WHAT IS HISTORY?

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I. The Historian and His Facts

I OFTEN THINK IT ODD THAT IT SHOULD BE SO DULL, FOR A GREAT DEAL OF IT MUST BE INVENTION.

- -Catherine Morland on History

WHAT is history ? Lest anyone think the question meaningless or superfluous, I will take as my text two passages relating respectively to the first and second incarnations of the Cambridge Modern History. Here is Acton in his report of October 1896 to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press on the work which he had undertaken to edit:

It is a unique opportunity of recording, in the way most useful to the greatest number, the fullness of the knowledge which the nineteenth century is about to bequeath.... By the judicious division of labour we should be able to do it, and to bring home to every man the last document, and the ripest conclusions of international research.

Ultimate history we cannot have in this generation; but we can dispose of conventional

history, and show the point we have reached on the road from one to the other, now that all information is within reach, and every problem has become capable of solution.' And almost exactly sixty years later Professor Sir George Clark, in his general introduction to the second *Cambridge Modern History*, commented on this belief of Acton and his collaborators that it would one day be possible to produce 'ultimate history', and went on:

Historians of a later generation do not look forward to any such prospect. They expect their work to be superseded again and again. They consider that knowledge of the past has come down through one or more human minds, has been 'processed' by them, and therefore cannot consist of elemental and impersonal atoms which nothing can alter....The exploration seems to be endless, and some impatient scholars take refuge in scepticism, or at least in the doctrine that, since all historical judgements involve persons and points of view, one is as good as another and there is no 'objective' historical truth.

Where the pundits contradict each other so flagrantly, the held is open to inquiry. I hope that J am sufficiently up-to-date to recognize that anything written in the 1890s must be nonsense. But I am not yet advanced enough to be committed to the view that anything written in the 1950s necessarily makes sense. Indeed, it may already have occurred to you that this inquiry is liable to stray into something even broader than the nature of history. The clash between Acton and Sir George Clark is a reflection of the change in our total outlook on society over the interval between these two pronouncements. Acton speaks out of the positive belief, the clear-eyed self-confidence, of the later Victorian age; Sir George Clark echoes the bewilderment sad distracted scepticism of the beat generation. When we attempt to answer the question 'What is history?' our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question what view we take of the society in which we live. I have no fear that my subject may, On closer inspection, seem trivial. I am afraid only that I may seem presumptuous to have broached a question so vast and so important.

The nineteenth century was a great age for facts.' What I want', said Mr. Gradgrind in Ward Times, 'is Facts.... Facts alone are wanted in life.' Nineteenth-century historians on the whole agreed with him. When Ranke in the 1830s, in legitimate protest against moralizing history, remarked that the task of the historian was 'simply to show how it really was (*wei es eigentlich gewesen*)', this not very profound aphorism had an astonishing success. Three generations of German, British, and even French historians marched into battle intoning the magic words *'Wieu eigendich gewesen'* like an incantation - designed, like most incantations, to save them from the tiresome obligation to think for

themselves. The Positivists, anxious to stake out their claim for history as a science, contributed the weight of their influence to this cult of facts. First ascertain the facts, said the Positivists, then draw your conclusions from them. In Great Britain, this view of history fitted in perfectly with the empiricist addition which was the dominant strain in British philosophy from Locke to Bertrand Russell. The empirical theory of knowledge presupposes a complete separation between subject and object. Pacts, like sense-impressions, impinge on the observer from outside and are independent of his consciousness. The process of reception is passive: having received the data, he then acts on them. The Oxford Shorter English Dictionary, a useful but tendentious work of the empirical school, clearly marks the separateness of the two processes by defining a fact as 'a datum of experience as distinct from conclusions'. This is what may be called the common-sense view of history. History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fish monger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him. Acton, whose culinary tastes were austere, wanted them served plain. In his letter of instructions to contributors to the first Cambridge Modem History he announced the requirement 'that our Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, German and Dutch alike; that nobody can tell, without examining the list of authors, where the Bishop of Oxford laid down the pen and whether Fairbairn or Gasquet, Liebermann or Harrison it up'.' Even Sir George Clark critical as he was of Acton’s attitude, himself contrasted the 'hard core of facts in history with the 'surrounding pulp of disputable interpretation" - forgetting perhaps that the pulpy part of the fruit is more rewarding than the hard core. First get your facts straight, then plunge at your peril into the shifting sands of interpretation - that is the ultimate wisdom of the empirical, common-sense school of history. It recalls the favourite dictum of the great liberal journalist C. P. Scott: 'Facts are sacred, opinion is free.'

Now this clearly will not do. I shall not embark on a philosophical discussion of the nature of our knowledge of the past. Let us assume for present purposes that the fact that- Caesar crossed the Rubicon and the fact there is a table in the middle of the room are fan of the same or of a comparable order, that both these facts enter our consciousness in the same or in a comparable manner, and that both have the same objective character in relation to the person who knows them. But, even on this bold and not very plausible assumption, our argument at mice runs into the difficulty that not all facts about the past are historical facts, or are treated as such by the historian. What is the criterion which distinguishes the facts of history from other fan about the past?

What is a historical fact? This is a crucial question into which we must look a little more closely. According to the commonsense view, there are certain basic facts which are the same for all historians and which form, so to speak, the backbone of history - the fact, for example, that the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066. But this view calls for two observations. In the first place, it is not with facts like these that the historian is primarily concerned. It is no doubt important to know that the great battle was fought in 1066 and not in 1065 or 1067, and that it was fought at Hastings and not at Eastbourne or Brighton. The historian must not get these things wrong. But when points of this kind are raised, I am reminded of Housman's remark that 'accuracy is a duty, not a virtue'." To praise a historian for his accuracy is like praising an architect for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building. It is a necessary condition of his work, but not his essential function. It is precisely for matters of this kind that the historian is entitled to rely on what have been called the 'auxiliary sciences' of history archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, chronology, and so forth. The historian is not required to have the special skills which enable the expert to determine the origin and period of a fragment of pottery or marble, to decipher an obscure inscription, or to make the elaborate astronomical calculations necessary to establish a precise date. These so-called basic facts, which are the same for all historians, commonly belong to the category of the raw materials of the historian rather than of history itself. The second observation is that the necessity to establish these basic facts rests not on any quality in the facts themselves, but on an a priori decision of the historian. In spite of C. P. Scott's motto, every journalist knows today that the most effective way to influence opinion is by the selection and arrangement of the appropriate facts. It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts, speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the door, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello's characters who said that a fact is like a sack - it won't stand up till you've put something in it, The only reason why we are interested to know that the battle was fought at Hastings in 1066 is that historians regard it as a major historical event. It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all. The fact that you arrived in this building half an hour ago on foot, or on a bicycle, or in a car, is just as much a fact about the past as the fact that Caesar crossed the Rubicon. But it will probably be ignored by historians. Professor Talcott Parsons once called science 'a selective system of cognitive orientations to reality'. It might perhaps have been put more simply. But history is, among other things, that. The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a

preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate.

Let us take a look at the process by which a mere fact about the past is transformed into a fact of history. At Stalybridge Wakes in 1850, a vendor of gingerbread, as the result of some petty dispute, was deliberately kicked to death by an angry mob. Is this a fact of history? A year ago I should unhesitatingly have said 'no'. It was recorded by an eye-witness in some little- known memoirs"; but I had never seen it judged worthy of mention by any historian. A year ago Dr Kitson Clark cited it in his Ford lectures in Oxford. Does this make it into a historical fact? Not, I think, yet. Its present status, I suggest, is that it has been proposed for membership of the select club of historical facts. It now awaits a seconder and sponsors. It may be that in the course of the next few years we shall see this fact appearing first in footnotes, then in the text, of articles and books about nineteenth-century England, and that in twenty or thirty years' time it may be a well-established historical fact. Alternatively, nobody may take it up, in which case it will relapse into the limbo of unhistorical facts about the past from which Dr Kitson Clark has gallantly attempted to rescue it. What will decide which of these two things will happen? It will depend, I think, on whether the thesis or interpretation in support of which Dr Kitson Clark cited this incident is accepted by other historians as valid and significant. Its status as a historical fact will turn on a question of interpretation. This element of interpretation enters into every fact of history.

May I be allowed a personal reminiscence. When I studied ancient history in this university many years ago, I had as a special subject 'Greece in the period of the Persian Wars'. I collected fifteen or twenty volumes on my shelves and took it far granted that there, recorded in these volumes, I had all the facts relating to my subject. Let us assume - it was very nearly true - that those volumes contained all the facts about it that were then known, or could be known. It never occurred to me to inquire by what accident or process of attrition that minute selection of facts, out of all the myriad facts that must once have been known to somebody, had survived to become tire facts of history. I suspect that even today one of the fascinations of ancient and medieval history is that it gives us the illusion of having all the facts at our disposal within a manageable compass: the nagging distinction between the facts of history and other facts about the past vanishes, because the few known facts are all facts of history. As Bury, who had worked in both periods, said, 'the records of ancient and medieval history are starred with lacunae. ' History has been called an enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts. But the main trouble does not consist in the lacunae. Our picture of Greece in the fifth century B.C. is defective not primarily because so many of the bits have been accidentally lost, but because it is, by and

large, the picture formed by a tiny group of people in the city of Athens. We know a lot about what fifth-century Greece looked like to an Athenian citizen; but hardly anything about what it looked like to a Spartan, a Corinthian, or a Theban - not to mention a Persian, or a slave or other non-citizen resident in Athens. Our picture has been preselected and predetermined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving. In the same way, when I read in a modern history of the Middle Ages that the people of the Middle Ages were deeply concerned with religion, I wonder how we know this, and whether it is true. What we know as the facts of medieval history have almost all been selected for us by generations of chroniclers who were professionally occupied in the theory and practice of religion, and who therefore thought it supremely important, and recorded everything relating to it, and not much else. The picture of the Russian peasant as devoutly religious was destroyed by the revolution of 1917· The picture of medieval man as devoutly religious, whether true or not, is indestructible, because nearly all the known facts about him were preselected for us by people who believed it, and wanted others to believe it, and a mass of other facts, in which we might possibly have found evidence to the contrary, has been lost beyond recall. The dead hand of vanished generations of historians, scribes, and chroniclers has determined beyond the possibility of appeal the pattern of the past.’ The history we read;' writes Professor Barraclough, himself trained as a medievalist, 'though based on facts, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgements."

But let us turn to the different, but equally grave, plight of the modern historian. The ancient or medieval historian may be grateful for the vast winnowing process which, over the years, has put at his disposal a manageable corpus of historical facts. As Lytton Strachey said, in his mischievous way, 'ignorance is the first requisite of the historian, ignorance which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits.'" When I am tempted, as I sometimes am, to envy the extreme competence of colleagues engaged in writing ancient or medieval history, I find consolation in the reflexion that they are so competent mainly because they are so ignorant of their subject. The modern historian enjoys none of the advantages of this built-in ignorance. He must cultivate this necessary ignorance for himself - the more so the nearer he comes to his own times. He has the dual task of discovering the few significant facts and turning them into facts of history, and of discarding the many insignificant facts as unhistorical. But this is the very converse of the nineteenth- century heresy that history consists of the compilation of a maximum number of irrefutable and objective facts. Anyone who succumbs to this heresy will either have to give up history as a bad job, and take to stamp-collecting or some other form of

antiquarianism, or end in a madhouse. It is this heresy which during the past hundred years has had such devastating effects on the modern historian, producing in Germany, in Great Britain, and in the United States, a vast and growing mass of dry-as-dust factual histories, of minutely specialized mono- graphs of would-be historians knowing more and more about less and less, sunk without trace in an ocean of facts, It was, I suspect, this heresy - rather than the alleged conflict between liberal and Catholic loyalties - which frustrated Acton as a historian. In an early essay he said of his teacher Dollinger: 'He would not write with imperfect materials, and to him the materials were always imperfect.' Acton was surely here pronouncing an anticipatory verdict on himself, on that strange phenomenon of a historian whom many would regard as the most distinguished occupant the Regius Chair of Modern History in this university has ever had - but who wrote no history. And Acton wrote his own epitaph, in the introductory note to the first volume of the *Cambridge Modern History* published just after his death, when he lamented that the requirements pressing on the historian 'threaten to turn him from a man of letters into the compiler of an encyclopaedia'. Something had gone wrong. What had gone wrong was the belief in this untiring and unending accumulation of hard facts as the foundation of history, the belief that facts speak for themselves and that we cannot have too many facts, a belief at that time so unquestioning that few historians then thought it necessary - and some still think it unnecessary today - to ask themselves the question.

The nineteenth-century fetishism of facts was completed and justified by a fetishism of documents. The documents were the Art of the Covenant in the temple of facts. The reverent historian approached them with bowed head and spoke of than in awed tones. If you find it in the documents, it is so. But what, when we get down to it, do these documents - the decrees, the treaties, the rent-rolls, the blue books, the official correspondence, the private letters and diaries - tell us. No document am tell us more than what the author of the document thought - what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to hap- pen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others no think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought. None of this means anything until she historian has got to work on it and deciphered it. The facts, whether found in documents or not, have still to be processed by the historian before he can make any use of them: the we he makes of them is, if I may put it that way, the processing process.

