HISTORY

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AN APOLOGY FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH.

IN the middle of the nineteenth century John Grote, the philosopher and younger brother of George Grote the historian, once lamented the tendency of all studies to run to history.¹ More recently Lord Morley has remarked that history "has advanced with powerful stride to a commanding place within the last forty or fifty years,"² while Croce has said that the nineteenth century "has been well called the century of history."³ Lessing described the course of history as "the education of the human race," and it has even been proposed that history should take the place of classics as the basis of humanistic education. These testimonies to the progress of his study may be gratifying to the historian; but there are penalties for success, and criticism is the lightest and most wholesome of them. No historian will therefore object to the rankling arrow which philosophy, as Dr. Barker tells us in the July number of HISTORY, has left in his historical mind, since its shock has stimulated a provocative inquiry into the meaning and value of history, of the historic method, and of historical research. But it behoves someone who believes in those things, even as they are practised and taught in a modern university, to take up the challenge, unless we are prepared to compromise like Dr. Barker and *jurare in verba philosophi*.

The issue goes very deep, and the differences between the historic method and the philosophic idea presented by Dr. Barker are fundamental. In the words he puts into his philosopher's mouth, the historian rarely, if ever, attempts "to think together all this memory, or to find its significance and plan," and foolishly assumes "that historical process is the explanation of existence." Thinking

¹ *History*, ii. 65.

² *Recollections*, i. 95.

³ *On History*, p. 90.

things together is, we infer, the method of philosophy, and the explanation of existence the object of its thought. So Plato of old thought together philosophy and statecraft, and deduced his conclusion that men could never be governed well until philosophers were made into kings, or kings into philosophers; and so Dr. Barker, under the guidance of Croce, has thought together history and philosophy, and tells us that things can never be well with history until it is mated with philosophy, or with philosophy until the philosopher learns some history. Put in that general way, the conclusion is hard to resist. No historian will deny that the philosopher is better for a knowledge of history, and he does not like to cut himself off from all philosophy.

But the difficulty comes in at once as soon as we begin to think, not as the philosopher thinks, in synthetic, general terms, but as the historian tries to think, in terms of scientific analysis, and to ask ourselves, what is the philosophy with which history is to mate? Many years ago, when I first examined in the Final Honours School of Modern History at Oxford, a discussion arose among the examiners on the relative value of the different subjects prescribed for the examination; and one examiner, apparently with a philosophical bias, distinguished the papers on Political Science and Political Economy from the purely historical papers by calling the former "the two thinking papers." I demurred by remarking that it was difficult for anyone to deal adequately with Stubbs' *Charters*, for instance, without thinking, and the rejoinder was somewhat as follows: "Ah, that is true enough, but that is thinking about something definite. That is not real thinking; real thinking is thinking in the abstract." That I take to be one of the differences, perhaps the fundamental difference, between the historical and the philosophical method. The philosopher conceives it his business to think things together, that is to say, to ignore what seem to him unessential *differentia* and confine his attention to the essential unities—to think, for instance, about "man" and not about particular men or nations, to put "mind" or "spirit" in his programme, but not its heterogeneous manifestations, to dream of the city of God, but ignore its many mansions, and, still more, the stones of which it is built.

Philosophy is therefore more sublime than history; but it is also more vague, and vagueness pervades its objections to history. The historian is charged, for instance, with assuming "that historical process is the explanation of existence." The existence of what? The existence of God or the universe, life or man? These things have all been philosophically "thought together,"

