greater part of the usurpers followed each other over short periods in temporary interludes in the peaceful workings of a stable system—such an example calls upon us to look into it. When we look into it we see that the problem of an ordered society was at least met by a balance of free individual self-assertion and the general security which endured for centuries.

Chiefly, however, the Middle Ages attract and deserve attention as furnishing significant analogies.

Recall the broad lines of feudal organization of society. It rested on relations and duties, not on isolated individuals and rights. Every one, no matter how great or how small, was in a relation to some one else and the relation involved reciprocal duties. The original fundamental idea was cooperation in defense. In the turmoil following the downfall of the Roman empire in the west, the single individual had not proved equal to defending himself. Hence he was not

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thought of as self-sufficient. In the beginning he commended himself to some lord, that is, he surrendered his land to some lord who gave him an estate in it. Thus the lord owed him protection and he owed the lord service. The typical man did not compete. He had his place in a cooperative organization. The several economic activities, in such division of labor as obtained in a mediaeval community, were conceived as services. The services required by the feudal community in which one held his estate were thought of as services due the lord, who had reciprocal duties whereby they inured to the community. Every man was held in his place by duty of service instead of by pressure of competition. He found his greatness in the greatness of his lord, not in competitive achievement. He did not own the things which counted in the social order of the time; he held estates in them. Thus whoever owned anything of consequence for that very reason stood in a relation. Estate and relation, relation and reciprocal duties were inseparable. The emphasis was on duties, not on rights. The watchword was cooperation. The significant thing was relation, with duties of doing the several things which the community required resting on those who had interests to which those duties were attached. It was not what men undertook from self-interest or caprice that maintained the social and economic order. Men were held to what their position in the relationally organized society made it their duty to do.

Turn now to our orthodox picture of society. It is one which has governed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, getting what is likely to prove its final form in the latter. It is a picture in which relation is ignored and each man is made to stand out by himself as an economically, politically, and hence legally self-sufficient unit. He is to find his place by free competition. The highest good is the maximum

of free self-assertion on the part of these units. The significant feature of these units is their natural rights by virtue of which they ought to have certain things or be free to do certain things. The end of government and law is to secure these natural rights, to give the fullest and freest rein to the competitive acquisitory activities of these units, to order the competition with a minimum of interference.

When such a picture truly portrayed the social order, when each household was economically independent, when each neighborhood performed within itself the main functions called for by such division of labor as a rural agricultural society demanded, a relationally organized society had no vital interest for the student of law or politics. But the days when the local miller ground the flour for the local community from the grain grown by the local farmer, and this flour was baked by the local baker and the local housewives, are hardly even remembered in our great urban communities and are passing in their last rural strongholds. The days when the local butcher provided the local meat from animals sold him by the local farmers, and the hides were tanned by the local tanner and made into shoes for his local customers by the local cobbler, are utterly gone. Gone, too, are the days when the local founder provided materials for the local blacksmith, and the local carriagemaker made the local vehicles. These days of local economic self-sufficiency are wholly in the past. Hence the individual can no longer do single-handed the aggregate of things demanded for his own life by the minute division of labor in a complex economic organization. The situation created by the economic order of today is analogous to that presented by the social order when the individual land owner, unequal to protecting himself, entered into a relation of service and protection with a lord. For the days when the individual business man was self-sufficient are

also in the past. More and more he has had to commend himself by transferring his business to a corporation and taking shares in its stead.

In our present economic order business and industry are the significant activities. They stand toward the social order of today where landholding stood toward the social order of the Middle Ages. Every one in business, great or small, is in a shareholder relation in which things are due him as shareholder, not because of any special undertaking. He is not freely competing. The great bulk of any urban community are upon salaries and owe service to corporations, which of late have shown some consciousness of owing a reciprocal protection. The individual businesses are more and more giving up and going into corporate form. The corporations are more and more merging. Chain stores are bringing about something very like a feudal organization of businesses which until now had been able to exist on the older basis. If a new domain of business or industry is opened, those who have conquered it distribute stock as a great feudal lord distributed estates. It has come to be the general course that men do not own businesses or enterprises or industries. They hold shares in them.

Today the typical man (for the city dweller, not the farmer, is the type for this time) finds his greatness, not in himself and in what he does, but in the corporation which he serves. If he is great, he is published to the world not as having done this or that, but as director in this company or that. If he is small, yet he shines in the reflected glory of the corporation from which he draws a salary.

But the significant thing is to contrast the feudal self-sufficient community with the individualist self-sufficient man, and then contrast the latter, as he had a real existence in the pioneer, rural, agricultural society of nineteenth-century

America, with the employee, shareholder, investor of today, held at least in one and often in many relations, with shares or interests rather than ownership in the things which count, cooperating rather than competing, finding his satisfactions in the achievements toward which he contributes rather than in what he achieves of himself. No one could suppose that we shall ever return exactly to a feudal organization of society. But we do seem to be developing a relationally organized society. Our picture can no longer be one of free competitive activity of economically self-sufficing units. It must be redrawn as one of adjusted relations of economically interdependent units. Our watchword is not competition but cooperation. All this is much more nearly allied to the Middle Ages than to the era from the Reformation to the nineteenth century.

There is no absolute history. There is no absolute measure of historical values. Values are relative to problems and tasks of the time and place. Where the Greek city-state and the feudal régime saw organization values, the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries saw personality values. Today social and legal philosophies are seeking to transcend both and are in quest of civilization values. As they give over esteeming free individual self-assertion as the highest good, types of civilization which the last century ignored take on a new importance.

A generation ago such comparisons of the present with these eras would have seemed prophecies of despair, admissions of conscious decadence, resigned acceptings of decline. But as we change gradually to another economic and social and hence political order and thus are able better to understand these eras of another type, we may see that much depends on the measure by which they are judged. They do not fare well by the measure of a rural agricultural society of small towns in a time of self-sufficient small states in an era

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of competitive individual acquisitory self-assertion. On the other hand, the institutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the bills of rights and dogma of separation of powers and aversion to administration and reliance upon rules rather than on men, and the modes of political thought of Victorian liberalism, do not fare well by the measure of the urban industrial order of today, by the measure of life in metropolitan cities in a time of organization, relation, and cooperation. Where the nineteenth-century small-town individualist held that each man was the tribunal to try history, we may perhaps be saying in the twentieth century that each time must value other times by its own measure and for its own ends.

To say that history is the tribunal of the world assumes history as something given. There is no one tribunal of history. There are as many as there are times and economic and social orders with their diverse problems. The last of these tribunals for the time being may very well, indeed it usually does, reverse the judgments of the tribunals which had gone before it. If man may not live by bread alone, neither may he live without bread. Material civilizations are not to be despised and will not be in an age of material progress. There are two sides to civilization, mastery of external nature and mastery of human nature. Relativism does a service in bringing home to us that one of these sides is not absolutely higher or absolutely more praiseworthy than the other. It is a matter of selection and interpretation and emphasis to construct and apply any measure of values. All types of human activity are involved in maintaining, furthering and transmitting civilization. The sum of all of them goes to make up civilization. We are not bound forever to value human experience, we are not bound now to value our own time, in terms of the last half of the last century.

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