

An Introduction to the History of Western Europe

By *JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON*

REVISED AND ENLARGED

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I



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PREFACE FOR THE EDITION OF 1934

In introducing the student to the history of the development of European culture, the problem of selection and proportion has seemed to me, throughout, the fundamental one. Consequently I have endeavored not only to state matters truly and clearly, but also to recall only those past events, institutions, and beliefs which it is essential for one to know in order to understand our own age. It has therefore been necessary, in so short an account of so vast a theme, to omit the names of many personages and conflicts of secondary importance which have ordinarily found their way into our historical manuals. I have ventured to neglect also a considerable number of episodes and anecdotes which, while hallowed by assiduous repetition, appear to owe their longevity to accident or fancy rather than to any profound significance.

Institutions which still deeply affect us—above all, the Church—have, on the other hand, been dealt with more generously than usual. The life and work of a few men of indubitably first-rate influence in the various fields of human endeavor have been assigned a place proportionate to their achievements. Lastly, the scope of the work has been broadened so that the merely political and military history falls somewhat into the background, and the economic, literary, and scientific achievements of the past form an integral part of the narrative.

In composing the original edition, published many years ago, I relied upon a great variety of sources of information belonging to various orders in the hierarchy of historical literature. I also received much aid from kind colleagues and friends. Anyone curious in regard to my indebtedness to others may

consult the preface to the earlier edition. Twenty years of further study, as well as the astonishing events of the last decade, have served to put many things in a new light. In the present revision the nineteenth century is far more fully developed in its outstanding traits than was possible in the original work. It is clear, too, that the early years of the twentieth century have beheld a sort of revolution in human thought and experience which belonged to a future not yet unrolled when I sent the earlier edition to press.

The *Readings in European History* were arranged to follow chapter by chapter the original edition and will serve excellently to supplement and vivify the revised narrative here given. There is a further collection of extracts from the sources, *Readings in Modern European History* (prepared in collaboration with Dr. Charles A. Beard) which contains additional material for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Some reflections on the general value and purport of historical study will be found in the introductory chapter of the present volume.

NEW YORK CITY

J. H. R.

PREFACE FOR THE EDITION OF 1946

The task assigned to me to revise the last sections of the *History of Western Europe* and bring it up to date is both a high privilege and a challenge which is hard to meet. It is not too much to say that for some thirty years this work exercised a deep and lasting influence upon the study and teaching of history in the United States. Indeed, in the earlier years of the century its influence was revolutionary; for it brought into the classroom not only scholarship of a high order, but clarity of historical perspective through the elimination of a vast amount of unnecessary detail. It concentrated upon the "living past"—that part of our heritage which is still molding the thought of men and the policy of nations. In spite of the contributions of the great historians, textbooks were still too often the dust-dry record which each generation of textbook writers had copied from those preceding it, with something of the unquestioned acceptance of authority typical of the medieval chroniclers. Professor Robinson cut through this mass of detail and brought the past to life again for the intellectual enrichment of all those who studied the history of Europe in American schools and colleges.

Since Professor Robinson's text was completed, however, a vast new chapter of human history has been opened up, in which civilization itself has been at grips with destiny. The First World War, in which three great empires disappeared, raised issues which were not fully met in the peace settlement, and rampant nationalism first weakened the League of Nations from within and then, in a vast revolutionary movement, overthrew it from without. Neither these crises nor the Second World War which followed could have been foreseen when the

last edition of this volume was prepared. The revision and completion of the text therefore called for the same kind of editorial procedure—that of concentrating upon the central theme of our own day—as was followed by Professor Robinson throughout in the making of his history. This meant that parts of the thoughtful and thought-provoking chapters on the human problem with which the former text of the history concluded had to make way for a narrative of the most critical era in all the long record of the human past.

No one can regret more than I this elimination of part of the Robinson text in order to make way for the history of these last years. I still recall reading the manuscript of the first chapters which Professor Robinson wrote in the opening year of the century. It was my privilege, first as student and then as colleague and friend, to watch and to share in the development of this work as it first took shape and then was recast time and time again, with infinite care, by the author. The years have amply justified his historical scholarship. It could not have been otherwise; for this work was based upon the original sources, and the interpreter was one of the greatest of American teachers of history. It is my hope that, despite the almost impossible task of reducing to a few pages the great drama of our time, this drama will lend an added interest to the whole story of the evolution of Western civilization, which is the theme of this book.

J. T. S.

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