and "existence" conceived as an abstract problem apart from every particular thing that exists. Let us take a simpler instance, such as the existence of North America, and see how far the charge of assuming that historical process explains it is relevant. Of course we must use a historical method and point out that North America has many kinds of existence. It exists as a tract of land, and the explanation of that is not a matter for the historian, but for the physicist, the geologist, and the geographer. It exists as the home of a certain flora and fauna, and the explanation of these things rests with the biologist. It exists as the habitat of certain races of men, which the anthropologist may explain, so far as they are aboriginal or prehistoric. The historical process only enters the witness-box when the political existence of North America comes into question; and the historians are prepared to testify, with some confidence that their testimony will help towards an explanation. Does the philosopher mean that the history of the discoveries by Columbus and his successors, of the Pilgrim Fathers and the Plantations, of colonial wars, the War of Independence and the Civil War, of the growth of constitutions and the formation of States and Territories, afford no explanation of the political existence of North America to-day? And if historical process does not explain, are we to seek a solution from a philosophy which knows nothing of red men or white men, Frenchmen or Dutchmen, but can only think of "man"? No historian ever pretended that historical process explains the "existence" of anything except the particular things which have been subject to a process observable by historical investigation; and the methods of that investigation vary according to the subject, like those of the man of science. The astronomer uses a telescope, the biologist a microscope, the chemist a test-tube; the man of science does not think these methods or things together nor imagine that thinking, however profound, about existence in general will solve his particular problems.

The charge that historical process explains nothing comes, however, only from words put into the mouth of an imaginary philosopher. Possibly no real philosopher would suggest it, and assuredly it could occur to no real historian; for historical process is so obviously the explanation of historical phenomena that it would be superfluous to pile up examples. Any one will suffice. Does not, for instance, the intervention of the United States help to explain the victory of the Allies in the late war? Does not that victory help to explain the Peace of Versailles, the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the revolution in Germany, and the

innumerable other consequences that followed thereupon? Or will our philosopher tell us that these are only sequences, not consequences, that history has nothing to do with cause and effect, and that even the cause does not explain the effect? Apparently Dr. Barker, with one foot resting on philosophy and the other on history, is so upset when his philosophy wobbles that he is driven to concede even this. "I admitted to myself," he writes, "that history only dealt with How and not with Why."

Here, again, we need analysis rather than thinking things together, and have to ask what sort of history we are discussing. There is history for babes and sucklings, and history for grown-up men and women; there are many sorts of history even for them, from the history which is as a tale that is told, or the history that is a political or religious pamphlet, to the history as conceived by Gibbon and Ranke, Stubbs and Maitland. But the history that wilfully excludes from its scope and competence all attempt to explain why men and societies have done what they did and become what they are is surely not worth discussing. May we not ask, for instance, why Napoleon fell, and must we be content with the philosopher's answer that he fell because he tilted against eternal verities? May not the historian say something about the battle of Trafalgar (among many other causes), and, if he is challenged further to explain the victory of Trafalgar, may he not adduce St. Vincent's reforms, the build of British ships, the excellence of British guns and gunnery, and manifold other details, the significance of which is apt to elude the philosopher's transcendental gaze? "History," says Dr. Barker, "does not explain values, on which alone a *raison d'être* can be grounded." That may be the history conceived and taught by moral philosophers who call themselves historians; but not a few teachers, even in elementary schools, account for the English victory at Crécy by the long-bow and know that it existed in 1347 because its value as a weapon of war had been tested in the wars of Edward I and Edward II. So, too, they know something of the value of the "round" ship as compared with the galley, and can therefore explain why it was possible for seamen to cast a girdle round the globe in the age of discovery, and why Drake and his fellows defeated the Spanish Armada; and that historical knowledge further helps them to explain why the Spanish Empire declined and the British Empire grew.

These things are nothing to our hypothetical philosopher. Nor apparently has he considered how he is going to answer those questions "why," which belong to history but are to

be annexed to the province of philosophy, except by historical research. So we have a list of the vain stories which occupy the idle curiosity of historians, who are not philosophers and write what philosophers do not consider history—"the wardrobe of a mediæval king; the panoply of a mediæval knight; the structure of the *Great Harry*; the rig of a frigate." The philosopher presumably does not know that the wardrobe of a mediæval king was the greater part of his administrative system, the study of which explains how he governed his kingdom and extended or lost his dominions. He does not know that the panoply of a mediæval knight helps to explain baronial predominance and the form of mediæval society; that the structure of the *Great Harry*, with other such-like details, helps us to understand why Henry VIII was able to break the bonds of Rome and defy what philosophers thought were eternal verities; and that the rig of frigates and similar matters contributed to British naval supremacy, which in its turn had its *raison d'être* and its value in explaining why the world is what it is to-day. Not seeing these things, he naturally concludes that history explains no values and provides no *raisons d'être*. But this is not Croce's view. He denounces the philosopher's contempt of "brute facts" and the philosophical attitude which "amounts to this: leave ideas to the philosophers and brute facts to the historians—let us be satisfied with serious things and leave their toys to the children." Croce says rather, "Let us raise up the debased countenances of the calumniated 'brute facts,' and we shall see the light of thought resplendent upon their foreheads."¹ A good deal of thought goes into the rig of a frigate.

