

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD  
IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

STRATHMORE PARCHMENT

MADE IN U.S.A.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD  
IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

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## CHAPTER I

## HISTORICAL WRITING BEFORE 1500

The historical method as we know it today, is characterized by (1) the gathering of data, (2) the criticism of data, and (3) the presentation of facts in a readable form. It is the result of a long period of evolution in the study of historical data. In this evolution, certain periods have contributed more than others. A notable acceleration in the growth of the modern historical method occurred in the heyday of the Renaissance. Although it was not limited by national or geographical boundaries, this development may be traced in considerable detail in the historical writings and events in England during the sixteenth century.

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the historical literature of England during the great century of the English Renaissance, in order to ascertain the growth of a consciousness of method in dealing with the materials of English history.

The scope of the study includes the following topics: historical writing before 1500; the beginnings of the historical method; the rise of antiquarianism; the later historians; and, finally, the relation between history and the drama, and history and the new science. To make such a study meaningful, it is essential that we first survey briefly the efforts of English historians down to the beginning of the sixteenth century. The sources used are indicated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle  
W. H. Schofield, From the Norman Conquest To Chaucer.

The Roman period of British history left no historical records made by the British people themselves. The period following, however, usually called the Anglo-Saxon period, produced a number of historical writers. The first of these was Gildas, a Celtic monk, who wrote De Excidio Britaniae about 547 A. D. As his title indicates, Gildas was concerned with the recent conflict between the British (Celts) and Anglo-Saxon invaders. He gives a sketch of British history, which occupies about one-fourth of his work. His chief sources were Eusebius, Jerome and Orasius. But Gildas was motivated chiefly by a desire to castigate his countrymen for their sins, and his history has a decidedly religious purpose. He was, in no sense, a critical historian, never distinguishing fact from fiction, and frequently interrupting his narrative with Scriptural quotation. Gildas is important, however, because he gives an account of battles in his own day between the British and their Anglo-Saxon enemies. This material is the source out of which has flowed the vast stream of Arthurian romance, in which historical fact and romantic fiction are so inextricably confused.

The second historian of note was Bede who lived in the north of England from 673 to 735. Bede's chief historical works are Historia Ecclesiastica, De Temporibus, De Temporum Ratione, and a martyrology. Bede was the first historian to date history from the birth of Christ. His most famous work, Historia Ecclesiastica, consists of five books. It provides evidence of the critical effort of Bede to distinguish fact from legend. He cited his authorities, and was careful to warn his readers whenever the narrative rested upon unsupported evidence. The Historia brings British history down to 731 A. D. and as it approaches Bede's own age, it becomes more detailed and reliable. But Bede was

interested in history mainly because it provided the framework within which he could study the growth of Christianity. Because of his connection with the church, he was limited in his point of view. Bede's work was translated from Latin into Anglo-Saxon at the command of King Alfred.

The third English historian of whom we have any knowledge was Nennius who in 800 A. D., compiled a history from the work of Gildas and countless legends which had sprung up in the intervening centuries. Nennius was less critical even than Gildas. He fashioned out of fact and legend a character whom he named Arthur, but his work is of little value as history.

The nearest approach in the Anglo-Saxon period to the writing of history per se was made in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This work was started in the English monasteries, especially Petersborough, by monks, who recorded briefly the events of outstanding importance without making any original comment on them. For the most part only the battles and brilliant exploits of the Kings are recorded in the Chronicle. King Alfred was the first to discover the importance of this work and had it systematically revised. The Chronicle was the first national continuous history of a western nation in its own language.

The record extends for two and a half centuries after the death of Alfred, after the last English King had fallen in battle and the tongue of the Norman conquerors had replaced the native Anglo-Saxon in court and school. The famous Battle of Hastings, which completed the Norman Conquest is herein graphically recorded as well as are the war-filled years of 911 to 1001 immediately preceding it.

Tha com Wyllelm earl of Normandige into Pefnessea on Sancte Michaelles maesseaefen, and sona thaes hi fere waeron, worhton castel act Haestingaport. This wearth tha Harolde cyninge gecydd, and he gaderade tha mycelne here, and com him togenes



aet thaere haran apuldran. And Wyllelm him com ongean on unwaer  
 aer his falc gefylced waere. Ac se cyning theah him swithe heard-  
 lice with feaht mid thaem mannum the him gelaestan woldon. And  
 thaer wearth micel wael geslaegen on aegthre healfe. Thaer  
 wearth of slaegen Harold Kyng, and Leofwine earl his brothor,  
 and Gyrth earl his brothor, and fela godra manna. And tha  
 Frencyscan ahton waelstowe geweald, eall swa heom God uthe for  
 falces synnon.<sup>2</sup>

Then came William, Earl of Normandy, into Pevensea on the eve of  
 Michaelmass; and as soon as they were able, they built a fort at Hastings.  
 This was reported to King Harold, and he gathered then a great army and  
 came against them at the place of the hoary apple tree. And William  
 came toward him unawares, before his men were in battle formation. But  
 the King fought exceedingly hard against them with the men who would  
 follow him. And there was a great slaughter on both sides. There was  
 Harold the King slain, with Earl Leofwin and Earl Gyrth, his brothers,  
 and many good men. And the French gained possession of the battlefield,  
 even as God permitted them on account of the sins of the people.