Let me illustrate what I am trying to say by an example which I happen to know well. When Gustav Stresemann, the Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic, died in 1929, he left behind him an enormous mass - 300 boxes full - of papers, official, semi-official, and private, nearly all relating to the six years of his tenure of office as Foreign Minister. His

friends and relatives naturally thought that a monument should be raised to the memory of so great a man. His faithful secretary Bernhard got to work; and within three years there appeared three massive volumes, of some 600 pages each, of selected documents from the 300 boxes, with the impressive title *Stresemanns Vermachtnis.* In the ordinary way the documents themselves would have mouldered away in some cellar or attic and disappeared for ever; or perhaps in a hundred years or so some curious scholar would have come upon them and set out to compare them with Bernhard's text. What happened was far more dramatic. In 1945 the documents fell into the hands of the British and American Governments, who photographed the lot and put the photostats at the disposal of scholars in the Public Record office in London and in the National Archives in Washington, so that, if we have sufficient patience and curiosity, we can discover exactly what Bernhard did. What he did was neither very unusual nor very shocking. When Stresemann died, his western policy seemed to have been crowned with a series of brilliant successes - Locarno, a the admission of Germany to the League of Nations, the Dawes and Young plans and the American loans, the withdrawal of allied occupation armies from the Rhineland. This seemed the important and rewarding: part of Stresemmn's foreign policy; and it was not unnatural that it should have been over-represented in Bernhard's selection of documents. Stresemann's eastern policy, on the other hand, his relations with the Soviet Union, seemed to have led nowhere in particular; and, since masses of documents about negotiations which yielded only trivial results were not very interesting and added nothing to Stresemann's reputation, the process of selection could be more rigorous. Stresemann in fact devoted a far more constant and anxious attention to relations with the Soviet Union, and they played a far larger part in his foreign policy as a whole, than the reader of the Bernhard selection would surmise. But the Bern- hard volumes compare favourably, I suspect, with many published collections of documents on which the ordinary historian implicitly relies.

This is not the end of my story. Shortly after the publication of Bernhard's volumes, Hitler came into power. Stresemann's name was consigned to oblivion in Germany, and the volumes disappeared from circulation: many, perhaps most, of the copies must have been destroyed. Today *Stresemanns* Vernachtnis is a rather rare book. But in the west Stresemann's reputation stood high. In 1935 an English publisher brought out an abbreviated translation of Bernhard's work - a selection from Bernhard's selection; perhaps one-third of the original was omitted. Sutton, a well-known translator from the German, did his job competently and well. The English version, he explained in the preface, was 'slightly condensed, but only by the omission of a certain amount of what, it was felt, was more ephemeral matter ... of little interest to English readers or students'. This again is

natural enough. But the result is that Stresemann's eastern policy, already under-represented in Bernhard, recedes still further from view, and the Soviet Union appears in Sutton's volumes merely as an occasional and rather unwelcome intruder in Stresemann's predominantly western foreign policy. Yet it is safe to say that, for all except a few specialists, Sutton and not Bernhard - and still less the documents themselves - represents for the western world the authentic voice of Stresemann. Had the documents perished in I945 in the bombing, and had the remaining Bernhard volumes disappeared, the authenticity and authority of Sutton would never have been questioned. Many printed collections of documents, gratefully accepted by historians in default of the originals, rest on no securer basis than this.

But I want to carry the story one step further. Let us forget about Bernhard and Sutton, and be thankful that we can, if we choose, consult the authentic papers of a leading participant in some important events of recent European history. What do the papers tell us ? Among other things they contain records of some hundreds of Stresemann's conversations with the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin and of a score or so with Chicherin. These records have one feature in common. They depict Stresemann as having the lion's share of the conversations and reveal his arguments as invariably well put and cogent, while those of his partner are for the most part scanty, confused, and unconvincing. This is a familiar characteristic of all records of diplomatic conversations. The documents do not tell us what happened, but only what Streetman thought had happened, or what he wanted others to think, or perhaps what he wanted himself to think, had happened. It was not Sutton or Bernhard, but Stresemann himself, who started the process of selection. And if we had, say, Chicherin's records of these same conversations, we should still learn from them only what Chicherin thought, and what really happened would still have to be reconstructed in the mind of the historian. Of course, facts and documents are essential to the historian. But do not make a fetish of them. They do not by themselves constitute history; they provide in themselves no ready-made answer to this tiresome question 'What is history?'

At this point I should like to say a few words on the question why nineteenth-century historians were generally indifferent to the philosophy of history. The term was invented by Voltaire, and has since been used in different senses; but I shall take it to mean, if I use it at all, our answer to the question,’ What is history~' The nineteenth century was, for the intellectuals of western Europe, a comfortable period exuding confidence and optimism. The facts were on the whole satisfactory; and the inclination to ask and answer awkward questions about them was correspondingly weak. Ranke piously believed that divine providence would take care of the meaning of history, if he took care of the facts; and

Burckhardt, with a more modern touch of cynicism, observed that 'we are not initiated into the purposes of the eternal wisdom'. Professor Butterfield as late as I93I noted with apparent satisfaction that 'historians have reflected little upon the nature of things, and even the nature of their own subject'.' But my predecessor in these lectures, Dr A. L. Rowse, more justly critical, wrote of Sir Winston Churchill's World Crisis - his book about the First World War - that, while it matched Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* in personality, vividness, and vitality, it was inferior in one respect: it had 'no philosophy of history behind it'.' British historians refused to be drawn, not because they believed that history had no meaning, but because they believed that its meaning was implicit and self-evident. The liberal nineteenth-century view of history had a close affinity with the economic doctrine of laissez-faire - also the product of a serene and self-confident outlook on the world. Let everyone get on with his particular job, and the hidden hand would take care of the universal harmony. The facts of history were themselves a demonstration of the supreme fact of a beneficent and apparently infinite progress towards higher things. This was the age of innocence, and historians walked in the Garden of Eden, without a scrap of philosophy to cover them, naked and unashamed before the god of history. Since then, we have known Sin and experienced a Fall; and those historians who today pretend to dispense with a philosophy of history Pre :merely trying, vainly and self-consciously, like members of a nudist colony, to recreate the Garden of Eden in their garden suburb. Today the awkward question can no longer be evaded.

During the past fifty years a good deal of serious work has been done on the question 'What is history?' It was from Germany, the country which was to do so much to upset the comfortable reign of nineteenth-century liberalism, that the first challenge came in the 1880s and 1890s to the doctrine of the primacy and autonomy of facts in history. The philosophers who made the challenge are now little more than names: Dilthey is the only one of them who has recently received some belated recognition in Great Britain. Before the turn of the century, prosperity and confidence were still too great in this country for any attention to be paid to heretics who attacked the cult of facts. But early in the new century, the torch passed to Italy, where Croce began to propound a philosophy of history which obviously owed much to German masters. All history is 'contemporary history', declared Croce,' meaning that history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems, and that the main work of the historian is not to record, but to evaluate; for, if he does not evaluate, how can he know what is worth recording? In 1910 the American historian, Carl Becker, argued in deliberately provocative language that 'the facts of history do not exist for any historian till he creates them'. These challenges were for the moment little noticed. It was only after 1920 that

Croce began to have a considerable vogue in France and Great Britain. This was not perhaps because Croce was a subtler thinker or a better stylist than his German predecessors, but because, after the First World War, the facts seemed to smile on us less propitiously than in the years before 1914, and we were therefore more accessible to a philosophy which sought to diminish their prestige. Croce was an important influence on the Oxford philosopher and historian Collingwood, the only British thinker in the present century who has made a serious contribution to the philosophy of history. He did not live to write the systematic treatise he had planned; but his published and unpublished papers on the subject were collected after his death in a volume entitled *The Idea of History*, which appeared in 1945·

The views of Collingwood can be summarized as follows. The philosophy of history is concerned neither with 'the past by itself' nor with 'the historian's thought about it by itself', but with 'the two things in their mutual relations'. (This dictum reflects the two current meanings of the word 'history' - the inquiry conducted by the historian and the series of past events into which he inquires.) 'The past which a historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present.' But a past act is dead, i.e. meaningless to the historian, unless he can understand the thought that lay behind it. Hence 'all history is the history of thought', and 'history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying'. The reconstitution of the past in the history,', mind is dependent on empirical evidence. But it is not in itself an empirical process, and cannot consist in a mere recital of facts. On the contrary, the process of reconstitution governs the selection and interpretation of the facts : this, indeed, is what makes them historical facts. ' History', says Professor Oakeshott, who on this point stands near to Collingwood, ‘is the historian's experience. It is " made " by nobody save the historian: to write history is the only way of making'.

This searching critique, though it may call for some serious reservations, brings to light certain neglected truths. In the first place, the faces of history never come to us 'pure', since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form: they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder. It follows that when we take up a work of history, our first concern should be not with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it. Let me take as an example the great historian in whose honour and in whose name these lectures were founded. G. M. Trevelyan, as he tells us in his autobiography, was 'brought up at home on a somewhat exuberantly Whig tradition and he would not, I hope, disclaim the title if I described him as the last and not the least of the great English liberal historians of the Whig tradition. It is not for nothing that he traces back his family tree, through the

great Whig historian George Otto Trevelyan, to Macaulay, incomparably the greatest of the Whig historians. Trevelyan's finest and maturest work, *England under Queen Anne,* was written against that background, and will yield its full meaning and significance to the reader only when read against that background. The author, indeed, leaves the reader with no excuse for failing to do so. For, if following the technique of connoisseurs of detective novels, you read the end first, you will find on the last few pages of the third volume the best summary known to me of what is nowadays called the Whig interpretation of history; and you will see that what Trevelyan is trying to do is to investigate the origin and development of the Whig tradition, and to root it fairly and squarely in the years after the death of its founder, William III. Though this is not, perhaps, the only conceivable interpretation of the events of Queen Anne's reign, it is a valid and, in Trevelyan's hands, a fruitful interpretation. But, in order to appreciate it at its' full value, you have to understand what the historian is doing. For if, as Collingwood says, the historian must re-enact in thought what has gone on in the mind of his dramatis personae, so the reader in his turn must re-enact what goes on in the mind of the historian. Study the historian before you begin to study the facts. This is, after all, not very abstruse. It is what is already done by the intelligent undergraduate who, when recommended to read a work by that great scholar Jones of St Jude's, goes round to a friend at St Jude's to ask what sort of chap Jones is, and what bees he has in his bonnet. When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog. The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use - these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind offish he wants to catch. By and lame, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation. Indeed, if, standing Sir George Clark on his head, I were to call history 'a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts ', my statement would, no doubt, be one-sided and misleading, but no more so, I venture to think, than the original dictum.

The second point is the more familiar one of the historian's need of imaginative understanding for the minds of the people with whom he is dealing, for the thought behind their acts: I say imaginative understanding', not 'sympathy', lest sympathy should be supposed to imply agreement. The nineteenth century was weak in medieval history, because it was too much repelled by the superstitious beliefs of the Middle Ages, and by the barbarities which they inspired, to have any imaginative understanding of medieval people. Or take Burckhardt's censorious remark about the Thirty Years War: It is

scandalous for a creed, no matter whether it is Catholic or Protestant, to place its salvation above the integrity of the nation." It was extremely difficult for a nineteenth-century liberal historian, brought up to believe that it is right and praiseworthy to kill in defence of one's country, but wicked and wrong-headed to kill in defence of one's religion, to enter into the state of mind of those who fought the Thirty Years War. This difficulty is particularly acute in the held in which I am now working. Much of what has been written in English speaking countries in the last ten years about the Soviet Union, and in the Soviet Union about the English-speaking countries, has been vitiated by this inability to achieve even the most elementary measure of imaginative understanding of what goes on in the mind of the other party, so that the words and actions of the other are always made to appear malign, senseless, or hypocritical. History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing.

The third point is that we can view the past, and achieve our understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present. The historian is of his own age, and is bound to it by the conditions of human existence. The very words which he uses - words like democracy, empire, war, revolution - have current connotations from which he cannot divorce them. Ancient historians have taken to using words like polls and plebs in the original, just in order to show that they have not fallen into this trap. This does not help them. They, too, live in the present, and cannot cheat themselves into the past by using unfamiliar or obsolete words, any more than they would become better Greek or Roman historians if they delivered their lectures in a *chilamys et a toga.* The names by which successive French historians have described the Parisian crowds which played so prominent a role in the French revolution - *les sans-vulottes, le peuple, la canaille, les bras-nus* - are all, for those who know the rules of the game, manifestos of a political affiliation and of a particular interpretation. Yet the historian is obliged to choose: the use of language - forbids him to be neutral. Nor is it a matter of words alone. Over the past hundred years the changed balance of power in Europe has reversed the attitude of British historians to Frederick the Great. The changed balance of power within the Christian churches between Catholicism and Protestantism has profoundly altered their attitude to such figures as Loyola, Luther, ad Cromwell. It requires only a superficial knowledge of the work of French historians of the last forty years on the French revolution to recognize how deeply it has been affected by the Russian revolution of 1917· The historian belongs not to the past but to the present. Professor Trevor-Roper tells us that the historian 'ought to love the past'.' This is a dubious injunction. To love the past may easily be an expression of the nostalgic romanticism of old men and old societies, a symptom of loss of faith and interest in the present or future. Cliché for cliché, I should prefer the one about freeing oneself

from 'the dead hand of the past'. The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present.