Dr. Barker's conception of history is as odd as its limitation in his same paragraph to "the record of human will and action," which excludes the effects of flood and fire, famine and pestilence, and all the operations of Nature on human fortunes, and rules out the destruction of Pompeii, the Black Death, the Plague and Fire of London, and Irish and Russian famine, not to mention those conditions of climate and terrain which have laid the foundations upon which nations have had to build their various social and political structures. Why this elimination from history of Nature and of everything that is not a record of human will and action? The answer accounts for much in Dr. Barker's conception of history. It is to him a sort of sermon, or at least a treatise in moral philosophy. Nothing has a value, he says, except in so far as it "serves a moral purpose"; and royal wardrobes, mediæval

¹ *On History*, pp. 73, 75.

panoplies, naval equipment have no "value" because their "value" is not moral. So Nature is excluded because man is not responsible for its operations: they do not point a moral, though they may adorn a tale. And what Dr. Barker means when he says that history does not explain values or provide a *raison d'être*, is that it does not profess to answer the theological, moral, or political questions why things ought, or ought not, to have existed or to exist.

This thinking together of theology, morals, politics, and history telescopes some of Dr. Barker's sentences out of all perspective and understanding. "To know," he writes, "how private property came to exist is not to know why it *should* exist." In this sentence the historical and the moral points are hopelessly thought together. The question how a thing came to exist is historical, the question whether it should exist is moral or political. Dr. Barker is arguing that history cannot answer the question "why"; and in order to prove his point he contends that history cannot answer historical questions because it does not pretend to answer moral questions. He would hardly contend that "to know how private property came to exist is not to know why it existed"; and so, instead of "why it existed," he writes "why it should exist." To either contention, when disentangled from their confusion, the historian would be prepared to make some reply. He would maintain that an adequate knowledge of how private property came to exist would help him to explain why it existed in the past and exists in the present; and that a knowledge of why it existed in the past and exists in the present would provide him with some reasons for determining whether or no it should continue to exist for the future. In other words, he would bring the question to the test of experience and not try to solve the problem by thinking in the abstract. And if the historian cannot answer the question from experience and recorded memory, how is the philosopher going to explain why private property existed in the past or exists at present? The philosopher appears, in fact, to be putting to the historian questions which he claims for his own province but cannot answer by means of his own investigations, and then to be discounting history because it fails to do outside its sphere that which philosophy cannot do in its own.

We should have liked a better foundation than this for the quiet assumption that "the historian, with all his historical 'values,' must come before the bar of philosophy." Why should Gibbon be tried by philosophers any more than Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton, or Darwin? Or is the philosopher the judge of the value

of all the earth? Must we learn nothing about the stars, the mechanism of the universe, or the growth of natural life, unless our astronomers, physicists, and biologists can prove before the philosopher's judgment-seat that what they have discovered is for what the moral philosopher calls "the betterment of humanity"? Before we submit to the jurisdiction we should also like a better assurance of competence and impartiality in the judge than is generally forthcoming when one branch of learning presumes to call another to its bar. The old theological claim to sit in judgment upon all learning and all science has assuredly not been dethroned for the sake of a restoration in the interests of philosophy. The particular instance in which Dr. Barker asserts the claim seems also to be particularly unfortunate. The historian is to be called to the bar, but "nationalisms with their memories of Cuchulain and Stephen Dushan and other heroes and glories" are to be put to the question; and the only ground for identifying the historian with these nationalisms is the judge's unsupported allegation that they "feed on the historic method." Murderers feed on bread. Is bread therefore bad, and should saints eschew the staff of life? Chauvinists have undoubtedly quoted history to serve their purpose, as people even worse than patriots have quoted Scripture; but they have also quoted philosophy, and Hegel and Nietzsche had as much to do with the perversion of German patriotism as had Ranke or Treitschke. I have no idea what Dr. Barker means by "the historic method." But most historians regard it as scientific, and use it for purposes the very reverse of those assumed by Dr. Barker. Does he really think that the methods of historical research are responsible for the propagation of historical legends? One might as well associate philosophy with Attila or Genghis Khan as the historic method with Cuchulain and Stephen Dushan.

