

# A MODERN HISTORY FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

BY  
ERIC A. WALKER.



**MASKELL MILLER, LIMITED**  
**CAPE TOWN**

**A MODERN HISTORY FOR  
SOUTH AFRICANS**

*By the same Author.*

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**“Historical Atlas of South Africa.”**

**“Lord de Villiers and His Times.  
South Africa 1842-1914.”**

**“A History of England”  
(*Williams and Walker.*)**

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## PREFACE.

THIS book is called A MODERN HISTORY FOR SOUTH AFRICANS because it is an attempt to show South African history in its proper setting as part of the history of Western Civilisation. Had I been asked to write a modern history, I should have had to content myself with a very much shorter account of the history of South Africa ; had I been writing a purely South African history, I should have merely referred to the history of the outer world in passing. As it is, considerably more than one-half of this book deals with Europe, the British Empire, the U.S.A., Japan, and so on, but throughout I have tried to keep all in touch with South Africa. At each stage I have given the general history first and have then written a chapter giving the South African history of that period in greater detail. In the chapters dealing with general history I have, wherever possible, used South African instances to illustrate general statements and, in the chapters on South African history, I have sought for parallels to South African events and movements in other parts of the world.

The book covers the ground marked out in the Matriculation syllabus. For the convenience of those who may wish to study any subject mentioned in that syllabus, I have drawn up a special table of references (*vide* p. 467). There are also subject-headings in the text and the usual general index.

At the end of each chapter I have given a short list of the books, portions of books and maps which I found most useful in writing that chapter. There are, however, a few books to which only general reference is made in those lists because, between them, they cover the whole period. These are, for general history, the *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. vi—xii and the volume of maps, and, for the South

African History, Theal's *History of South Africa* (from the beginning to 1872), Cory's *Rise of South Africa* (1820-46), and my own *Political History of South Africa* (from the beginning to 1924) which is due to appear early in 1927.

Dates have been banished as far as possible to the table at the end of the book. That table shows South African and general events in parallel columns so that the reader may see at a glance the connection between the two. The table includes only such events as are mentioned in the text. It is merely given for the sake of clearness and convenience. I trust that no one will try to memorise the whole of it.

I have drawn the maps specially to suit the book and, again, have shown only such names and other details as are mentioned in the text.

One last word. The great political and social ideas which men have sought to carry into effect from time to time since the middle of the eighteenth century play a large part in this book. Necessarily so, for it is these ideas which give meaning and unity to the details of the story. I have endeavoured to deal with Liberalism, Nationalism, Imperialism, Socialism, and the rest as historical facts without showing my preference for any one of them, still less with any intention of recommending any one of them as the cure for our "present discontents." To press forward a particular idea is the duty of a propagandist; meanwhile, I have tried to write a history.

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## INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE beginning any piece of work it is well to understand the nature of it. History is not a mere collection of dates and facts any more than a pile of bricks and timber is a house. Dates and facts are the raw material without which there can be no history, but they are nothing more. History is the result of the handling of that material just as a house is the result of arranging the bricks and beams in a certain way.

Take, for instance, a few of the chief facts connected with the life of the great Napoleon. In 1785 Napoleon was a lieutenant in the Royal French artillery. In 1795 he fired on a mob in the streets of Paris; in 1796 he led a Revolutionary army into Italy; in 1798 he led another army into Egypt; in 1799 he became First Consul; in 1804 he became Emperor, and so it goes to the appointed end at Waterloo in 1815, each fact with its appropriate date and all of it as enlightening as an out-of-date railway timetable. Luckily history is nothing so dull as that. History begins when you start with the fact that young Napoleon was a lieutenant, and then find out how he, a Corsican by birth, came to get a commission in the French army at all, why he fired on the mob, what the cannon were like with which he fired, what the results of the cannonade were, how Napoleon came to be a general and afterwards Emperor. When you have found all that out you will be writing history and learning its first great lesson, that every event has causes behind it and results which follow it; in other words, that one thing leads to another.