If, however, these are some of the insights of what I may call the Collingwood view of history, it is time to consider some of the dangers. The emphasis on the role of the historian in the making of history tends, if pressed to its logical conclusion, to rule out any objective history at all: history is what the historian makes. Collingwood seems indeed, at one moment, in an unpublished note quoted by his editor, to have reached this conclusion :

St Augustine looked at history from the point of view of the early Christian; Tillamont, from that of a seventeenth-century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of an eighteenth-century Englishman; Mommsen from that of a nineteenth-century German. There is no point in asking which was the right point of view. Each was the only one possible for the man who adopted

This amounts to total scepticism, like Froude's remark that history is 'a child's box of letters with which we can spell any word we please'." Collingwood, in his reaction against 'scissors- and-paste history', against the view of history as a mere compilation of facts, comes perilously near to treating history as something spun out of the human brain, and leads back to the conclusion referred to by Sir George Clark in the passage which I quoted earlier, that there is no "objective" historical truth'. In place of the theory that history has no meaning, we are offered here the theory of an infinity of meanings, none any more right than any other - which comes to much the same thing. The second theory is surely as untenable as the first. It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different because interpretation plays a necessary part in establishing the facts of history, and because no existing interpretation is wholly objective, one interpretation is as good as another, and the facts of history are in principle not amenable to objective interpretation. I shall have to consider at a later stage what exactly is meant by objectivity in history.

But a still greater danger lurks in the Collingwood hypothesis. If the historian necessarily looks at his period of history through. the eyes of his own time, and studies the problems of the past as a key to those of the present, will he not fall into a purely pragmatic view of the facts, and maintain that the criterion of a right interpretation is its suitability to some present purpose? On this hypothesis, the facts of history are nothing, interpretation is everything. Nietzsche had already enunciated the principle: 'The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it. ... The question is how far it is life-furthering, life-

preserving, species-preserving, perhaps species-creating. The American pragmatists moved, less explicitly and less wholeheartedly, along the same line. Knowledge is knowledge for some purpose. The validity of the knowledge depends on the validity of the purpose, But even where no such theory has been professed, practice has often been no less disquieting. In my own held of study I have seen too many examples of extravagant interpretation riding roughshod over facts not to be impressed with the reality of this danger. It is not surprising that perusal of some of the more extreme products of Soviet and anti-Soviet schools of historiography should sometimes breed a certain nostalgia for that illusory nineteenth-century haven of purely factual history.

How then, in the middle of the twentieth century, are we to define the obligation of the historian to his facts ~ I trust that I have spent a sufficient number of hours in recent years chasing and perusing documents, and stuffng my historical narrative with properly footnoted facts, to escape the imputation of treating facts and documents too cavalierly. The duty of the historian to respect his facts is not exhausted by the obligation to see that his facts are accurate. He must seek to bring into the picture all known or knowable facts relevant, in one sense or another, to the theme on which he is engaged and to the interpretation proposed. If he seeks to depict the Victorian Englishman as a moral and rational being, he must not forget what happened at Starybridge Wakes in 1850. But this, in turn, does not mean that he can eliminate interpretation, which is the life-blood of history. Laymen - that is to say, non-academic friends or friends from other academic disciplines - sometimes ask me how the historian goes to work when he writes history. The commonest assumption appears to be that the historian divides his work into two sharply distinguishable phases or periods. First, he spends a long preliminary period reading his sources and filling his notebooks with facts: then, when this is over, he puts away his sources, Fakes out his notebooks and writes his book from beginning to end. This is to me an unconvincing and implausible picture. For myself, as soon as I have got going on a few of what I take to be the capital sources, the itch becomes too strong and I begin to write - not necessarily at the beginning, but somewhere, anywhere. Thereafter, reading and writing go on simultaneously. The writing is added to, subtracted from, re-shaped, cancelled, as I go on reading. The reading is guided and directed and made fruitful by the writing: the more I write, the more I know what I am looking for, the better I understand the significance and relevance of what I find. Some historians probably do all this preliminary writing in their head without using pen, paper, or typewriter, just as some people play chess in their heads without recourse to board and chessmen: this is a talent which I envy, but cannot emulate. But I am convinced that, for any historian worth the name, the two processes of what economists call 'input' and 'output' go on simultaneously

and are, in practice, parts of a single process. If you try to separate them, or to give one priority over the other, you fall into one of two heresies. Either you write scissors-and-paste history without meaning or significance; or you write propaganda or historical fiction, and merely use facts of the past to embroider a kind of writing which has nothing to do with history.

Our examination of the relation of the historian to the facts of history finds us, therefore, in an apparently precarious situation, navigating delicately between the Scylla of an untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts, of the unqualified primacy of fact over interpretation, and the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian who establishes the facts of history and masters them through the process of interpretation, between a view of history having the centre of gravity in the past and a view having the centre of gravity in the present. But our situation is less precarious than it seems. We shall encounter the same dichotomy of fact and interpretation again in these lectures in other guises - the particular and the general, the empirical and the theoretical, the objective and the subjective. The predicament of the historian is a reflexion of the nature of man. Man, except perhaps in earliest infancy and in extreme old age, is not totally involved in his environment and unconditionally subject to it. On the other hand, he is never totally independent of it and its unconditional master. The relation of man to his environment is the relation of the historian to his theme. The historian is neither the humble slave nor the tyrannical master of Ids facts. The relation between the historian and his facts is one of equality, of give-and-take. As any working historian knows, if he stops to reflect what he is doing as he thinks and writes, the historian is engaged on a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts. It is impossible to assign primacy to one over the other.

The historian starts with a provisional selection of facts, and a provisional interpretation in the light of which that selection has been made - by others as well as by himself. As he works, both the interpretation and the selection and ordering of facts undergo subtle and perhaps partly unconscious changes, through the reciprocal action of one or the other. And this reciprocal action also involves reciprocity between present and past, since the historian is part of the present and the facts belong to the past. The historian and the facts of history are necessary to one another. The historian without his facts is rootless and futile; the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless. My first answer therefore to the question 'What is history?' is that it is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.

2. Society and the individual

THE question which comes first - society or the individual - is like the question about the hen and the egg. Whether you treat it as a logical or as a historical question, you can make no statement about it, one way or the other, which does not have to be corrected by an opposite, and equally one-sided, statement. Society and the individual are inseparable; they are necessary and complementary to each other, not opposites. 'No man is an island, entire of itself;' in Dome's famous words: 'every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.' That is an aspect of the truth. On the other hand, take the dictum of J. S. Mill, the classical individualist: 'Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance. ‘Of course not. But the fallacy is to suppose that they existed, or had any kind of substance, before being 'brought together'. As soon as we are born, the world gets to work on us and transforms us from merely biological into social units. Every human being at every stage of history or pre-history is born into a society and from his earliest years is moulded by that society. The language which he speaks is not an individual inheritance, but a social acquisition from the group in which he grows up. Both language and environment help to determine the character of his thought; his earliest ideas come to him from others. As has been well said, thee individual apart from society would be both speechless and mindless. The lasting fascination of the Robinson Crusoe myth is due to its attempt to imagine an individual independent of society. The attempt breaks down. Robinson is not an abstract individual, but an Englishman from York; he carries his Bible with him and prays to his tribal God. The myth quickly bestows on him his Man Friday; and the building of a new society begins. The other relevant myth is that of Kirilov in Dostoyevsky's *Devils* who kills himself in order to demonstrate his perfect freedom. Suicide is the only perfectly free act open to individual man; every other act involves in one way or another his membership of society.

It is commonly said by anthropologists that primitive man is less individual and more completely moulded by his society than civilized man. This contains an element of truth. Simpler societies are more uniform, in the sense that they call for, and provide opportunities for, a far smaller diversity of individual skills and occupations than the more complex and advanced societies. Increasing individualization in this sense is a necessary product of modern advanced society, and runs through all its activities from top to bottom. But it would be a serious error to set up an antithesis between this process of individualization and the growing strength and cohesion of society. The development of society and the development of the individual go hand in hand and condition each other. Indeed what we mean by a complex or advanced society is a society in which the

interdependence of individuals on one another has assumed advanced and complex forms. It would be dangerous to assume that the power of a modern national community to mould the character and thought of its individual members, and to produce a certain degree of conformity and uniformity among them, is any less than that of a primitive tribal community. The old conception of national character based on biological differences bas long been exploded; but differences of national character arising out of different national backgrounds of society and education are difficult to deny. That elusive entity 'human nature' has varied so much from country to country and from century to century that it is difficult not to regard it as a historical phenomenon shaped by prevailing social conditions and conventions. There are many differences between, say, Americans, Russians, and Indians. But some, and perhaps the most important, of these differences take the form of different attitudes to social relations between individuals, or, in other words, to the way in which society should be constituted, so that the study of differences between American, Russian, and Indian society as a whole may well turn out to be the best way of studying differences between individual Americans, Russians, and Indians. Civilized man, like primitive man, is moulded by society just as effectively as society is moulded by him. You can no more have the egg without the hen than you can have the hen without the egg.

It would have been unnecessary to dwell on these very obvious truths but for the fact that they have been obscured for us by the remarkable and exceptional period of history from which the western world is only just emerging. The cult of individual- ism is one of the most pervasive of modern historical myths. According to the familiar account in Burckhardt's *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy,* the second part of which is subtitled 'The Development of the Individual', the cult of the individual began with the Renaissance, when man, who had hitherto been 'conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation', at length 'became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such'. Later the cult was connected with the rise of capitalism and of Protestantism, with the beginnings of the industrial revolution, and with the doctrines of laissez-faire. The rights of man and the citizen proclaimed by the French revolution were the rights of the individual. Individualism was the basis of the great nineteenth- century philosophy of utilitarianism, Morley's essay *On Compromise,* a characteristic document of Victorian liberalism, called individualism and utilitarianism 'the religion of human happiness and well-being'. 'Rugged individualism' was the keynote of human progress. This may be a perfectly sound and valid analysis of the ideology of a particular historical epoch. But what I want to make clear is that the increased individualization which accompanied the rise of the modern world was a ·normal process of advancing civilization. A social revolution brought new social groups to positions of power. It

operated, as always, through individuals and by offering fresh opportunities of individual development; and, since in the early stages of capitalism the units of production and distribution were largely in the hands of single individuals, the ideology of the new social order strongly emphasized the role of individual initiative in the social order. But the whole process was a social process representing a specific stage in historical development, and cannot be explained in terms of a revolt of individuals against society or of an emancipation of individuals from social restraints.

Many signs suggest that, even in the western world, which was the focus of this development and of this ideology, this period of history has reached its end: I need not insist here on the rise of what is called mass democracy, or on the gradual replacement of predominantly individual by predominantly collective forms of economic production and organization. But the ideology generated by this long and fruitful period is still a dominant force in western Europe and throughout the English- speaking countries. When we speak in abstract terms of the tension between liberty and equality, or between individual liberty and social justice, we are apt to forget that fights do not occur between abstract ideas. These are not struggles between individuals as such and society as such, but between groups of individuals in society, each group striving to promote social policies favourable to it and to frustrate social policies inimical to it. Individualism, in the sense no longer of a great social movement but of false opposition between individual and society, has become today the slogan of an interested group and, because of its controversial character, a barrier to our understanding of what goes on in the world. I have nothing to say against the cult of the individual as a protest against the perversion which treats the individual as a means and society or the state as the end. But we shall arrive at no real understanding either of the past or of the present if we attempt to operate with the concept of an abstract individual standing outside society.

And this brings me at last to the point of my long digression. The common-sense view of history treats it as something written by individuals about individuals. This view was certainly taken and encouraged by nineteenth-century liberal historians, and is not in substance incorrect. But it now seems over-simplified and inadequate, and we need to probe deeper. The knowledge of the historian is not his excusive individual possession: men, probably, of many generations and of many different countries have participated in accumulating it. The men whose actions the historian studies were not isolated individuals acting in a vacuum: they acted in the context, and under the impulse, of a past society. In my last lecture I described history as a process of interaction, a dialogue between the historian in the present and the facts of the past. I now want to inquire into the relative

weight of the individual and social elements on both sides' of the equation. How far are historians single individuals, and how far products of their society and their period? How far are the facts of history facts about single individuals and how far social facts?

The historian, then, is an individual human being. Like other individuals, he is also a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; it is in this capacity that he approaches the facts of the historical past. We sometimes speak of the course of history as a 'moving procession'. The metaphor is fair enough, provided it does not tempt the historian to think of himself as an eagle surveying the scene from a lonely crag or as a V.I.P. at the saluting base. Nothing of the kind ! The historian is just another dim figure trudging along in another part of the procession. And as the procession winds along, swerving now to the right and now to the left, and sometimes doubling back on itself, the relative positions of different parts of the procession are constantly changing, so that it may make perfectly good sense to say, for example, that we are nearer today to the Middle Ages than were our great-grandfathers a century ago, or that the age of Caesar is nearer to us than the age of Dante. New vistas, new angles of vision, constantly appear as the procession - and the historian with it - moves along. The historian is part of history. The point in the procession at which he finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past.

This truism is not less true when the period treated by the historian is remote from his own time. When I studied ancient history, the classics on the subject were - and probably still are - Grote's *History of Greece* and Mommsen's *History of Rome.* Grote, an enlightened radical- banker writing in the I840s, embodied the aspirations of the rising and politically progressive British middle class in an idealized picture of Athenian democracy, in which Pericles figured as a Benthanite reformer and Athens acquired an empire in a fit of absence of mind. It may not be fanciful to suggest that Grote's neglect of the problem of slavery in Athens reflected the failure of the group to which he belonged to face the problem of the new English factory working class. Mommsen was a German liberal, disillusioned by the muddles and humiliations of the German revolution of 1848-9. Writing in the 1850s - the decade which saw the birth of the name and concept of *Realpolitik* - Mommsen was imbued with the sense of need for a strong man to clear up the mess left by the failure of the German people to realize its political aspirations; and we shall never appreciate his history at its true value unless we realize that his well-known idealization of Caesar is the product of this yearning for the strong man to save Germany from ruin, and that the lawyer-politician Cicero that ineffective chatterbox and slippery procrastinator, has walked straight out of the debates of the Paulikirche in Frankfurt in

1948. Indeed, I should not think it an outrageous paradox if someone were to say that Grote's History of Greece has quite as much to tell us today about the thought of the English philosophical radicals in the 1840s as about Athenian democracy in the fifth century B.C., or that anyone wishing to understand what 1848 did to the German liberals should take Mommsen's *History of Rome* as one of his text-books. Nor does this diminish their stature as great historical works. I have no patience with the fashion, set by Bury in his inaugural lecture, of pretending that Mommsen's greatness rests not on his History of Rome but on his corpus of inscriptions and his work on Roman constitutional law: this is to reduce history to the level of compilation. Great history is written precisely when the historian's vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present. Surprise has often been expressed that Mommsen failed to continue his history beyond the fall of the republic. He lacked neither time, nor opportunity, nor knowledge. But, when Mommsen wrote his history, the strong man had not yet arisen in Germany. During his active career, the problem of what happened once the strong man had taken over was not yet actual. Nothing inspired Mommsen to project this problem back on to the Roman scene; and the history of the empire remained unwritten.