There is, of course, history and history. But there is also philosophy and philosophy; and, once more, before we recognise the philosophical tribunal, we want to know which philosophers will sit and what philosophy they will administer. For even philosophy is not so plain and simple a thing that it stands in no need of analysis or discrimination. Dr. Barker is a fervid admirer of Greek philosophy, and especially that of Plato. But he also quotes Hobbes, whose unquoted remarks on philosophy are quite as entertaining and well informed as his words, which Dr. Barker quotes, on history. "Philosophy," says Hobbes, "was not risen to the Grecians"; and after enumerating various ancient

schools, in a chapter¹ entitled "Of Darkness from Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions," he proceeds to ask "What has been the utility of those schools? . . . There is nothing so absurd that the old philosophers, as Cicero saith (who was one of them), have not some of them maintained." "I know," he writes elsewhere,² "that Aristotle . . . for a foundation of his doctrine, maketh men by nature, some more worthy to command, meaning the wiser sort, such as he thought himself to be for his philosophy; others to serve, meaning those that had strong bodies, but were not philosophers as he. . . . And therefore, for the ninth law of Nature I put this, 'That every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature.' The breach of this precept is pride."

Our exalted court of philosophers would not apparently be unanimous in its judgment, unless indeed the philosophers found it easier to agree on what history, than on what philosophy, is or should be. But we must push our caveats one step further and deny that the sort of philosophy which puts itself forward as a judge of history has any claim or competence to act in that capacity. We have not, of course, a word to say against many philosophers or many philosophies: we are merely dealing with a philosophy which claims to determine the nature and functions of history by, and in virtue of, a method which is philosophical but not historical. Here Dr. Barker bases himself on a quotation from Hobbes³ to the effect that philosophy "excludes history as well natural as political . . . because such knowledge is but experience or authority, and not ratiocination." The exclusions are so large that Hobbes' definition would appear detrimental rather to philosophy than to history; for "natural history" then included all and more than all we now mean by natural science. But it always seems a little unfair to tie philosophers down to such details as quotations from themselves, because their subject is so many-sided that contradictions are almost inevitable; and when Hobbes is dealing more particularly with history, in the preface to his translation of Thucydides, he writes of "the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves

¹ *Leviathan*, c. xlvii.

² *Ibid.* c. xv.

³ The reference is not to the *Leviathan*, but to Hobbes' *Elements of Philosophy* (*English Works*, ed. Molesworth in sixteen volumes, i. 10-11). Dr. Barker omits "or authority" after "experience" in his quotation, and seems to me to think both terms together. Elsewhere (*Leviathan*, c. xlvii) Hobbes refers to "that original knowledge called experience" which "is found as well in brute beasts as in man"; and Dr. Barker is too modest when he says that "any knowledge I had was 'but experience.'"

prudently in the present and providently towards the future." An excellent statement, but a little difficult to reconcile with his other definition of history as excluding ratiocination.

I must, however, agree with both Hobbes and Dr. Barker in excluding history from right ratiocination as defined by Hobbes. "Whatsoever," he writes, "we know by right ratiocination can neither be false nor doubtful"; and again, "nothing is produced by reasoning aright but general, eternal, and immutable truth."¹ Into such altitudes the historian cannot follow the philosopher; but by abstaining he may avoid the falls which sometimes await the philosopher when the wax of his Icarian wings is melted by the sun. Convinced of the rightness of his reasoning and of the infallibility of its results, Hobbes ventured, not only into historical theories about the social contract and origin of the State, but into the rarer atmosphere of pure mathematics. And there he encountered the fierce heat of criticism from Wallis and other real mathematicians, with such fatal results that he found himself excluded from the fellowship of the Royal Society, and attributed his fate not to any defects in his right ratiocination, but to the malignity of Wallis.