And the second lesson arises out of the first. Historical facts are important to us in so far as we can see that they have had far-reaching results. That is why history is continually being rewritten. Our ideas and interests are not quite the same as those of our fathers, just as theirs were different from those of our grandfathers. So men in each generation have taken the facts of history

and have tried to rearrange them, giving the central place to those facts which have a direct bearing on the problems of their own day and pushing others, to which their fathers had given the first place, into the background. Histories of South Africa used to be written mainly to explain the growth of self-government in the Cape Colony and the quarrels of the British government and colonies with the republics. Later, men made the movement towards Union or the development of the Afrikaner people the central fact and rewrote their histories accordingly. Perhaps tomorrow men will say that the dealings of Europeans here with the half-castes, natives and Asiatics are the really important things and will study our past from that point of view. It is all history as true as the knowledge and the honesty of the writers can make it, but the general impression made on the readers by one version will be different from that made by the others. But then you cannot expect four versions of the Reformation, one written by a Catholic, another by an Anglican, the third by a Presbyterian, and the fourth by an Atheist, to look exactly alike any more than you can expect three artists and a photographer to give you four precisely similar pictures of the same thing.

**The Living Past.**—The whole recorded mass of facts dealing with the thoughts, fears, hopes, prejudices, instincts and acts of men is so enormous that no one man can master them. Thousands upon thousands of events are happening every day, as a glance at this morning's newspaper sufficiently proves, and so it has been in the past, a past of which we have at least some record in countries like Egypt and Mesopotamia for fully 7,000 years. It is that which makes the writing and teaching of history so difficult. Writers and teachers have first to follow out one main thread of events, cause leading to result and so on, and then take up a second thread and a third; but all the time they have to make it clear to themselves and to those to whom they are speaking that these threads have run on side by side through time, interweaving with one another to make the storied pattern of our past. Of that pattern our own lives and times are the most recent section, to be continued, let us hope, in our next. Make no mistake. We cannot break away from our past history. The past is not dead. I.



lives in each one of us if only because our parents' blood runs in our veins and their ideas and ways of life make up the homes in which we have been brought up. And so it was with them and their ancestors as far back as we can go.

Look at it in another way. If a few Englishmen had not cut off a king's head three hundred years ago, the English Parliament might never have won the powers it did win and then our Parliament Houses might never have stood at the bottom of Government Avenue in Capetown. If Robert Clive had succeeded in blowing his brains out—and he tried twice—there might have been no British rule in India and then the British would have had no need to take the Cape. Suppose that Kruger had died as a boy on the Great Trek or Rhodes of consumption as a youth, would not the history of South Africa and, therefore, our own lives and surroundings here and now have been something different from what they are? Suppose that Germany had won the Great War—but we must stop supposing.

We are concerned with what has happened and with what is happening as a result. The policeman rides through your village for good and sufficient reasons in the past as well as in the present; our city councillors are chosen and carry on the business of the city in a certain way because city councillors began to be chosen and to conduct their affairs in that way in England a hundred years ago; many South Africans bear Huguenot names because a king of France, two-and-a-half centuries ago, revoked the Edict of Nantes. There was a Cape Colony to which the Huguenots could come because van Riebeeck had founded a settlement on Table Bay in the interests of the trade of the Dutch East India Company, which had arisen mainly because a king of Spain had closed the port of Lisbon to the shipping of the Dutch who were fighting him in defence of their religion, which was the outcome of the Reformation, and of their local liberties, which had grown up in the Middle Ages when Western Europe was emerging from the Dark Ages which had followed the breakdown of the Roman Empire. That is ancient history but it is none the less very much alive to us here, in South Africa, now.

4 We are, however, not asked to study the whole of that long story. We only have to consider the last chapter of

the story of Western or European civilisation, one of the great civilisations which have flourished or still flourish in this world of ours. We can still further lighten our task by looking at that chapter mainly with a view to noting how South Africa finds a place in it. If that history is to be made real and alive to us, we must link ourselves up with it and the only way we can do that is to take South Africa as our standing ground and then look round and ask ourselves how we came to be here and, possibly, whither we are going.