It would be easy to multiply examples of this phenomenon among modern historians. In my last lecture I paid tribute to G. M. Trevelyan's England under Queen Anne as a monument to the Whig tradition in which he had been reared. Let us now consider the imposing and significant achievement of one whom most of us would regard as the greatest British historian to emerge on the academic scene since the First World War: Sir Lewis Namier. Namier was a true conservative - not a typical English conservative who when scratched turns out to be 75 per cent a liberal, but a conservative such as we have not seen among British historians for more than a hundred years. Between the middle of the last century and 1914 it was scarcely possible for a British historian to conceive of historical change except as change for the better. In the 1920s, we moved into a period in which change was beginning to be associated with fear for the future, and could be thought of as change for the worse - a period of the rebirth of conservative thinking. Like Acton's liberalism, Namier's conservatism derived both strength and profundity from being rooted in a continental background. Unlike Fisher or Toynbee, Namier had no roots in the nineteenth-century liberalism, and suffered from no nostalgic regrets for it. After the First World War and the abortive peace had revealed the bankruptcy of liberalism, the reaction could come only in one of two forms - socialism or conservatism. Namier appeared as the conservative historian. He worked in two chosen fields, and the choice of both was significant. In English history he went back to the last period in which the ruling class had been able to engage in the rational pursuit of position and power in an orderly

and mainly static society. Somebody has accused Namier of taking mind out of history." It is not perhaps a very fortunate phrase, but one can see the point which the critic was trying to make. Politics at the accession of George III were still immune from the fanaticism of ideas, and of that passionate belief in progress, which was to break on the world with the French revolution and usher in the century of triumphant liberalism. No ideas, no revolution, no liberalism: Namier chose to give us a brilliant portrait of an age still safe - though not to d remain safe for long - from all these dangers.

But Namier's choice of a second subject was equally significant. Namier by-passed the great modern revolutions, English, French, and Russian - he wrote nothing of substance on any of them - and elected to give us a penetrating study of the European revolution of 1848 - a revolution that failed, a set-back all over Europe for the rising hopes of liberalism, a demonstration of the hollowness of ideas in face of armed force, of democrats when confronted with soldiers. The intrusion of ideas into the serious business of politics is futile and dangerous: Namier rubbed in the moral by calling this humiliating failure 'the revolution of the intellectuals'. Nor is our conclusion a matter of inference alone; for, though Namier wrote nothing systematic on the philosophy of history, he expressed himself in an essay published a few years ago with his usual clarity and incisiveness. 'The less, therefore,' he wrote, ‘man clogs the free play of his mind with political doctrine and dogma, the better for his thinking.' And, after mentioning, and not rejecting, the charge that he had taken the mind out of history, he went on:

Some political philosophers complain of a 'tired lull' and the absence at present of argument on general politics in this country; practical solutions are sought for concrete problems, while programmes and ideals are forgotten by both parties. But to me this attitude seems to betoken a greater national maturity, and I can only wish that it may long continue undisturbed by the workings of political philosophy.

I do not want at the moment to join issue with this view: I will reserve that for a later lecture. My purpose here is merely to ; understand or appreciate the work of the historian unless you have first grasped the standpoint from which he himself approached it; secondly, that that standpoint is itself rooted in a social and historical background. Do not forget that, as Marx once said, the educator himself has to be educated; in modern jargon, the brain of the brain-washer has itself been washed. The historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history.

The historians of whom I have just spoken - Grote and Mommsen, Trevelyan and Namier

- were each of them cast, so to speak, in a single social and political mould; no marked change of outlook occurs between their earlier and later work. But some historians in periods of rapid change have reflected in their writings not one society and one social order, but a succession of different orders. The best example known to me of this is the great German historian Meinecke, whose span of life and work was unusually long, and covered a series of revolutionary and catastrophic changes in the fortunes of his country. Here we have in effect three different Meineckes, each the spokesman; of a different historical epoch, and each speaking through one of his three major works. The Meinecke of *Weltburgetthum* and *Nationalstaat*, published in 1907, confidently sees the realization of German national ideals in the Bismarckian Reich and - like many nineteenth-century thinkers, from Mazzini onwards - identities nationalism with the highest form of universalism: this is the product of the baroque Wilhelmine sequel to the age of Bismarck. The Meinecke *of Die idee der Staatsrason*, published in 1925 speaks with the divided and bewildered mind of the Weimar Republic: the world of politics has become an arena of unresolved conflict between raison d'etat and a morality which is external to politics, but which cannot in the last resort override the life and security of the state. Finally the Meinecke of *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, published in 1936 when he had been swept from his academic honours by the Nazi flood, utters a cry of despair, rejecting a historicism which appears to recognize that 'Whatever is, is right' and tossing uneasily between the historical relative and a super-rational absolute. Last of all, when Meinecke in his old age had seen his country succumb to a military defeat more crushing than that of 1918, he relapsed helplessly in *Die Deutsche Katastrophe* of 1946 into the belief in a history at the mercy ofblind, inexorable chance.' The psychologist or the biographer would be interested here in Meinecke's development as an individual: what interests the historian is the way in which Meinecke reflects back three - or even four - successive, and sharply contrasted, periods of present time into the historical past.

Or let us take a distinguished example nearer home. In the iconoclastic 1930s, when the Liberal Party had just been snuffed out as an effective force in British politics, Professor Butterfield wrote a book called *The Whig Interpretation of History*, which enjoyed a great and deserved success. It was a remarkable book in many ways - not least because, though it denounced the Whig Interpretation over some 130 pages, it did not (so far as I can discover without the help of an index) name a single Whig except Fox, who was no historian, or a single historian save Acton, who was no Whig But anything that the book lacked in detail and precision it made up for in sparkling invective. The reader was left in no doubt that the Whig interpretation was a bad thing; and one of the charges brought against it was that it 'studies the past with reference to the present'. On this point Professor

Butterfield was categorical and severe:

The study of the past with one eye, so to speak, upon the present is the source of all sins and sophistries in history. is the essence of what we mean by the word 'unhistorical’.

Twelve years elapsed. The fashion for iconoclasm went out. Professor Butterfield's country was engaged in a war often said to be fought in defence of the constitutional liberties embodied in the Whig tradition, under a great leader who constantly invoked the past 'with one eye, so to speak, upon the present'. In a small book called *The Englishman and His History* published in 1944, Professor Butterfield not only decided that the Whig interpretation of history was the 'English' interpretation, but spoke enthusiastically of ‘the Englishman's alliance with his history' and of the 'marriage between the present and the past'. To draw attention to these reversals of outlook is not an unfriendly criticism. It is not my purpose to refute the proto-Butterfield with the deutero-Butterfield, or to confront Professor Butterfield drunk with Professor Butterfield sober. I am fully aware that, if anyone took the trouble to peruse some of the things I wrote before, during, and after the war, he would have no difficulty at all in convincing me of contradictions and inconsistencies at least as glaring as any I have detected in others. Indeed, I am not sure that I should envy any historian who could honestly claim to have lived through the earth-shaking events of the past fifty years without some radical modifications of his outlook. My purpose is merely to show how closely the work of the historian mirrors the society in which he works. It is not merely the events that are in flux. The historian himself is in flux. When you take up a historical work, it is not enough to look for the author's name on the title-page: look also for the date of publication or writing - it is sometimes even more revealing. If the philosopher is right in telling us that we cannot step into the same river twice, it is perhaps equally true, and for the same reason, that two books cannot be written by the same historian.

And, if we move for a moment from the individual historian to what may be called broad trends in historical writing, the extent to which the historian is the product of his society becomes all the more apparent. In the nineteenth century, British historians with scarcely an exception regarded the course of history as a demonstration of the principle of progress: they expressed the ideology of a society in a condition of remarkably rapid progress. History was full of meaning for British historians, so long as it seemed to be going our way; now that it has taken a wrong turning, belief in the meaning of history has become a heresy. After the First World War, Toynbee made a desperate attempt to replace a linear view of history by a cyclical theory - the characteristic ideology of a society in decline.

Since Toynbee's failure, British historians have for the most part been content to throw in their hands and declare that there is no general pattern in history at all. A banal remark by Fisher to that: effect has achieved almost as wide a popularity as Ranke's aphorism in the last century. If anyone tells me that the British historians of the last thirty years experienced this change of heart as the result of profound individual reflexion and of the burning of midnight oil in their separate garrets, I shall not think it necessary to contest the fact. But I shall continue to regard all this individual thinking and oil-burning as a social phenomenon, the product and expression of a fundamental change in the character and outlook of our society since 1914. There is no more significant pointer to the character of a society than the kind of history it writes or fails to write. Geyl, the Dutch historian, in his fascinating monograph translated into English under the title Napoleon For and Against, shows how the successive judgements of French nineteenth-century historians on Napoleon reflected the changing and conflicting patterns of French political life and thought throughout the century. The thought of historians, as of other human beings, is moulded by the environment of the time and place. Acton, who fully recognized this truth, sought for an escape from it in history itself:

History [he wrote] must be our deliverer not only from the undue influence of other times, but from the undue influence of our own, from the tyranny of environment and the pressure of the air we breathe.

This may sound too optimistic an assessment of the role of history. But I shall venture to believe that the historian who is most conscious of his own situation is also more capable of transcending it, and more capable of appreciating the essential nature of the differences between his own society and outlook and those of other periods and other countries, than the historian who loudly protests that he is an individual and not a social phenomenon. Man's capacity to rise above his social and historical situation seems to be conditioned by the sensitivity with which he recognizes the extent of his involvement in it.

In my first lecture I said: Before you study the history study the historian. Now I would add: Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment. The historian, being an individual, is also a product of history and of society; and it is in this twofold light that the student of history must learn to regard him.

Let us now leave the historian and consider the other side of my equation - the facts of history - in the light of the same problem. Is the object of the historian's inquiry the behaviour of individuals or the action of social forces? Here I am moving on to well-

trodden ground. When Sir Isaiah Berlin published a few years ago a sparkling and popular essay entitled Historical Inevitability - to the main thesis of which I shall return later in these lectures - he headed it with a motto, culled from the works of Mr T. S. Eliot, 'Vast impersonal forces'; and throughout the essay he pokes fun at people who believe in 'vast impersonal forces' rather than individuals as the decisive factor in history. What I will call the Bad King John theory of history - the view that what matters in history is the character and behaviour of individuals - has a long pedigree. The desire to postulate individual genius as the creative force in history is characteristic of the primitive stages of historical consciousness. The ancient Greeks liked to label the achievements of the past with the names of eponymous heroes supposedly responsible for them, to attribute their epics to a bard called Homer, and their laws and institutions to a Lycurgus or a Solon. The same inclination reappears at the Renaissance, when Plutarch, the biographer- moralist, was much more popular and influential a figure in the classical revival than the historians of antiquity. In this country, in particular, we all learned this theory, so to speak, at our mother's knee; and today we should probably recognize that there is something childish, or at any rate childlike, about it. It had some plausibility in days when society was simpler, and public affairs appeared to be run by a handful of known individuals. It clearly does not fit the more complex society of our times; and the birth in the nineteenth century of the new science of sociology was a response to this growing complexity. Yet the old tradition dies hard. At the beginning of this century, 'history Is the biography of great men' was still a reputable dictum. Only ten years ago a distinguished American historian accused his colleagues, perhaps not too seriously, of the 'mass murder of historical characters) by treating them as 'puppets of social and economic forces'. Addicts of this theory tend nowadays to be shy about it; but, after some searching, I found an excellent contemporary statement of it in the introduction to one of Miss Wedgwood's books.

The behaviour of men as individuals [she writes] is more interesting to me than their behaviour as groups or classes. History can be written with this bias as well as another; it is neither more, nor less, misleading.... This book.., is an attempt to understand how these men felt and why, in their own estimation, they acted as they did.'

This statement is precise; and, since Miss Wedgwood is a popular writer, many people, I am sure, think as she does. Dr Rowse tells us, for instance, that the Elizabethan system broke down because James I was incapable of understanding it, and that the English revolution of the seventeenth century was an 'accidental' event due to the stupidity of the two first Stuart kings. Even Sir James Neale, a more austere historian than Dr Rowse, sometimes seems more eager to express his admiration for Queen Elizabeth than to

explain what the Tudor monarchy stood for; and Sir Isaiah Berlin, in the essay which I have just quoted, is terribly worried by the prospect that historians may fail to denounce Genghis Khan and Hitler as bad men. The Bad King John and Good Queen Bess theory is especially rife when we come to more recent times. It is easier to call communism 'the brain-child of Karl Marx' (I pluck this flower from a recent stockbrokers' circular) than to analyse its origin and character, to attribute the Bolshevik Revolution to the stupidity of Nicholas II or to German gold than to study its profound social causes, and to see in the two world wars of this century the result of the individual wickedness of Wilhelm II and Hitler rather than of some deep-seated breakdown in the system of international relations.