Hobbes, indeed, in spite of his philosophical acuteness, fell into the same sort of error with his ratiocination as those into which smaller and more modern authorities have fallen with their Education, spelt with a capital letter. He regarded ratiocination as a sort of infallible technique, the possession of which enabled him to teach or write about any subject, whether he knew anything about it or not. He had no doubt that real philosophy was his philosophy, and that his reasoning was right. And the test of its rightness was his conviction that it must be so. He had got what Dr. Barker desiderates when he says that "every history that is a genuine history implies some view of the world . . . and if there is much history nowadays which has no view of the world, and is rather a compilation of facts (which men sometimes call by the name of research), perhaps it is not history."² So Hobbes derived his theory of the social contract and origin of the State, not from historical research, but from his conception of the world and of its absolute need for sovereignty. By his right ratiocination he attained to a view of mankind which implied what he thought was a genuine history of the origin of society; and thus he has

¹ *Elements of Philosophy*, loc. cit.; *Leviathan*, c. xlvii.

² Croce, it may be remarked, repudiates the idea of a definitive philosophy (*On History*, pp. 158-9).

become the type of that contractual school of political philosophers who, like Locke, Rousseau, and others, each reached by similar methods of "right ratiocination" infallible but mutually destructive conceptions of "general, eternal, and immutable truth." That contractual school, which is recommended by Dr. Barker for imitation by historians, is the antithesis of the historical. The historian may have his view of the world, but he prefers to deduce it from history, and not to deduce his history from imaginary plans or categorical imperatives. The weakness of the philosopher is that, while he admits there are many matters of study, he thinks there is only one method of studying them; that that method is applicable to all; and that his mastery of that method entitles him to summon them all to appear at the bar of philosophy.

It was in this frame of mind that Dr. Barker came across Croce's *Theory and History of Historiography*, the title of which is epitomised and popularised on its cover into *On History*; and the book, or at least its main thesis, that real history is always contemporary history, and philosophy as well, appears to have captivated his imagination. It is perhaps a characteristic of the specialist in ideas, as distinct from the man of research, that he is somewhat susceptible to the philosophical fancies of the moment; for whatever truth there may be in the contention that history, with however distant a past it deals, is always an expression of present thought, it appears to apply with greater force to philosophy, which, according to Croce, "is never anything but the thought of the eternal present."¹ At any rate Dr. Barker clearly thinks that the important thing for history is what philosophy thinks of it; and, accepting Croce's identification of history with philosophy, he proceeds to discuss the new meaning which the historian must give to history in order to make it toe the philosophical line. "What, then," he asks, "is history, and with what does it deal?" In order to make it deal with the present, he denies that it "really" deals with the past; and he gives two reasons for the paradox. Firstly, the past which survives is "a part—the part which accident and economy have conspired to leave—and not the whole"; and secondly, in dealing with the past, we select, even from what survives, that part of the record which appeals to us, neglecting whatever is not either "a root of the present" or "an analogue of the present." But a part of the past does not become a part of the present because it is not the whole of the past; and if a part of the past is not "really" the past, why should a part of

¹ *On History*, p. 61.

the present "really" be the present? The argument that you cannot "really" deal with a thing at all, because you have to deal with it bit by bit, looks like a part of mediæval scholasticism which is not the whole of modern philosophy. Croce himself has abjured the idea that philosophy itself has to deal with one general problem, and points out that the study of particular problems "was destined to produce eventually a change of view as regards the general problem."¹

