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Europe Since 1815

Specialism In History

The science of history, like the art of medicine, has been greatly transformed, in late years, by the rise of specialism. In the old days a man who set up shop as an historian commonly presumed to traverse the whole field, at least within the wide bounds marked off by one race or nation, but the typical historian of today is a specialist, and often a very narrow one. He devotes himself, let us say, to the Hanse towns, to slavery, to the American revolution or to the Peninsula campaign, and his whole lifework is done within the limits he thus established for himself. Even such elaborate and comprehensive works as the Cambridge Modern History are usually little more than loose collections of monographs by specialists.

This rise of specialism has been of great and obvious value. It has made research scientific and exhaustive, it has rid history of the glittering generalities which formerly passed for sound generalizations, and it has attracted workers to the field by making it possible for a man of but ordinary talents to do appreciable service. But meanwhile, a need has arisen for general summaries of the results attained by experts working in their separate departments—of large reviews, for the general reader, of the facts unearthed and the theories found defensible. It is necessary, in brief, from time to time, to construct an old-fashioned history out of the new materials produced in such bewildering abundance, that the world may see things in proportion and so profit by the work of the specialists.

Such a large review is “Europe Since 1815,” by Dr. Charles Downer Hazen, Johns Hopkins doctor of philosophy and the present professor of history in Smith College. It is the first volume in the Holt’s American Historical series, which is to be edited by Prof. Charles H. Haskins of Harvard, another Hopkins man and once one of the instructors in history at the university. Dr. Hazen’s purpose, in the present work, is to give a clear and comprehensive account, within one volume, of the development and expansion of the European states since the downfall of Napoleon and of their action and reaction upon one another. The difficulties of the enterprise must be apparent to everyone. Enormous and controversial literatures have grown up about even the minor phases of the main subject—such, for example, as the Crimean war, the Chartist movement in England, the *kulturkampf* in Germany and the rise of navies. It is, in its main currents, infinitely complex and confusing and crowded with dismaying problems. But Dr. Hazen has bravely undertaken to grapple with it, and it must be said for him that he has overcome its difficulties with extraordinary ingenuity. His book, in brief, is marked by clarity, sound knowledge and a sense of proportion. It is informing as history and it makes extremely agreeable reading.

Every European nation of today, save only Great Britain, has its roots in the Congress of Vienna, which was called in 1815 to readjust the territorial and dynastic balance so rudely

disturbed by Napoleon. While the sovereigns and plenipotentiaries intrigued and palavered at the Austrian capital, the Corsican escaped from Elba and the Hundred Days threatened to plunge all Europe into war once more, but Waterloo came in time to stave off that danger, and so the Congress proceeded to its work. In these negotiations Russia and Austria played the leading roles, largely on account of the commanding personalities of Alexander I and Prince Metternich. Metternich, in truth, was the strong man of the hour. Against the rather academic democracy of Alexander he opened a demand for the complete restoration of the old order, and the whole history of Europe, for the next generation, was a history of Metternich's herculean effort to stamp out the liberal ideas set flying by the French Revolution.

The Role Of Metternich

Dr. Hazen's description of this long fight makes one of the most interesting sections of his book. He describes in detail the measures adopted by Metternich to prevent the spread of democracy in Austria, and he shows how the Metternichian policy became dominant in the northern German states, in Spain, in parts of Italy, in Russia, and even, for a time, in France. Only England held aloof. The English were utterly opposed to absolutism and prided themselves upon their freedom. And yet, as Dr. Hazen shows, democracy was little more than a name in England until the passage of the Reform bill of 1832, and even then only the upper middle class got any real measure of new power. The monarchy, true enough, was far from absolute, but not until our own time was the ruling aristocracy overthrown. Even today it still retains a few of its old privileges, albeit those privileges are fast becoming hollow forms.

Dr. Hazen points out that the history of Europe in the nineteenth century was marked by the growth and final triumph of two main ideas. The first was the idea of democracy, of government of the people, by the people and for the people; and the second was the idea of nationality. The former, before the century was out, was dominant from the Atlantic to the Russian border. England, beginning as an aristocratic oligarchy, became a republic in all but the name; France, after four ventures into monarchy, finally made choice of frankly republican institutions and has managed to guard them against insidious assaults for 40 years; Prussia, after vainly endeavoring to ape Austria, became, in the end, the cornerstone of a great constitutional state; Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Holland and the Scandinavian states moved steadily toward universal manhood suffrage and a limitation of monarchial power, and even Austria, the home of Metternich and for a generation the laboratory in which he conducted his sanguinary political experiments, became in the course of time, a constitutional monarchy with the proletariat in the saddle.

Socialism's Quick Rise

This gradual rise of democracy opened the way for the rise of Socialism, probably the greatest European event of modern times. Socialism, at the start, was largely a political doctrine, and, in consequence, little distinguishable from its parent, democracy, but in the course of the revolutionary disturbances of the forties it began to become more distinctively a demand for social reform. Bismarck made a gallant fight against it in Germany, but that fight was hopeless from the start. Once the proletarians had gained a voice in the government, they were bound to seek the alleviation of their economic woes, and the more influential they grew politically the

more successful they became at getting what they wanted. Socialism, in brief, was the product of universal manhood suffrage reacting against an aristocracy which had survived beyond its time.

Dr. Hazen's chapters upon the awakening of national consciousness in Italy and Germany are of especial interest and value.

The history of Europe since 1848 is largely concerned with the growth of great racial states. Out of the welter of tiny German principalities the mighty German Empire has arisen, and out of the harassed and enslaved Italy of 1815 the solid and prosperous Italian kingdom of today has come. This growth of nationalism is to be ascribed to the improvement in communication, the awakening of interest in history and the free interchange of ideas. While in the cases of Germany and Italy it has worked for union, it has in Ireland, Greece, Norway, Belgium, Hungary and the Balkan States made for disunion. Nationalism, in truth, has long been a source of danger in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with its multitude of races, and it seems likely to cause the dismemberment of that great monarchy before many years come and go.

A Book Of Many Merits

A brief review, of course, cannot do justice to Dr. Hazen's important and valuable book. It is, in itself, a summary, and it bears further summarizing. In the midst of many merits, it must suffice to call attention to its clear treatment of the organization of the German Empire, under the ruthless hand of Bismarck: to its adequate dealing with the final enthronement of democracy in England, the origin of the vexed Balkan question, the constructive work of Cavour in Italy, the relations between England and Ireland and the part played in nineteenth century history by reactionary ecclesiasticism, and finally to the ingenuity revealed in Dr. Hazen's arrangement of his boundless and perplexing materials.

(Source: Iowa State University, Parks Media Center, Microfilm Collection)