Miss Wedgwood's statement, then, combines two propositions. The first is that the behaviour of men as individuals is distinct from their behaviour as members of groups or classes, and that the historian may legitimately choose to dwell on the one rather than on the other. The second is that the study of the behaviour of men as individuals consists of the study of the conscious motives of their actions.

After what I have already said, I need not labour the first point. It is not that the view of man as an individual is more or less misleading than the view of him as a member of the group; it is the attempt to draw a distinction between the two which is misleading. The individual is by definition a member of a society, or probably of more than one society - call it group, class, tribe, nation, or what you will. Early biologists were content to classify species of birds, beasts, and fishes in cages, aquariums, and showcases, and did not seek to study the living creature in relation to its environment. Perhaps the social sciences today have not yet fully emerged from that primitive stage. Some people distinguish between psychology as the science of the individual and sociology as the science of society; and the name 'psychologism' has been given to the view that all social problems are ultimately reducible to the analysis of individual human behaviour. But the psychologist who failed to study the social environment of the individual would not get very far. It is tempting to make a distinction between biography, which treats man as an individual, and history, which treats man as part of a whole, and to suggest that good biography makes bad history.’ Nothing causes more error and unfairness in man's view of history', Acton once wrote, 'than the interest which is inspired by individual characters.’ But this distinction, too, is unreal. Nor do I want to take shelter behind the Victorian proverb placed by G. 1M. Young on the title-page of his book Victorian England:’ Servants talk about people, gentlefolk discuss things.' Some biographies are serious contributions to history: in my own field, Isaac Deutscher's biographies of Stalin and Trotsky are outstanding examples. Others belong to literature, like the historical novel. ‘To Lytton Strachey', writes Professor

Trevor-Roper, 'historical problems were always, and only, problems -of individual behaviour and individual eccentricity. ... Historical problems, the problems of politics and society, he never sought to answer, or even to ask.'" Nobody is obliged to write or read history; and excellent books can be written about the past which are not history. But I think we are entitled by convention - as I propose to do in these lectures - to reserve the word 'history' for the process of inquiry into the past of man in society.

The second point, i.e. that history is concerned to inquire why individuals 'in their own estimation, acted as they did', seems at first sight extremely odd; and I suspect that Miss Wedgwood like other sensible people, does not practise what she preaches. If she does, she must write some very queer history. Everyone knows today that human beings do not always, or perhaps even habitually, act from motives of which they are fully conscious or which they are willing to avow; and to exclude insight into unconscious or unavowed motives is surely a way of going about one's work with one eye wilfully shut. This ~s, however, what, according to some people, historians ought to do. The point is this. So long as you are content to say that the badness of King John consisted in his greed or stupidity or ambition to play the tyrant, you are speaking in terms of individual qualities which are comprehensible even at the level of nursery history. But, once you begin to say that Ring John was the unconscious tool of vested interests opposed to the rise to power of the feudal barons, you not only introduce a more complicated and sophisticated view of Ring John's badness, but you appear to suggest that historical events are determined not by the conscious actions of individuals, but by some extraneous and all-powerful forces guiding their unconscious will. This is, of course, nonsense. So far as I am concerned, I have no belief in Divine Providence, World Spirit, Manifest Destiny, History with a capital H, or any other of the abstractions which have sometimes been sup- posed to guide the course of events; and I should endorse without qualification the comment of Marx:

History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights.

The two remarks which I have to make on this question have nothing to do with any abstract view of history, and are based on purely empirical observation.

The first is that history is to a considerable extent a matter of numbers. Carlyle was responsible for the unfortunate assertion that 'history is the biography of great men'. But listen to him at his most eloquent and in his greatest historical work:

Hunger and nakedness and nightmare oppression lying heavy on twenty-five million hearts: this, not the wounded vanities or contradicted philosophies of philosophical advocates, rich shopkeepers, rural noblesse, was the prime mover in the French revolution; as the like will be in all such revolutions, in all countries."

Or, as Lenin said:' Politics begin where the masses are; not where there are thousands, but where there are millions, that is where serious politics begin." Carlyle's and Lenin's millions were millions of individuals: there was nothing impersonal about them. Discussions of this question sometimes confuse anonymity with impersonality. People do not cease to be people, or individuals - individuals, because we do not know their names. Mr Eliot's 'vast, impersonal forces' were the individuals whom Clarendon, a bolder and franker conservative, calls 'dirty people of no name'. These nameless millions were individuals acting more or less unconsciously, together, and constituting a social force. The historian will not in ordinary circumstances need to take cognizance of a single discontented peasant or discontented village. But millions of discontented peasants in thousands of villages are a factor which no historian will ignore. The reasons which deter Jones from getting married do not interest the historian unless the same reasons also deter thousands of other individuals of Jones's generation, and bring about a substantial fall in a marriage-rate: in that event, they may well be historically significant. Nor need we be perturbed by the platitude that movements are started by minorities. All effective movements have few leaders and a multitude of followers; but this does not mean that the multitude is not essential to their success. Numbers count in history.

My second observation is even better attested. Writers of many different schools of thought have concurred in remarking that the actions of individual human beings often have results which were not intended or desired by the actors or indeed by any other individual. The Christian believes that the individual, acting consciously for his own often selfish ends, is the unconscious agent of God's purpose. Mandeville's 'private vices - public benefits' was an early and deliberately paradoxical expression of this discovery. Adam Smith's hidden hand and Hegel's 'cunning of reason', which sets individuals to work for it and to serve its purposes, though the individuals believe themselves to be fulfilling their own personal desires, are too familiar to require quotation. 'In the social production of their means of production,' wrote 1Marx in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*, 'human beings enter into definite and necessary relations which are independent of their will.' 'Man lives consciously for himself,' wrote Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, echoing Adam Smith, 'but is an unconscious instrument in the attainment of the historic universal aims of humanity.' And here, to round off this anthology, which is already long

enough, is Professor Butterfield: 'There is something in the nature of historical events which twists the course of history in a direction that no man ever intended.' Since 1914, after a hundred years of only minor local wars, we have had two major world wars. It would not be a plausible explanation of this phenomenon to maintain that more individuals wanted war, or fewer wanted peace, in the first half of the twentieth century than in the last three quarters of the nineteenth. It is difficult to believe that any individual willed or desired the great economic depression of the 1930s. Yet it was indubitably brought about by the actions of individuals, each consciously pursuing some totally different aim. Nor does the diagnosis of a discrepancy between the intentions of the individual and the results of his action always have to wait for the retrospective historian. 'He does not mean to go to war,' wrote Lodge of Woodrow Wilson in March 1917, 'but I think he will be carried away by events.' It defies all the evidence, to suggest that history can be written on the basis of 'explanations in terms of human intentions" or of accounts of their motives given by the actors themselves, of why 'in their own estimation, they acted as they did'. The facts of history are indeed facts about individuals, but not about actions of individuals performed in isolation, and not about the motives, real or imaginary, from which individuals suppose themselves to have acted. They are facts about the relations of individuals to one another in society and about the social forces which produce from the actions of individuals results often at variance with, and sometimes opposite to, the results which they themselves intended.

One of the serious errors of Collingwood's view of history which I discussed in my low lecture was to assume that the thought behind the act, which the historian was called on to investigate, was the thought of the individual actor. This is a false assumption. What the historian is called on to investigate is what lies behind the act; and to this the conscious thought or motive of the individual actor may be quite irrelevant.

Here I should say something about the role of the rebel or dissident in history. To set up the popular picture of the individual in revolt against society is to reintroduce the false anti- thesis between society and the individual. No society is fully homogeneous. Every society is an arena of social conflicts, and those individuals who range themselves against existing authority are no less products and reflexions of the society than those who uphold it. Richard II and Catherine the Great represented powerful social forces in the England of the fourteenth century and in the Russia of the eighteenth century: but so also did Wat Tyler and Pugachev, the leader of the great serf rebellion. Monarchs and rebels alike were the product of the specific conditions of their age and country. To describe Wat Tyler and Pugachev as individuals in revolt against society is a misleading simplification. If they had

been merely that, the historian would never have heard of them. They owe their role in history to the mass of their followers, and are significant as social phenomena, or not at all. Or let us take an outstanding rebel and individualist at a more sophisticated level. Few people have reacted more violently and more radically against the society of their day and country than Nietzsche. Yet Nietzsche was a direct product of European, and more specifically of German, society - a phenomenon which could not have occurred in China or Peru. A generation after Nietzsche's death it became clearer than it had been to his contemporaries how strong were the European, and specifically German, social forces of which this individual had been the expression; and Nietzsche became a more significant figure for posterity than for his own generation.

The role of the rebel in history has some analogies with that of the great man. The great-man theory of history - a particular example of the Good Queen Bess school - has gone out of fashion in recent years, though it still occasionally rears its ungainly bead. The editor of a series of popular history text-books, started after the Second World War, invited his authors 'to open up a significant historical theme by way of a biography of a great: man'; and Mr A. J. P. Taylor told us in one of his minor essays that 'the history of modern Europe can be written in terms of three titans: Napoleon, Bismarck, and Lenin', though in his more serious writings he has undertaken no such rash project. What is the role of the great man in history? The great man is an individual, and, being an outstanding individual, is also a social phenomenon of outstanding importance. 'It is an obvious truth', observed Gibbon, 'that the times must be suited to extraordinary characters, and that the genius of Cromwell or Retz might now expire in obscurity.' Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* diagnosed the converse phenomenon: 'The class war in France created circumstances and relations which enabled a gross mediocrity to strut about in a hero's garb.' Had Bismarck been born in the eighteenth century - an absurd hypothesis, since he would not then have been Bismarck - he would not have united Germany and might not have been a great man at all. But one need not, I think, as Tolstoy does, deny great men as no more than 'labels giving names to events'. Sometimes of course the cult of the great man may have sinister implications. Nietzsche's superman is a repellent figure. It is not necessary for me to recall the case of Hitler, or the grim consequences of the 'cult of personality' in the Soviet Union. But it is not my purpose to deflate the greatness of great men: nor do I want to subscribe to the thesis that 'great men are almost always bad men'. The view which I would hope to discourage is the view which places great men outside history and sees them as imposing themselves on history in virtue of their greatness, as 'lack-in-the-boxes who emerge miraculously from the unknown to interrupt the real continuity of history'.' Even today I do not know that we can better Hegel's classic

description:

The great man of the age is the one who can put into words the will of his age, tell his age what its will is, and accomplish it. What he does is the heart and essence of his age; he actualizes his age.

Dr Leavis means something like this when he says that great writers are 'significant in terms of the human awareness they promote'. The great man is always representative either of existing forces or of forces which he helps to create by way of challenge to existing authority. But the higher degree of creativity may perhaps be assigned to those great men who, like Cromwell or Lenin, helped to mould the forces which carried them to greatness, rather than to those who, like Napoleon or Bismarck, rode to greatness on the back of already existing forces. Nor should we forget those great men who stood so far in advance of their own time that their greatness was recognized only by succeeding generations. What seems to me essential is to recognize in the great man an outstanding individual who is at once a product and an agent of the historical process, at once the representative and the creator of social forces which change the shape of the world and the thoughts of men.

History, then, in both senses of the word - meaning both the inquiry conducted by the historian and the facts of the past into which he inquires - is a social process, in which individuals are engaged as social beings; and the imaginary antithesis between society and the individual is no more than a red herring drawn across our path to confuse our thinking. The reciprocal process of interaction between-the historian and his facts, what I have called the dialogue between present and past, is a dialogue not between abstract and isolated individuals, but between the society of today and the society of yesterday. History, in Burckhardt's words, is 'the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another'.' The past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past. To enable man to understand the society of the past, and to increase his mastery over the society of the present, is the dual function of history.

3. History, Science, and Morality

WHEN I was very young, I was suitably impressed to learn that, appearances notwithstanding, the whale is not a fish. Nowadays these questions of classification move me less; and it does not worry me unduly when I am assured that history is not a science.

This terminological question is an eccentricity of the English language. In every other European language, the equivalent word to 'science' includes history without hesitation. But in the English-speaking world this question has a long past behind it, and the issues raised by it are a convenient introduction to the problems of method in history.

At the end of the eighteenth century, when science had contributed so triumphantly both to man's knowledge of the world and to man's knowledge of his own physical attributes, it began to be asked whether science could not also further man's knowledge of society. The conception of the social sciences, and of history among them, gradually developed throughout the nineteenth century; and the method by which science studied the world of nature was applied to the study of human affairs. In the first part of this period the Newtonian tradition prevailed. Society, like the world of nature, was thought of as a mechanism; the title of a work by Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, published in 1951, is still remembered. Bertrand Russell, reared in this tradition, later recalled the period when he hoped that in time there would be 'a mathematics of human behaviour as precise as the mathematics of machines'.' Then Darwin made another scientific revolution; and social scientists, taking their cue from biology, began to think of society as an organism. But the real importance of the Darwinian revolution was that Darwin, completing what Lyell had already begun in geology, brought history into science. Science was concerned no longer with some- thing static and timeless, but with a process of change and development. Evolution in science confirmed and complemented progress in history. Nothing, however, occurred to alter the inductive view of historical method which I described in my first lecture: First collect your facts, then interpret them. It was assumed without question that this was also the method of science. This was the view which Bury evidently had in mind when, in the closing words of his inaugural lecture of January 1903, he described history as 'a science, no more and no less'. The fifty years after Bury's inaugural lecture witnessed a strong reaction against this view of history. Collingwood, when he wrote in the 1930s, was particularly anxious to draw a sharp line between the world of nature, which was the object of scientific inquiry, and the world of history; and during this period Bury's dictum was rarely quoted except in terms of derision. But what historians failed to notice at the time was that science itself had undergone a profound revolution, which makes it seem that Bury may have been more nearly right than we had supposed, though for the wrong reason. What Lyell did for geology and Darwin for biology has now been done for astronomy, which has become a science of how the universe came to be what it is; and modern physicists constantly tell us that what they investigate are not facts, but events. The historian has some excuse for feeling him- self more at home in the world of science today than he could have done a hundred years ago.