The argument from conscious or unconscious selection is somewhat more subtle. But so much of the past is a root of the present that the charge against history of only selecting those roots of the present loses most of its point. Nor is the analogue between republican Rome and revolutionary France quite convincing. The French revolutionists were not historians and did not write the history of Rome. Dr. Barker seems here to think together the historian and the politician who merely goes to history for his political arguments and takes away only what he wants for political purposes. Revolutionists have always been anxious to clothe themselves in the respectable garb of an ideal past; but the fact that they borrowed its garments did not make them a part of the past, or the past a very large part of them, and the examples of Brutus and Cassius were a political excuse rather than a historical inspiration. Imitation is generally somewhat of a fraud, and in any case the "analogues" have little to do with real history. Even the "roots" do not exhaust its content. Do Egyptologists write of the Pharaohs because their rule was a root or an analogue of the present? Did Sayce discover in the Hittites a subtle analogue of the British empire? Does Sir Arthur Evans seek in Minoan Crete an expression of whatever views he may hold of the present? Must a historian of Israel believe in the survival of the lost Ten Tribes? Cannot a European archæologist write of the Incas, the Aztecs, ancient India, China, or Japan without being told in HISTORY that his work "is not an explanation" and "has no significance or plan," because those ancient pasts are not the roots or analogues of his present?

It is admitted that "this view, that all history is contemporary history, depends ultimately upon a conception of philosophy"; and the admission may lead the historian to shrug his shoulders and say that in that case it is no concern of his. History for him is based on other foundations than the embarrassed and transient phantoms of philosophy. But idle curiosity might tempt him to

¹ *On History*, pp. 155, 164.

ask a few questions about the "mind or spirit" which in each age "is struggling for self-consciousness"; "has its phases, which vary from age to age"; "sits at the roaring loom, and weaves its living web"; "plunged in time, concrete in history, is ceaselessly thinking and making and being in successive presents"; and "is the object of the study of the philosopher." Sublimity is all very well for Erdgeist in *Faust*, from which Dr. Barker's imagery comes; but history needs to be more precise, and we wish Dr. Barker could have told us, for instance, whether the spirit also makes itself, the loom at which it sits, and the stuff it weaves thereon. The spirit is presumably the spirit of man, but what is the spirit of man? Can we talk philosophically about the "colour" of man, when "man" consists of white men, yellow men, red men, and black men? And is not the spirit infinitely more complex and variegated than the colour? Each man has his own spirit or mind, and to think them all together into one mind or spirit, and to talk of that spirit sitting and weaving and thinking and making, is to create a fictitious unity which never did anything at all. Individual men and particular generations have thought and done many diverse things; groups of men have thought sufficiently alike to be able to do many things as groups; and those groups have grown larger and larger until in the future it may become possible for a universal league of nations to develop a universal spirit of man. But, so far, the "spirit of man" has been a philosophical generalisation which is historically false.

Whether there is and has been one spirit of man, enduring from the days of the anthropoid apes to the present and extending from the spiritual latitude of London to that of Timbuctoo, or whether there has been, and is, an infinite number of different human spirits, may be merely a matter of terminology. The theologian prefers to think of millions of human souls, the philosopher of a single human mind or spirit. But in either case it is the diversity or the variation, and not the unity, that produces the changing conceptions of history. Dr. Barker himself talks about two pasts, "the past which is constant" and "the past which changes," and it is the latter, he says, "which matters most" because it is part of the present. So Mr. Chesterton has it that the real St. Thomas Beket was not the Beket of his age but the Beket to whom the fourteenth century prayed. Each generation makes its own past, and history is not real until it becomes a legend! But surely there is confusion here. These are pictures, not the past. There is only one past, and that is unalterable; but there are many conceptions of the past, and

they alter from age to age. We might speak of our conception of God as Dr. Barker speaks of the past, and say that it varies from age to age, and Voltaire came near to saying that each generation makes its own God. But Dr. Barker would naturally be shocked if we spoke of two Gods, a God which is constant and a God which changes, and said that the God which changes matters most. It is just as confusing to write of two pasts, when we mean one past and a multitude of conceptions. We might as well say that there are many Mont Blancs because we have seen many different views of that mountain.