No man can see into the future for any distance but all men can look back and take their bearings. Unless we know whether the path we are travelling along runs straight or is trailing away to one side or the other, we are lost as completely as if we were in the mist of Table Mountain or in the dark on the Karoo, fairly safe if we stand still but in danger if we move. Even if we obstinately try to mark time, we are in danger of being run into from behind. For we have neighbours in a world which is daily becoming more crowded, all of them travelling at varying speeds along paths which do not run, like railway lines, exactly parallel to our own. Unless we can see something of our own past tracks and of their's too, we shall be in danger of losing touch with friends or of colliding with enemies.

We of all people must grasp that fact for our land with its 1,600,000 white inhabitants lies at the southern end of a huge continent, 5,000 miles long, at one of the four corners of the earth round which much of the world's traffic, men, goods and ideas, must pass. In the Union itself we are surrounded by non-Europeans four times as numerous as ourselves: by Cape coloured men, partly European in blood and almost wholly European in ideas and way of life, by Bantu (Kaffirs) who, with few exceptions, are either still in the tribal stage or only just coming out of it, by Indians in the south-east who come from a country with a high and ancient civilisation different from our own, and in the south-west by Malays who represent the great Moslem civilisation of western Asia and north Africa. Twenty years ago there were also thousands of Chinese on the Transvaal goldmines, children of yet another rich and long-lived civilisation different from that of India or the West. Here are risks of collision in plenty if we still go on fumbling

in the dark, as we must do if we listen to those who tell us that history has no "practical" value. That is what men said of electricity in the beginning.

**Western Civilisation.**—But, you may say, what is a civilisation? All men have a certain way of life, a culture, some barbaric, some semi-civilised, others again civilised. Civilised cultures arise in that kind of society where great numbers of people live year in and year out on land which has to be farmed in order to give them a living. If they tried to live by hunting or grubbing for roots like Bushmen, most of them would have to trek or die and in either case their civilisation would perish. That is what has happened when civilisations have broken down. The centres of the life of these peoples have always been cities—the root meaning of our word civilisation is the same as the Latin word for city or state (*civitas*)—and those cities have always depended for their food either on the farms in their own country or on imports from abroad. That is the material or bread-and-butter definition of civilisation. But the material is only one side of the story. There must be a strong government to keep order among such masses of people, a widely held belief in the value of law and order, writing so that records may be kept and multiplied, some knowledge at least of road-building, of irrigation and of measurement. There must be something else, more important in the long run than even all these things, and that is the same general ideas of right and wrong held by the mass of the people, the same general ideas of man's relations to God or to the gods and to each other.

Our Western civilisation has all these marks. It is based on corn-farming for we are a bread-eating people unlike those Indians and Chinese who depend mainly on rice. It centres round cities, big or little, as much as did the civilisation of the ancient Greeks and Romans of which it is the descendant. Western civilisation is soaked in Christian ideas which spring mainly from the beliefs of the Jews and Greeks and have reached us through the organising power of Rome. Its notions of law and order are Roman, for it was Rome that taught western Europe what law and government were. It owes its conception of citizenship to the Greeks.

The ancient Greeks came to the conclusion that men did not live simply to make the state, still less the government of the state, rich and strong, but that the state existed to enable the citizens to live "the good life." What is more, the city (the state) was not a mere collection of buildings but the whole body of citizens. Whether the citizens were all the free men of the state, a democracy, or only a small part of them, an oligarchy, the fact remained that they were responsible to each other for the defence and the well-being of the state. All must take a share in making the law which all must then obey because they had agreed that the law was reasonable and just. Of course the Greeks did not live up to their ideals any more than we live up to ours, but the ideal at which they aimed marked a great revolution in politics. For outside their little cities men had to obey the law simply because it *was* the custom of the tribe into which they happened to have been born or adopted, or else they obeyed a divinely-appointed king who interpreted a code dictated by their god whose mouthpiece he was, "the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not."<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, our idea of personal freedom, the idea that a man's house is his castle, comes to us in great part from the Germanic peoples who came into the Roman Empire in the days of its decay either as slaves, mercenary troops or conquerors.