Let us look first at the concept of laws. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scientists assumed that laws of nature - Newton's laws of motion, the law of gravitation, Boyle's law, the law of evolution, and so forth - had been discovered and definitely established, and that the business of the scientist was to discover and establish more such laws by process of induction from observed facts. The word 'law' came down trailing clouds of glory from Galileo and Newton. Students of society, consciously or unconsciously desiring to assert the scientific status of their studies, adopted the same language and believed themselves to be following the same procedure. The political economists seem to have been first in the held with Gresham's law, and Adam Smith's laws of the market. Burke appealed to 'the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the Laws of God'. Malthus propounded a law of population; Lassalle an iron law of wages; and Marx in the preface to Capital claimed to have discovered 'the economic law of motion of modern society'. Buckle in the concluding words of his *History of Civilization* expressed the conviction that the course of human affairs was 'permeated by one glorious principle of universal and undeviating regularity'. Today this terminology sounds as old-fashioned as it is presumptuous; but it sounds almost as old-fashioned to the physical scientist as it does to the social scientist. In the year before Bury delivered his inaugural lecture, the French mathematician Henri Poincare published a small volume called *La Science et I'hypothese* which started a revolution in scientific thinking. Poincare's main thesis was that the general propositions enunciated by scientists, where they were not mere definitions or disguised conventions about the use of language, were hypotheses designed to crystallize and organize further thinking, and were subject to verification, modification, or refutation. All this has now become something of a commonplace. Newton's boast *'Hypotheses non fingo'* rings hollow today; and though scientists, and even social scientists, still sometimes speak of laws, so to speak, for old time's sake, they no longer believe in their existence in the sense in which scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century universally believed in them. It is recognized that scientists make discoveries and acquire fresh knowledge, not by establishing precise and comprehensive laws, but by enunciating hypotheses which open the way to flesh inquiry. A standard text-book on scientific method by two American philosophers describes the method of science as 'essentially circular':

We obtain evidence for principles by appealing to empirical material, to what is alleged to be 'fact'; and we select, analyse, and interpret empirical material on the basis of principles.' The word 'reciprocal' would perhaps have been preferable to 'circular'; for the result is not to return to the same place, but to move forward to fresh discoveries through this process of interaction between principles and facts, between theory and practice. Ah thinking

requires acceptance of certain presuppositions based on observation, which make scientific thinking possible but are subject to revision in the light of that thinking. These hypotheses may well be valid in some contexts or for some purposes, though they turn out to be invalid in others. The test in all cases is the empirical one whether they are in fact effective in promoting fresh insights and adding to our knowledge. The methods of Rutherford were recently described by one of his most distinguished pupils and fellow-workers :

He had a driving urge to know how nuclear phenomena worked, in the sense in which one could speak of knowing what went on in the kitchen. I do not believe that he searched for an explanation in the classical manner of a theory using certain basic laws; as long as he knew what was happening he was content."

This description equally fits the historian, who has abandoned the search for basic laws, and is content to inquire how things work.

The status of the hypotheses used by the historian in the process of his inquiry seems remarkably similar to that of the hypotheses used by the scientist. Take, for example, Mm Weber's famous diagnosis of a relation between Protestantism and capitalism. Nobody today would call this a law, though it might have been hailed as such in an earlier period. It is a hypothesis which, though modified to some extent in the course of the inquiries which it inspired, has beyond doubt enlarged our understanding of both these movements. Or take a statement like that of Marx: 'The hand-mill gives us a society with a feudal lord; the steam-mill gives us a society with an industrial capitalist." This is not in modern terminology a law, though Marx would probably have claimed it as such, but a fruitful hypothesis pointing the way to further inquiry and fresh understanding. Such hypotheses are indispensable tools of thought. The well-known German economist of the early 1900s, Werner ; Sombart, confessed to a 'troubled feeling' which overtook those who had abandoned Marxism.

When [he wrote] we lose the comfortable formulas that have hitherto been our guides amid the complexities of existence ... we feel like drowning in the ocean of facts until we find a new foothold or learn to swim."

The controversy about periodization in history falls into this category. The division of history into periods is not a fact, but 8 necessary hypothesis or tool of thought, valid in so far as it is illuminating, and dependent for its validity on interpretation. Historians who

differ on the question when the Middle Ages ended differ in their interpretation of certain events. The question is not a question of fact; but it is also not meaningless. The division of history into geographical sectors is equally not a fact, but a hypothesis: to speak of European history may be a valid and fruitful hypothesis in some contexts, misleading and mischievous in others. Most historians assume that Russia is part of Europe; some passionately deny it. The bias of the historian can be judged by the hypothesis which he adopts. I must quote one general pronouncement on the methods of social science, since it comes from a great social scientist who was trained as a physical scientist. Georges Sorel, who practised as an engineer before he began in his forties to write about the problems of society, emphasized the need to isolate particular elements in a situation even at the risk of over-simplifying:

One should proceed [he wrote] by feeling one's way; one should try out probable and partial hypotheses, and be satisfied with provisional approximations so as always to leave the door open to progressive correction.'

This is a far cry from the nineteenth century, when scientists, and historians like Acton, looked forward to one day establishing, through the accumulation of well-attested facts, a comprehensive body of knowledge which would settle all disputed issues once for all. Nowadays both scientists and historians entertain the more modest hope of advancing progressively from one fragmentary hypothesis to another, isolating their facts through the medium of their interpretations, and testing their interpretations by the facts; and ways in which they go about it do not seem to me essentially different. In my first lecture I quoted a remark of Professor Barraclough that history was 'not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgements'. While I was preparing these lectures, a physicist from this university, in a B.B.C. broadcast, defined a scientific truth as 'a statement which has been publicly accepted by the experts'." Neither of these formulas is entirely satisfactory - for reasons which will appear when I come to discuss the question of objectivity. But it was striking to find a historian and a physicist independently formulating the same problem in almost exactly the same words.

Analogies are, however, a notorious trap for the unwary: and I want to consider respectfully the arguments for believing that, great as are the differences between the mathematical and the natural sciences, or between different sciences within these categories, a fundamental distinction can be drawn between these sciences and history, and that this distinction makes it misleading to call history - and perhaps also the other so-called social sciences - by the name of science. These objections - some of them more

convincing than others - are in brief: (r) that history deals exclusively with the unique, science with the general; (2) that history teaches no lessons; (3) that history is unable to predict; (4) that history is necessarily subjective, since man is observing himself; and (5) that history, unlike science, involves issues of religion and morality. I will try to examine each of these points in turn.

First, it is alleged that history deals with the unique and particular, and science with the general and universal. This view may be said to start with Aristotle, who declared that poetry was 'more philosophical' and 'more serious' than history, since poetry was concerned with general truth and history with particular.' A host of later writers, down to Collingwood inclusive, made a similar distinction between science and history. This seems to rest on a misunderstanding. Hobbes's famous dictum still stands: ‘Nothing in the world is universal but names, for the things named are every one of them individual and singular.' This is certainly true of the physical sciences: no two geological formations, no two animals of the same species, and no two atoms, are identical. Similarly, no two historical events are identical. But insistence on the uniqueness of historical events has the same paralysing effect as the platitude taken over by Moore from Bishop Butler and at one time especially beloved by linguistic philosophers: 'Everything is what it is and not another thing.' Embarked on this course, you soon attain a sort of philosophical nirvana, in which nothing that matters can be said about anything.

The very use of language commits the historian, like the scientist, to generalization. The Peloponnesian War and the Second World War were very different, and both were unique. But the historian calls them both wars, and only the pedant will protest. When Gibbon wrote of both the establishment of Christianity by Constantine and the rise of Islam as revolutions, he was generalizing two unique events. Modern historians do the same when they write of the English, French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions. The historian is not really interested in the unique, but in what is general in the unique. In the 1930s discussions by historians of the causes of the war of I9I4 usually proceeded on the assumption that it was due either to the mismanagement of diplomats, working in secret and uncontrolled by public opinion, or to the unfortunate division of the world into territorial sovereign states. In the 1930s discussions proceeded on the assumption that it was due to rivalries between imperialist powers driven by the stresses of capitalism in decline to partition the world between them. These discussions all involved generalization about the causes of war, or at any rate of war in ninetieth-century conditions. The historian constantly uses generalization to test his evidence. If the evidence is not clear whether Richard murdered the princes in the Tower, the historian will ask himself - perhaps

unconsciously rather than consciously - whether it was a habit of rulers of the period to liquidate potential rivals to their throne; and his judgement will, quite rightly, be influenced by this generalization.

The reader, as well as the writer, of history, is a chronic generalizer, applying the observation of the historian to other historical contexts with which he is familiar - or perhaps to his own time. When I read Carlyle's French Revolution, I find myself again and again generalizing his comments by applying them to my own special interest in the Russian revolution. Take this on the terror:

Horrible, in lands that had known equal justice - not so unnatural in lands that had never known it. Or, more significantly, this:

It is unfortunate, though very natural, that the history of this period has so generally been written in hysterics. Exaggeration abounds, execration, wailing; and on the whole, darkness.' Or another, this time from Burckhardt on the growth of the modern state in the sixteenth century:

The more recently power has originated, the less it can remain stationary - first because those who created it have become accustomed to rapid further movement and because they are and will remain innovators per se; secondly, because the forces aroused or subdued by them can be employed only through further acts of violence."

It is nonsense to say that generalization is foreign to history; history thrives on generalizations. As Mr Elton neatly puts it in a volume of the new *Cambridge Modern History*, 'what distinguishes the historian from the collector of historical facts is generalization';" he might have added that the same thing distinguishes the natural scientist from the naturalist or collector of specimens. But do not suppose that generalization permits us to construct some vast scheme of history into which specific events must be fitted. And, since Marx is one of those who is often accused of constructing, or believing in, such a scheme, I will quote by way of summing-up a passage from one of his letters which puts the matter in its right perspective:

Events strikingly similar, but occurring in a different historical milieu, lead to completely dissimilar results. By studying each of these evolutions separately and then comparing them, it is easy to find the key to the understanding of this phenomenon; but it is never possible to arrive at this understanding by using the passe-partout of some historical-

philosophical theory whose great virtue is to stand above history. History is concerned with the relation between the unique and the general. As a historian, you can no more separate them, or give precedence to one over the other, than you can separate fact and interpretation.

This is perhaps the place for a brief remark on the relations between history and sociology. Sociology at present faces two apposite dangers - the danger of becoming ultra-theoretical and the danger of becoming ultra-empirical. The first is the danger of losing itself in abstract and meaningless generalizations about society in general. Society with a big S is as misleading a fallacy as History with a big H. This danger is brought nearer by those who assign to sociology the exclusive task of generalizing from the unique events recorded by history: it has even been suggested that sociology is distinguished from history by having 'laws'." The other danger is that foreseen by Karl Mannheim almost a generation ago, and very much present today, of a sociology 'split into a series of discrete technical problems of social readjustment'. Sociology is concerned with historical societies, every one of which is unique and moulded by specific historical antecedents and conditions. But to attempt to avoid generalization and interpretation by confining oneself to so- called 'technical' problems of enumeration and analysis is merely to become the unconscious apologist of a static society. Sociology, if it is to become· a fruitful field of study, must, like history, concern itself with the relation between the unique and the general. But it must also become dynamic - a study not of society at rest (for no such society exists), but of social change and development. For the rest, I would only say that the more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both. Let the frontier between them be kept wide open for two-way traffic.

The question of generalization is closely connected with my second question: the lessons of history. The real point about generalization is that through it we attempt to learn from history, to apply the lesson drawn from one set of events to another set of events: when we generalize, we are consciously or unconsciously trying to do this. Those who reject generalization and insist that history is concerned exclusively with the unique are, logically enough, those who deny that anything can be learned from history. But the assertion that men learn nothing from history is contradicted by a multitude of observable facts. No experience is more common. In 1919 I was present at the Paris Peace Conference as a junior member of the British delegation. Everyone in the delegation believed that we could learn from the lessons of the Vienna Congress, the last great European peace congress a hundred years earlier. A certain Captain Webster, then employed in the War office, now Sir Charles Webster and an eminent historian, wrote an

essay telling us what those lessons were. Two of them have remained in my memory. One was that it was dangerous, when re-drawing the map of Europe, to neglect the principle of self-determination. The other was that it was dangerous to throw secret documents into your waste-paper basket, the contents of which would certainly be bought by the secret service of some other delegation. These lessons of history were taken for gospel and influenced our behaviour. This example is recent and trivial. But it would be easy to trace in comparatively remote history the influence of the lessons of a still remoter past. Everyone knows about the impact of ancient Greece upon Rome. But I am not sure whether any historian has attempted to make a precise analysis of the lessons which the Romans learned, or believed themselves to have learned, from the history of Hellas. An examination of the lessons drawn in western Europe in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries from Old Testament history might yield rewarding results. The English Puritan revolution cannot be fully understood without it; and the conception of the chosen people was an important factor in the rise of modern nationalism. The stamp of a classical education was heavily imprinted in the nineteenth century on the new ruling class in Great Britain. Grote, as I have already noted, painted to Athena as an exemplar for the new democracy; and I should like to see a study of the extensive and important lessons consciously or unconsciously imparted to British empire-builders by the history of the Roman Empire. In my own particular field, the makers of the Russian revolution were profoundly impressed - one might almost say, obsessed –by the lessons of the French revolution, of the revolutions of 1848, and of the Paris commune of 1871. But I shall recall here the qualification imposed by the dual character of history. Learning from history is never simply a one-way process. To learn about the present in the light of the past means also to learn about the past in the light of the present. The function of history is to promote a profounder understanding of both past and present through the interrelation between them.