There is, of course, continual change in our conceptions of a past which does not change itself; and happily, owing to the progress of historical research, the change is in an ordered direction towards a greater knowledge and a fuller comprehension of different points of view. It may be that historians still write history too much from the point of view of the patrons who pay them; but the patron is no longer a private person, or a limited class of plutocrats, but a public which is a fair sample of the community. Hence even classical history is beginning to take account of the life, economic interests, and influence of the masses who used to appear in its pages as no more than slaves or the mob. And it may be said that that expansion of sympathy and intelligence is itself an expression of the present, and that recent histories of Greece and Rome are therefore contemporary history. An idealist might go further, and say that we are absorbing and understanding more and more of the past, thus making the past a greater and greater part of the present and founding a community of time as well as a league of nations. But we must not be too transcendental, and the theory that all history is contemporary history is a fanciful exaggeration. It seems to be an expansion of the idea *cogito, ergo sum* into the idea that not merely whatever I think, but whatever I think about, becomes part of me. An astronomer's thoughts of the sun and the moon and the stars are no doubt part of him, but we can hardly say that his mind is made up of those heavenly bodies, or extend his ego until it includes the universe. Pan-egoism may be the latest Protean form of pantheism, and, as Herr Teufelsdröckh says, "this so solid-seeming world but an air-image, and ME the only reality";¹ but transcendental harmony cannot be based on the confusion of things with the knowledge of them.²

¹ *Sartor Resartus*, c. viii.

² Croce (*On History*, p. 108) repeats the old philosophical fancy, "nothing exists outside thought." Therefore America, gravitation, radium, etc., did not exist until they were discovered. The element of truth in this paradox

Our absorption of a knowledge of the past does not make the past part of the present. The history we write of the past is contemporary historiography but not contemporary history. A portrait is not the man it portrays, a landscape is not the scene it depicts, a history is not the thing it relates, and an image of God is not God.

Nor is this ever-changing "contemporary history" the history that matters most, except as a part of politics. As a part of real knowledge it matters least, because it is the most fickle and least well informed. It has no solid foundations, but varies with every gust of popular opinion. It comes not of the breathing of the past upon the present, but of the reading of the present into the past. An interesting essay might, for instance, be written on the "contemporary history" of the reign of King John which was written during the reign of Henry VIII and gradually converted the worst of the Angevins into something like a national hero seeking to break the bonds of Rome. Why should we say that the glorified St. Thomas Beket of the fourteenth century was the real St. Thomas any more than the St. Thomas whom the sixteenth denounced as a traitor? This whitewashed John and vilified Thomas were perhaps the history that mattered most to the politicians of the Reformation, but they were a reflexion of politics and a perversion of history. And the other "nationalisms" which Dr. Barker sets down to the discredit of the historic method, were really the outcome of similar analogues and inspirations of which he seems to approve. Cuchulain and Stephen Dushan owe more to modern Irish and Serbian nationalism than nationalism owes to them; and the judgment they have most to fear is not that of philosophy but of historical research.

It is the irony of Dr. Barker's position that he entertains so many philosophic doubts of the historical research which he really needs. He appears to have been singularly unfortunate in the research students whose "tragical compilations" he has come across, and to have been warned off the post-graduate course by those awful examples. And he wishes to save others as well as himself from this "mistaken imitation of the research that is necessary and valuable in natural science." So a deep gulf is fixed between the "natural world" and the "human world." One is susceptible to research, the other is not, and for the oddest

is merely that things do not exist for us until we know of their existence; and even that is not quite true. The saying seems really to amount to no more than the tautological statement that nothing exists in the realm of thought outside the realm of thought.

of reasons. "To control the natural world we must know it; to know it we must have at our service a vast mass of induction based on a vast observation. The world of human action is a different world." Is, then, the human world a different world because we cannot control it, or because, in order to control it, we need not know it, or because, in order to know it, we need no such induction or observation? One would have thought "the world of human action" to be one which human action could control more easily than it could control the movements of the sun and the stars, or even the tides and the weather and general behaviour of our own erratic globe. And has not Dr. Barker told us himself that "history is the record of human will and action," and that institutions do not grow, but are made? But the man of science does not pretend to make the elements with which he deals, and I believe he still disclaims the possibility of even transmuting one into another. Matter is far less plastic than mind, and one would have thought that the moral was precisely the reverse of Dr. Barker's deduction, and that in order to guide human thought and action aright we needed all the induction and observation we could make.