**Importance of Political History.**—It is above all this way of looking at things which makes Western or European Civilisation one thing, distinct from other civilisations, past and present. Men have tried and are still trying to express that point of view, more or less consciously, in their business arrangements, their law and machinery of government, and in their working of the government. Hence, in looking at the facts which record those various attempts, we can study them either as Economic or as Constitutional or as Political history.

The economic historian tells us, essentially, how men have made their livings, why taxes have sometimes been levied on land, or on imported or exported goods, or

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<sup>1</sup> Tribal law holds good to-day in most parts of Africa and the Pacific Islands; divine monarchy is still the rule in Moslem North Africa and large parts of Asia.

on incomes, why some nations have tried to protect home industries and others have relied on free trade, how and why trade unions and trusts have grown up, what the effects of inventions have been on trade and manufacture and, therefore, on the general life of the community concerned.

The constitutional historian first and foremost sets out to tell us why we, for instance, have a Governor-General, a cabinet, two Houses of Parliament, municipal and divisional councils and so on, how they have grown up, what their powers are, what their relations are to one another, why it is that you may say or write anything you like provided you do not libel anybody, why, if you do, you cannot be kept in prison indefinitely without a trial, and what are the legal and moral principles on which all these liberties and restrictions are founded.

The political historian makes it his main business to show what civilised men have done in their public capacities either as rulers or ruled, that is, as members of states.<sup>1</sup> He looks at communities acting through their governments and ambassadors or, when the ambassadors fail, through their armies and navies; he shows how far the government tried to control bodies within the state like the church or the schools and universities or its business men and labour organisations, and how these bodies have reacted against these attempts. Charters and treaties, Acts of Parliament and royal proclamations, general elections and rebellions, battle, murder and sudden death must play a large part in political history, for these are the ways in which men show themselves for all the outer world to see. Political history is the history of the state as such, of the polis (which is merely the Greek for the Latin *civitas*), the body of citizens acting as a body of citizens and not in their private capacities as lawyers or men in search of their daily bread.

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<sup>1</sup> A "State" is a number of people divided into two groups, the ruler or rulers and the ruled, who live upon a definite territory (a captain and crew of a ship are not a state). That territory need not all be in one piece (Robben Island and the Guano Islands are still parts of the state of the Union, and before 1866, the state of Prussia was scattered in seventy pieces across Germany) but it must be under one sovereign government, that is, a government which owes no obedience to any earthly superior and which has an unlimited right to the lives and goods of all its subjects in case of need. That is the theory but, in practice, many states have been recognised as sovereign which have been legally limited as, for instance, Belgium, which was a neutral-state up to 1914 bound not to make war unless it were attacked. In theory again, the British Dominions are not sovereign but practically they are.

Political history supplies the framework into which economic and constitutional history can most conveniently be fitted. It is therefore well to study it first.

At the same time, political history is unintelligible unless we take note of the economic and constitutional facts which underlie it. The political historian need not fall in with the wishes of young Peterkin to "tell us all about the war." That is a matter for the military historian. But if he is to tell us "what they fought each other for," he will soon find himself asking questions about constitutional matters. What sort of constitutional control had anyone over Bismarck? How was it that he was free to make the wars which he judged to be necessary to secure the union of the German states in the German Empire? Still more certainly will he find himself asking economic questions. How far did the Anglo-Bourbon wars of the eighteenth century, how far did the war of 1914, arise out of commercial and financial rivalries? Similarly, how far did the troubles of Charles I with his Parliament arise out of the fact that he was in real need of money wherewith to carry on the government of the state because, for a variety of causes, the purchasing power of money was falling? The three main kinds of history cannot be kept separately in watertight compartments but, for our purpose, the political kind is the most important and we must only turn to the others when we have to do so.

## **ERRATA.**

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Page 86. Line 5 from bottom. For 1770 read 1774, and  
for Commandant-general read field-commandant.

Page 94. Line 8. For High Court read High Court and  
Council of Policy.

Page 97. Line 30. For declared read virtually declare

Page 295. Line 17. After expenditure insert full stop  
Delete and and insert Finally he decided.

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