My third point is the role of prediction in history: no lessons, it is said, can be learned from history because history, unlike science, cannot predict the future. This question is involved in a tissue of misunderstandings. As we have seen, scientists are no longer so eager as they used to be to talk about the laws of nature. The so-called laws of sciences which affect our ordinary life are in fact statements of tendency, statements of what will happen other things being equal or in laboratory conditions. They do not claim to predict what will happen in concrete cases. The law of gravity does not prove that that particular apple will fall to the ground: somebody may catch it in a basket. The law of optics that light travels in a straight line does not prove that a particular ray of light may not be refracted or scattered by some intervening object. But this does not mean that these laws

are worthless, or not in principle valid. Modern physical theories, we are told, deal only with the probabilities of events taking place. Today science is more inclined to remember that induction can logically lead only to probabilities or to reasonable belief, and is more anxious to treat its pronouncements as general rules or guides, the validity of which can be tested only in specific action. 'Science, *d'ou prevoyance; preyance, d'ou action ',* as Comte puts it. The clue to the question of prediction in history lies in this distinction between the general and the specific, between the universal and the unique. The historian, as we have seen, is bound to generalize; and, in so doing, he provides general guides for future action which, though not specific predictions, are both valid and useful. But he cannot predict specific events, because the specific is unique and because the element of accident enters into it. This distinction, which worries philosophers, is perfectly clear to the ordinary man. If two or three children in a school develop measles, you will conclude that the epidemic will spread; and this prediction, if you care to call it such, is based on a generalization from past experience and is a valid and useful guide to action. But you cannot make the specific prediction that Charles or Mary will catch measles. The historian proceeds in the same way. People do not expect the historian to predict that revolution will break out in Ruritania next month. The kind of conclusion which they will seek to draw, partly from specific knowledge of Ruritanian affairs and partly from a study of history, is that conditions in Ruritania are such that a revolution is likely to occur in the near future if somebody touches it off, or unless somebody on the government side does something to stop it; and this conclusion might be accompanied by estimates, based partly on the analogy of other revolutions, of the attitude which different sectors of the population may be expected to adopt. The prediction, if such it can be called, can be realized only through the occurrence of unique events, which cannot themselves be predicted. But this does not mean that inferences drawn from history about the future are worthless, or that they do not possess a conditional validity which serves both as a guide to action and a key to our understanding of how things happen. I do not wish to suggest that the inferences of the social scientist or of the historian can match those of the physical scientist in precision, or that their inferiority in this respect is due merely to the greater backwardness of the social sciences. The human being is on any view the most complex natural entity known to us, and the study of his behaviour may well involve difficulties different in kind from those confronting the physical scientist. All I wish to establish is that their aims and methods are not fundamentally dissimilar.

My fourth point introduces a far more cogent argument for drawing a line of demarcation between the social sciences, including history, and the physical sciences. This is the argument that in the social sciences subject and object belong to the same category and

interact reciprocally on each other. Human beings are not only the most complex and variable of natural entities, but they have to be studied by other human beings, not. by independent observers of another species. Here man is no longer content, as in the biological sciences, to study his own physical make-up and physical reactions. The sociologist, the economist, or the historian needs to penetrate into forms of human behaviour in which the will is active, to ascertain why the human beings who are the object of his study willed to act as they did. This sets up a relation, which is peculiar to history and the social sciences, between the observer and what is observed. The point of view of the historian enters irrevocably into every observation which he makes ;history is shot through and through with relativity. In Karl Mannheim's words, ‘even the categories in which experiences are subsumed, collected, and ordered vary according to the social position of the observer'. But it is not merely true that the bias of the social scientist necessarily enters into all his observations. It is also true that the process of observation affects and modifies what is being observed. And this can happen in two opposite ways. The human beings whose behaviour is made the object of analysis and prediction may be warned in advance, by the prediction of consequences unwelcome to them, and be induced by it to modify their action, so that the prediction, however correctly based on the analysis, proves self-frustrating. One reason why history rarely repeats itself among historically conscious people is that the dramatis personae are aware at the second performance of the denouement of the first, and their action is affected by that knowledge.'

The Bolsheviks knew that the French revolution had ended in a Napoleon, and feared that their own revolution might end in the same way. They therefore mistrusted Trotsky, who among their leaders looked most like a Napoleon, and trusted Stalin, who looked least like a Napoleon. But this process may work in a converse direction. The economist who, by a scientific analysis of existing economic conditions, predicts an approaching boom or slump may, if his authority is great and his arguments cogent, contribute by the very fact of his prediction to the occurrence of the phenomenon predicted. The political scientist who, on the strength of historical observations, nourishes the conviction that despotism is short-lived, may contribute to the downfall of the despot. Everyone is familiar with the behaviour of candidates at elections, who predict their own victory for the conscious purpose of rendering the fulfilment of the prediction more likely; and one suspects that economists, political scientists, and historians, when they venture on prediction, are sometimes inspired by the unconscious hope of hastening the realization of the prediction. All that one can perhaps safely say about these complex relations is that interaction between the observer and what is observed, between the social scientist and his data, between the historian and his facts, is continuous, and continuously varies; and that this

appears to be a distinctive feature of history and of the social sciences.

I should perhaps note here that some physicists in recent years have spoken of their science in terms which appear to suggest more striking analogies between the physical universe and the world of the historian. In the first place, their results are said to involve a principle of uncertainty or indeterminacy. I shall speak in my next lecture of the nature and limits of so- called determinism in history. But whether the indeterminacy of modern physics resides in the nature of the universe, or is merely an index of our own hitherto imperfect understanding of it (this point is still in debate), I should have the same doubts about finding in it significant analogies with our ability to make historical predictions as one had a few years ago about the attempts of some enthusiasts to find proof in it of the operation of free will in the universe. Secondly, we are told that in modern physics distances in space and lapses of time have measures depending on the motion of the 'observer'. In modern physics all measurements are subject to inherent variations due to the impossibility of establishing a constant relation between the 'observer' and the object under observation; both the 'observer' and the thing observed - both subject and object - enter into the final result of the observation. But, while these descriptions would apply with a minimum of change to the relations between the historian and the objects of his observations, I am not satisfied that the essence of these relations is in any real sense comparable with the nature of relations between the physicist and his universe; and though I am in principle concerned to reduce rather than to inflate the differences which separate the approach of the historian from that of the scientist, it will not help to attempt to spirit these differences away by relying on imperfect analogies.

But, while it is, I think, fair to say that the involvement of the social scientist or historian in the object of his study is of a different kind from that of the physical scientist, and the issues raised by the relation between subject and object infinitely more complicated, this is not the end of the matter. Classical theories of knowledge, which prevailed throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, all assumed a sharp dichotomy between the knowing subject and the object known. However the process was conceived, the model constructed by the philosophers showed subject and object, man and the external world, divided and apart. This was the great age of the birth and development of science; and theories of knowledge were strongly influenced by the outlook of the pioneers of science. Man was set sharply against the external world. He grappled with it as with something intractable and potentially hostile - intractable because it was difficult to understand, potentially hostile because it was difficult to master. With the successes of modern science, this outlook has been radically modified. The scientist nowadays is far less likely

to think of the forces of nature as something to fight against than as something to co-operate with and to harness to his purposes. Classical theories of knowledge no longer fit the newer science, and least of all the science of physics. It is not surprising that during the past fifty years philosophers have begun to call them in question, and to recognise that the process of knowledge, far from setting subject and object sharply apart, involves a measure of interrelation and interdependence between them. This is, however, extremely significant for the social sciences. In my first lecture, I suggested that the study of history was difficult to reconcile with the traditional empiricist theory of knowledge. I should now like to argue that the social sciences as a whole, since they involve man as both subject and object, both investigator and thing investigated, are incompatible with any theory of knowledge which pronounces a rigid divorce between subject and object. Sociology, in its attempts to establish itself as a coherent body of doctrine, has quite rightly set up a branch called the sociology of knowledge. This has, however, not yet got very far mainly, I suspect, because it has been content to go round and round inside the cage of a traditional theory of knowledge. If philosophers, under the impact first of modern physical science, and now of modern social science, are beginning to break out from this cage, and construct some more up-to-date model for the processes of knowledge than the old billiard-ball model of the impact of data on a passive consciousness, this is a good omen for the social sciences and for history in particular. This is a point of some importance, to which I shall return later when I come to consider what we mean by objectivity in history.

Last but not least, I have to discuss the view that history, being intimately involved in questions of religion and morality, is thereby distinguished from science in general and perhaps even from the other social sciences. Of the relation of history to religion I shall say only the little that is necessary to make my own position clear. To be a serious astronomer is compatible with belief in a God who created and ordered the universe. But it is not compatible with belief in a God who intervenes at will to change the course of a planet, to postpone an eclipse, or to alter the rules of the cosmic game. In the same way, it is some- times suggested, a serious historian may believe in a God who has ordered, and given meaning to, the course of history as a whole, though he cannot believe in the Old Testament kind of God who intervenes to slaughter the Amalekites, or cheats on the calendar by extending the hours of daylight for the benefit of Joshua's army. Nor can he invoke God as an explanation of particular historical events. Father D'Arcy in a recent book attempted to make this distinction:

It would not do for a student to answer every question in history by saying that it was the finger of God. Not until we have gone as far as most in tidying up mundane events and the

human drama ate we permitted to bring in wider considerations.

The awkwardness of this view is that it appears to treat religion like the joker in the pack of cards, to be reserved for really important tricks that cannot be taken in any other way. Karl Barth, the Lutheran theologian, did better when he pronounced a total separation between divine and secular history, and handed over the latter to the secular arm. Professor Butterfield, if I understand him, means the same thing when he speaks of technical history. Technical history is the only kind of history you or I are ever likely to write, or he himself has ever written. But by the use of this odd epithet, he reserves the right to believe in an esoteric or providential history with which the rest of us need not concern ourselves. Writers like Berdyaev, Niebarhr, and Maritain purport to maintain the autonomous status of history, but insist that the end or goal of history lies outside history. Personally, I find it hard to reconcile the integrity of history with belief in some super-historical force on which its meaning and significance depend - whether that force be the God of a Chosen People, a Christian God, the Hidden Hand of the deist, or Hegel's World Spirit. For the purposes of these lectures, I shall assume that the historian must solve his problems without recourse to any such deus ex machina, that history is a game played, so to speak, without a joker in the pack.

The relation of history to morality is more complicated, and discussions of it in the past have suffered from several ambiguities. It is scarcely necessary today to argue that the historian is not required to pass moral judgements on the private life of the characters in his story. The standpoints of the historian and of the moralist are not identical. Henry VIII may have been a husband and a good king. But the historian is interested in him in the former capacity only in so far as it affected historical repents. If his moral delinquencies had had as little apparent effect on public affairs as those of Henry II, the historian would not need to bother about them. This goes for virtues as well as vices. Pasteur and Einstein were, one is told, men of exemplary, even saintly, private lives. But, suppose they had been unfaithful husbands, cruel fathers, and unscrupulous colleagues, would their historical achievements have been any the less? And it is these which preoccupy the historian. Stalin is said to have behaved cruelly and callously to his second wife; but, as a historian of Soviet affairs, I do not feel myself much concerned. This does not mean that private morality is not important, or that the history of morals is not a legitimate part of history. But the historian does not nun aside to pronounce moral judgements on the private lives of individuals who appear in his pages. He has other things to do.

The more serious ambiguity arises over the question of moral judgements on public

actions. Belief in the duty of the historian to pronounce moral judgements on his dramatis personae has a long pedigree. But it was never more powerful than in nineteenth-century Britain, when it was reinforced both by the moralizing tendencies of the age and by the uninhibited cult of individualism. Rosebery remarked that what English people wanted to know about Napoleon was whether he was 'a good man'. Acton in his correspondence with Creighton declared that 'the inflexibility of the moral code is the secret of the authority, the dignity, and the utility of History', and claimed to make history 'an arbiter of controversy, a guide of the wanderer, the upholder of that moral standard which the powers of earth and of religion itself tend constantly to depress'" - a view based on Acton's almost mystical belief in the objectivity and supremacy of historical facts, which apparently requires and entitles the historian, in the name of History as a sort of super- historical power, to pass moral judgements on individuals participating in historical events. This attitude still sometimes reappears in unexpected forms. Professor Toynbee described Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 as a 'deliberate personal sin';" and Sir Isaiah Berlin, in the essay already quoted, insists with great vehemence that it is the duty of the historian 'to judge Charlemagne or Napoleon or Genghis Khan or Hitler or Stalin for their massacres' This view has been sufficiently castigated by Professor Knowles, who in his inaugural lecture quoted Motley's denunciation of Philip II (' if there are vices ... from which he was exempt, it is because it is not permitted by human nature to attain perfection even in evil') and Stubbs's description of Ring John (' polluted with every crime that could disgrace a man') as instances of moral judgements on individuals which it is not within the competence of the historian to pronounce:’ The historian is not a judge, still less a hanging judge.' But Croce also has a fine passage on this point, which I should like to quote:

The accusation forgets the great difference that our tribunals (whether juridical or moral) are present-day tribunals designed for living, active and dangerous men, while those other men have already appeared before the tribunal of their day, and cannot be condemned or absolved twice. They cannot be held responsible before any tribunal whatsoever, just because they are men of the past who belong to the peace of the past and as such can only be subjects of history, and can suffer no other judgement than that which penetrates and understands the spirit of their work. ... Those who, on the plea of narrating history, bustle about as judges, condemning here and giving absolution there, because they think that this is the office of history ... are generally recognised as devoid of historical sense.

