

# AN HISTORICAL TRILOGY

*By R. L. Schuyler*

With the publication of "National Self-Government" Professor Ramsay Muir completes an historical trilogy to which he gives as a general title, "The Culmination of Modern History". The volumes previously published are "Nationalism and Internationalism" (1916) and "The Expansion of Europe" (1917). The work as a whole is a political interpretation of modern history from the point of view of the Great War.

A reader has no valid complaint to lodge against an historian who seeks in brief compass to generalize from the events of several centuries on the ground that his presentation of facts is more or less abbreviated. That is to be expected. But he has a right to demand that statements of fact, where such are given, should be substantially correct. Unfortunately, Professor Muir is guilty of a good many lapses from factual accuracy. A few examples may with propriety be put in evidence. In "The Expansion of Europe" it is stated that Virginia was planted in 1608 (page 34); that Albany is located at the junction of the Mohawk and the Hudson (page 29); that "full religious toleration" was allowed in Maryland (page 37); that the English conquest of New Netherlands took place in 1667 (page 42); that the Virginia assembly of 1619 consisted of one representative from each "township" (page 35); that India fell into a state of "complete anarchy" following the collapse of the Mogul Empire (page 50); that

the United States is the single instance of a daughter-nation outnumbering its mother country (page 56); and that the Monroe Doctrine has been safeguarded by the British navy (page 102), a statement which, while partially true, manifestly leaves out of consideration those occasions when the Doctrine was invoked against Great Britain.

In "National Self-Government" (page 29) the party cabinet is said to have been the main motive force in British politics ever since 1784, although the party cabinet in fact disappeared from British politics in 1915 and has not yet been restored. To say that the middle class "abandoned power" in England in 1867 (page 76) raises the question, who has been ruling in that country since that date? The remark that outside of Britain and the communities sprung from her, representative systems have been the product of the last hundred years (page 1) overlooks the history of France since 1789. The statement that almost all classes of the population were growing prosperous in England during the third quarter of the nineteenth century (page 152) conjures up a vision of English society in that period that is altogether too roseate. Within the narrow compass of six pages (pages 38-44) the author dispenses a variety of error respecting the Constitution of the United States which suggests that he has never read that document.

Turning from matters of fact to questions of judgment and interpretation: to say that the fundamental cause of the decline of the Roman Empire "was that the life-giving balance and conflict between Law and Liberty were more and more lost as the centralized power of the Emperors and their officials increased", ("National-

ism and Internationalism", page 26) is a most summary and *ex cathedra* way of disposing of a debatable question. To represent British policy in its support of Turkey at the Congress of Berlin as subordinate to that of Germany and Austria (page 104) seems unwarranted, while the assertion that this was the sole occasion in the history of the national movement when Britain ranged herself against the national cause leaves Ireland out of consideration. It is assumed that the rapid changes of ministry in France during the Third Republic have meant political instability ("National Self-Government", page 148). The Paris Commune of 1871 should not be described as "the aimless and reckless outburst of mere revolutionary insanity" (page 145). The system of national education created in France under the Third Republic, which certainly taught patriotism and Republicanism, is highly commended ("National Self-Government", pages 204-5); while the educational system of the German Empire, which taught patriotism and devotion to the Hohenzollern, is represented as tending to destroy individuality and thought (pages 186-190). Of course it always makes a difference whose ox is gored, but is not the real issue whether educational systems should be utilized for the purposes of nationalistic propaganda at all? There are those who think that we should divorce nationalism, as we have divorced sectarianism, from education.

Professor Muir is perhaps unduly severe in his judgment upon America's traditional policy of aloofness from "world politics". Americans, he thinks, were persuaded that they were a chosen people, who should not concern themselves with the problems of the rest of the world ("The Expansion

of Europe", page 65). It is true that the American Revolution was not a crusading movement, like the French Revolution, yet there have always been Americans who, like Jefferson, hoped that the example of the United States would prove contagious, and believed that the best service the United States could perform to the world was to put its own house in order and thus to afford to other peoples an inspiring proof of the practicability of democracy.

Professor Muir's trilogy is one of the more serious historical interpretations called forth by the war. It had its origin in a popular lecture in which he undertook to show that the chief political developments of the modern world were brought simultaneously to a test in the Great War. These are, in his view, (1) the growth of the idea of nationality; (2) the growth of the idea of internationalism as the fulfilment, not the antithesis, of nationality; (3) the growth of self-government through representative institutions as dependent upon the sense of nationality; and (4) the expansion of the political influence and ideas of Europe over the non-European world.

Professor Muir interprets the Great War as the culmination of modern history in the sense that it is to determine whether the world is to be organized on the basis of cooperative nationalism or military domination, democracy or autocracy, trusteeship over the backward peoples of the earth or imperial exploitation. His volumes should contribute to a better understanding of what may be called the historical background of these antithetical principles, and even those who are tolerably familiar with the broad outlines of modern history will find much that is suggestive in what he

has written. Those who incline to a materialistic interpretation of history will feel that he overemphasizes ideas at the expense of the brute facts of human existence.

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Nationalism and Internationalism. By Ramsay Muir. Houghton Mifflin Co.  
The Expansion of Europe. By Ramsay Muir. Houghton Mifflin Co.  
National Self-Government. By Ramsay Muir. Henry Holt and Co.