If Dr. Barker will pardon my saying so, he seems to me to be always, with an altruistic perversity, getting in his own way. There is no need for him to debar himself from the advantages of research which he concedes so generously to the man of science. And historical research would not only help him to combat the nationalisms in his path: it would help him to deal with Hobbes, whom, I am sure, he dislikes at heart. Historical research redeems history from Hobbes' reproach of consisting of nothing but authority and experience which man shares with brute beasts; raises it to the level of that philosophy "the nature of which dependeth not on authors"; frees it from "the errors brought in from false or uncertain history"; and vindicates for it that truth which Hobbes denies to "that which is gotten by reasoning from the authority of books . . . because it . . . is not knowledge but faith."¹ Bad work occurs, no doubt, in historical research as it does everywhere else; and perhaps teachers themselves are not always so discriminating as they might be before they advise or encourage students to enter that arduous path. But some universities deprecate discrimination at the start, and any other means of selection than self-determination; and Dr. Barker himself adduces the example of Thucydides, who did what he did "himself and by himself." If you leave students to find their way by

¹ These quotations all come from c. xlii of the *Leviathan*.

themselves in the dark, you may get an occasional *tour de force*, but you must always expect some "tragical compilations." And against them must in justice be set the fact that even for the M.A., the least pretentious of research degrees, work has been done which has been printed by the university presses of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Manchester, has been approved by scholars in two hemispheres, and become part of the revisions in which historical learning largely consists.

Dr. Barker, however, is all for standing on the old ways and solid thinking about the old facts. What, he asks, is the magic about unprinted material and new facts? "What, after all, is a 'fact'; and is a fact always worth finding?" The question about the nature of fact applies as much to old fact as to new, and the answer to that about finding is that you never can tell until you have found it; a new fact may be worth a good deal more than the old. But that is not the point of historical research. The crucial question is, how do you know that facts are facts, and what is the value of solid thinking about the old facts if they are not facts at all? And as for thinking, how does one learn to think about history except by finding out what history is? One cannot become a historian merely by reading history or even by right ratiocination. One must be able to tell the false from the true and the fact from the fiction; and there is no means to that end except by a training in historical research. Solid deduction from facts which are fiction is more fatal than feeble induction from truth. It is all very well to talk about going deep into the minds of men, but how do we get into touch with their minds at all unless we know what they said and wrote and did, and not merely what historians have told us? Such knowledge is not "gotten by reasoning from the authority of books;" and, if we want to fathom historical truth, we must plumb other things than the literary or the philosophical mind.

The "magic" about unprinted material is too deep for adequate explanation in a sentence or two. The main point is that the vast bulk of the evidence on which history rests, or should rest, has never been printed at all, and without recourse to it we have little assurance that what has been printed really represents the facts. Dr. Barker himself contends that history does not "really" deal with the past because it only deals with a part. That is part of the case for the study of unprinted material. Secondly, even when material has been printed, and accurately printed (which is none too often the case), the original MS. will tell us much that the print does not; it may reveal the authorship, its date, and various

degrees of manipulation. One can only get the real history of Elizabeth's acts of supremacy and uniformity or of the "Star Chamber" act of 1487 from the MSS. and not from the printed statutes; and I fear Dr. Barker has done a lot of solid thinking and teaching about a certain charter of Henry I to London, part of which, at least, is a later forgery. It might not require much thinking of the philosophical sort to produce a scientific edition of mediæval English legislation, but it would save a number of people, including philosophers, if they studied it, from a whole morass of deductive confusion.

Some, perhaps much, of this spade-work may be merely the digging of "sherds," and some of the diggers may not be able to do anything better than dig. But even those humbler workers need not be ashamed. It is a quaint conceit to set up an antithesis between thinking and historical research. Even the digger for so obvious and material a thing as gold must be able to discriminate between good and bad ore; and the discrimination between new and old, significant and insignificant, historical fact involves more thinking than the philosopher, who limits himself to the old, appears to imagine. In any case, the diggers are better employed in collecting and sorting material than if they took to philosophy and attempted to build the temple without the stones, to make plans of the universe before they surveyed the ground, and to form "some definite conception of history" before starting to study the facts of which it consists. It may be that solid thinking was done about the old facts of Minoan civilisation before men began to dig up the sherds in Crete; but it may also be that the diggers have done more for its understanding than they could ever have done by thinking in general about an abstract spirit or mind of man.

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