And if anyone cavils at the statement that it is not our business to pass moral judgement on Hitler or Stalin - or, if you like, on Senator McCarthy - this is because they were the contemporaries of many of us, because hundreds of thousands of those who suffered

directly or indirectly from their actions are still alive, and because, precisely for these reasons, it is difficult for us to approach them as historians and to divest ourselves of other capacities which might justify us in passing judgement on their deeds: this is one of the embarrassments - I should say, the principal embarrassment - of the contemporary historian. But what profit does anyone find today in denouncing the sins of Charlemagne or of Napoleon !

Let us therefore reject the notion of the historian as a hanging judge, and turn to the more difficult but more profitable question of the passing of moral judgements not on individuals, but on events, institutions, or policies of the past. These are the important judgements of the historian; and those who insist so fervently on the moral condemnation of the individual some- times unconsciously provide an alibi for whole groups and societies. The French historian Lefebvre, seeking to exonerate the French revolution from responsibility for the disasters and bloodshed of the Napoleonic wars, attributed them to 'the dictatorship of a general ... whose temperament ... could not easily acquiesce in peace and moderation'. Germans today welcome the denunciation of Hitler's individual wickedness as a satisfactory alternative to the moral judgement of the historian on the society which produced him. Russians, Englishmen, and Americans readily join in personal attacks on Stalin, Neville Chamberlain, or McCarthy as scapegoats for their collective misdeeds. Moreover, laudatory moral judgements on individuals can be just as misleading and mischievous as the moral denunciation of individuals. Recognition that some individual slave- owners were high-minded was constantly used as an excuse for not condemning slavery as immoral. ruler Weber refers to 'the masterless slavery in which capitalism emmeshes the worker or the debtor', and rightly argues that the historian should pass moral judgement on the institution, but not on the individuals who created it. The historian does not sit in judgement on an individual oriental despot. But he is not required to remain indifferent and impartial between, say, oriental despotism and the institutions of Periclean Athens. He will not pass judgement on the individual slave-owner. But this does not prevent him from condemning a slave-owning society. Historical facts, as we saw, presuppose some measure of interpretation; and historical interpretations always involve moral judgements - or, if you prefer a more neutral-sounding term, value judgements.

This is, however, only the beginning of our difficulties. History is a process of struggle, in which results, whether we judge them good or bad, are achieved by some groups directly or indirectly - and more often directly than indirectly - at the expense of others. The losers pay. Suffering is indigenous in history. Every great period of history has its casualties as well as its victories. This is an exceedingly complicated question, because we have no

measure which enables us to balance the greater good of some against the sacrifices of others: yet some such balance must be struck. It is not exclusively a problem of history. In ordinary life we are more often involved than we sometimes care to admit in the necessity of preferring the lesser evil, or of doing evil that good may come. In history the question is sometimes discussed under the rubric 'the cost of progress' or 'the price of revolution'. This is misleading. As Bacon says in the essay *On Innovations*, 'the forward retention of custom is as turbulent a thing as an innovation'. The cost of conservation falls just as heavily on the underprivileged as the cost of innovation on those who are deprived of their privileges. The thesis that the good of some justifies the sufferings of others is implicit in all government, and is just as much a conservative as a radical doctrine. Dr Johnson robustly invoked the argument of the lesser evil to justify the maintenance of existing inequalities.

It is better that some should be unhappy than that none should be happy, which would be the case in a general state of equality.'

But it is in periods of radical change that the issue appears in its most dramatic form; and it is here that we find it easiest to study the attitude of the historian towards it.

Let us take the story of the industrialisation of Great Britain between, say, about 1780 and 1870. Virtually every historian will treat the industrial revolution, probably without discussion, as a great and progressive achievement. He will also describe the driving of the peasantry off the land, the herding of workers in unhealthy factories and unsanitary dwellings, the exploitation of child labour. He will probably say that abuses occurred in the working of the system, and that some employers were more ruthless than others, and will dwell with some unction on the gradual growth of a humanitarian conscience once the system has become established. But he will assume, again probably without saying it, that measures of coercion and exploitation, at any rate in the first stages, were an unavoidable part of the cast of industrialisation. Nor have I ever heard of a historian who said that, in view of the cost, it would have been better to stay the hand of progress and not industrialise; if any such exists, he doubtless belongs to the school of Chesterton and Belloc, and will - quite properly - not be taken seriously by serious historians. This example is of particular interest to me, because I hope soon in my history of Soviet Russia to approach the problem of the collectivisation of the peasant as a part of the cost of industrialisation; and I know well that if, following the example of historians of the British industrial revolution, I deplore the brutalities and abuses of collectivisation, but treat the process as an unavoidable part of the cost of a desirable and necessary policy of

industrialisation, I shall incur charges of cynicism and of condoning evil things. Historians condone the nineteenth-century colonisation of Asia and Africa by the western nations on the ground not only of its immediate effects on the world economy, but of its long-term consequences for the backward peoples of these continents. After all, it is said, modern India is the child of British rule; and modern China is the product of nineteenth-century western imperialism, crossed with the influence of the Russian revolution. Unfortunately it was not the Chinese workers who laboured in the western-owned factories in the treaty ports, or in the South African mines, or on the western front in the First World War, who have survived to enjoy whatever glory or profit may have accrued from the Chinese revolution. Those who pay the cost are rarely those who reap the benefits. The well-known purple passage from Engels is uncomfortably apt:

History is about the most cruel of all goddesses, and she leads her triumphal car over heaps of corpses, not only in war, but also in 'peaceful' economic development. And we men and women are unfortunately so stupid that we never pluck up courage for real progress unless urged to it by sufferings that seem almost out of proportion.'

Ivan Karamazov's famous gesture of defiance is a heroic fallacy. We are born into society, we are born into history. No moment: occurs when we are offered a ticket of admission with the option to accept or reject it. The historian has no more conclusive answer than the theologian to the problem of suffering. He, too, falls back on the thesis of the lesser evil and the greater good.

But does not the fact that the historian, unlike the scientist, becomes involved by the nature of his material in these issues of moral judgement imply the submission of history to a super- historical standard of value. I do not think that it does. Let us assume that abstract conceptions like 'good' and 'bad', and more sophisticated developments of them, lie beyond the confines of history. But, even so, these abstractions play in the study of historical morality much the same role as mathematical and logical formulas in physical science. They are indispensable categories of thought; but they are devoid of meaning or application till specific content is put into them. If you prefer a different metaphor, the moral precepts which we apply in history or in everyday life are like cheques on a bank: they have a printed and a written part. The printed part consists of abstract words like liberty and equality, justice and democracy. These are essential categories. But the cheque is valueless until we fill in the other part, which states how much liberty we propose to allocate to whom, whom we recognise as our equals, and up to what amount. The way in which we fill in the cheque from time to time is a matter of history. The process by which

specific historical content is given to abstract moral conceptions is a historical process; indeed, our moral judgements are made within a conceptual framework which is itself the creation of history. The favourite form of contemporary international controversy on moral issues is a debate on rival claims to freedom and democracy. The conceptions are abstract and universal. But the content put into them has varied throughout history, from time to time and from place to place; any practical issue of their application can be understood and debated only in historical terms. To take a slightly less popular example, the attempt has been made to use the conception of 'economic rationality' as an objective and non-controversial criterion by which the desirability of economic policies can be tested and judged. The attempt at once breaks down. Theorists brought up on the laws of classical economics condemn planning in principle as an irrational intrusion into rational economic processes; for example, planners refuse in their price policy to be bound by the law of supply and demand, and prices under planning can have no rational basis. It may, of course, be true that planners often behave irrationally, and therefore foolishly. But the criterion by which they must be judged is not the old 'economic rationality' of classical economy. Personally, I have more sympathy with the converse argument that it was the uncontrolled unorganised laissez-faire economy which was essentially irrational, and that planning is an attempt to introduce 'economic rationality' into the process. But the only point which I wish to make at the moment is the impossibility of erecting an abstract and super-historical standard by which historical actions can be judged. Bath sides inevitably read into such a standard the specific content appropriate to their own historical conditions and aspirations.

This is the real indictment of those who seek to erect a super- historical standard or criterion in the light of which judgement is passed on historical events or situations - whether that standard derives from some divine authority postulated by the theologians, or from a static Reason or Nature postulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. It is not that short- coming occur in the application of the standard, or defects in the standard itself. It is that the attempt to erect such a standard is unhistorical and contradicts the very essence of history. It provides a dogmatic answer to questions which the historian is bound by his vocation incessantly to ask: the historian who accepts answers in advance to these questions goes to work with his eyes blindfolded and renounces his vocation. History is movement; and movement implies comparison. That is why historians tend to express their moral judgements in words of a comparative nature like ‘progressive' and 'reactionary' rather than in uncompromising absolutes like ‘good' and 'bad’; these are attempts to define different societies or historical phenomena not in relation to some absolute standard, but in their relation to one another. Moreover, when we examine these

supposedly absolute and extra-historical values, we find that they too are in fact rooted to history. The emergence of a particular value or ideal at a given time or place is explained by historical conditions of place and time. The practical content of hypothetical absolutes like equality, liberty, justice, or natural law varies from period to period, or from continent to continent. Every group has its own values, which are rooted in history. Every group protects itself against the intrusion of alien and inconvenient values, which it brands by opprobrious epithets as bourgeois and capitalist, or undemocratic and totalitarian, or, more crudely still, as un-English and un-American. The abstract standard or value, divorced from society and divorced from history, is as much an illusion as the abstract individual. The serious historian is the one who recognises the historically- conditioned character of all values, not the one who claims for his own values an objectivity beyond history. The beliefs which we hold and the standards of judgement which we set up are part of history, and are as much subject to historical investigation as any other aspect of human behaviour. Few sciences today - least of all the social sciences - would lay claim to total independence. But history has no fundamental dependence on something outside itself which would differentiate it from any other science.

Let me sum up what I have tried to say about the claim of history to be included among the sciences. The word science already covers so many different branches of knowledge, employing so many different methods and techniques, that the onus seems to rest on those who seek to exclude history rather than on those who seek to include it. It is significant that the arguments for exclusion come not from scientists anxious to exclude historians from their select company, but from historians and philosophers anxious to vindicate the status of history as a branch of humane letters. The dispute reflects the prejudice of the old division between the humanities and science, in which the humanities were supposed to represent the broad culture of the ruling class, and science the skills of the technicians who served it. The words 'humanities' and 'humane' are themselves in this context a survival of this time-honoured prejudice; and the fact that the antithesis between science and history will not make sense in any language but English suggests the peculiarly insular character of the prejudice. My principal objection to the refusal to call history a science is that it justifies and perpetuates the rift between the so-called 'two cultures'. The rift itself is a product of this ancient prejudice, based on a class structure of English society which itself belongs to the past ; and I am myself not convinced that the chasm which separates the historian from the geologist is any deeper or more unbridgeable than the chasm which separates the geologist from the physicist. But the way to mend the rift is not, in my view, to teach elementary science to historians or elementary history to scientists. This is a blind alley into which we have been led by muddled thinking. After all, scientists themselves do

not behave in this way. I have never heard of engineers being advised to attend elementary classes in botany.

One remedy I would suggest is to improve the standard of our history, to make it - if I may dare to say so - more scientific, to make our demands on those who pursue it more rigorous. History as an academic discipline in this university is sometimes thought of as a catch-all for those who find classics too difficult and science too serious. One impression which I hope to convey in these lectures is that history is a far more difficult subject than classics, and quite as serious as any science. But this remedy would imply a stronger faith among historians themselves in what they are doing. Sir Charles Snow, in a recent lecture on this theme, had a point when he contrasted the 'brash' optimism of the scientist with the ' subdued voice ' and ' anti-social feeling' of what he called the 'literary intellectual'. Some historians - and more of those who write about history without being historians - belong to this category of ‘literary intellectuals'. They are so busy telling us that history is not a science, and explaining what it cannot and should not be or do, that they have no time for its achievements and its potentialities.

The other way to heal the rift is to promote a profounder understanding of the identity of aim between scientists and historians; and this is the main value of the new and growing interest in the history and philosophy of science. Scientists, social scientists, and historians are all engaged in different branches of the same study: the study of man and his environment, of the effects of man on his environment and of his environment on man. The object of the study is the same: to increase man's understanding of, and mastery over, his environment. The presuppositions and the methods of the physicist, the geologist, the psychologist, and the historian differ widely in detail; nor do I wish to commit myself to the proposition that, in order to be more scientific, the historian must follow more closely the methods of physical science. But historian and physical scientist are united in the fundamental purpose of seeking to explain, and in the fundamental procedure of question and answer. The historian, like any other scientist, is an animal who incessantly asks the question 'Why ?' In my next lecture I shall examine the ways in which he puts the question and in which he attempts to answer it.

4 Causation in History

IF milk is set to boil in a saucepan, it boils over. I do not know, and have never wanted to know, why this happens; if pressed, I should probably attribute it to a propensity in milk to boil over, which is true enough but explains nothing. But then I am not a natural scientist.