The fundamental difference in the separate recensions is not in the  
 story itself but in the amount of time the author spends on the various  
 details. At times the entry is only a date and a brief statement of  
 the event; while at other times the author describes the happenings  
 graphically and fully. Consequently the literary merit varies throughout  
 the Chronicle. A brief statement of dates is here indicated for better  
 understanding.

Book I - 1066-1121  
 Book II - 1122-1131  
 Book III - 1132-1154

In addition to the Chronicle there are two other types of literature

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<sup>2</sup> From the Cotton M S., Tiberius B. IV of the Chronicle, 1066,  
 Plummer, Two Saxon Chronicles, I, p. 199.

in this period in which some history is included. These are religious writings and patriotic poems. In fact, most of the writings in this period were religious in nature, historical allusions being largely incidental. Aelfric was the greatest prose writer in the vernacular before the Conquest, but he wrote mainly "homilies", or sermons, with only incidental mention of historical detail.

Many important historical events are recorded in the great patriotic poems of the tenth century, however. Some of these are found in the Chronicle. The Battle of Maldon is the most outstanding. It tells of the heroic resistance of the Anglo-Saxons against the Danes. Faithfully it records the historical facts, but, since it is a patriotic poem it also records the deep feelings of the author.

The best sources of constitutional history are to be found in the Laws and Charters of the Anglo-Saxon period. These were preserved when other writings were destroyed.

The work of the Anglo-Saxons ended with the Norman Conquest of 1066. There was a transition period in which the peoples of both Anglo-Saxon and Norman lineage were too busy making the necessary adjustments, after the upheaval, to take time to engage in literary pursuits. Following the Norman Conquest, however, there occurred a remarkably productive period of chronicle writing. The many Latin chronicles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries afford a trustworthy fund of historical information, so that few periods in English history stand out in such clear and minute relief as that of the Norman and Angevin Kings. These records were the work of men who felt that they were working in the tradition of the great historians of antiquity. Although written in Latin, they are English in spirit and viewpoint. They exhibit a strong, patriotic pride



and have their excuse for being in the desire of historians to give to England a rich past reaching across the centuries to the glories of ancient Troy.

Among the great chronicles of this early medieval period was Geoffrey of Monmouth, the author of Historia Regum Britanniae (1148). Geoffrey was an Anglo-Norman, intent upon filling in the gaps in the history of his country. Unfortunately for the historical value of his chronicle, Geoffrey drew upon his imagination for the material to bridge the gaps. But it is significant that he recognized the need of substantiating his fiction by references to alleged authorities. He attributed his additions to "hidden sources" to which he alone had access. Thus he inadvertently testified to a disposition among his countrymen to search for authentic historical evidence. However, the respect for any written "authority" was generally unqualified by a critical examination of its authenticity, although by the end of the twelfth century many scholars were gravely questioning Geoffrey's credit. The chroniclers after Geoffrey, for the most part, accepted the fact that Gildas, a contemporary of the victorious leader of the British in the twelve great battles of the West, does not mention Arthur by name. As we shall see later, the challenging of the historicity of Arthur in the sixteenth century marks definitely the beginnings of modernism in historical methods.

Quite a different story is that of William of Newburgh, the author of a history of England from 1066 to 1198. William has been described as "the father of historical criticism". He wisely limited his history to a short period, part of which fell within his own lifetime. Not only did he have the advantage of much vivid contemporary material, but he

showed an awareness of order and the need for evaluating data which was unusual in his day. His work marks a decided advance toward the achievement of an orderly and critical interpretation of historical data presented with due regard for their cause and effect.

The twelfth century also produced William of Malmesbury, whose chronicle is distinguished by its wealth of fact and by a ponderous, classical style. Another chronicler who little deserves the fame which his history brought was Henry of Huntingdon. Henry's Historia Anglorum, written in 1130, was neither original nor accurate, although it was long a standard work. In the same century Jocelin of Brakeland wrote the chronicle of the monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, which Carlyle used as the basis of his Past and Present.

Especially during the reign of Henry II did chroniclers flourish. The works of John of Salisbury, Peter of Blais, Gervase of Tillbury, Walter Map, and Gerald of Wales give us one of the most intimate and detailed pictures of contemporary life that the history of England affords. It is significant that at least one of these chroniclers, Walter Map, wrote with a view of preserving for future generations the account of his own age. This is obviously an important new element in the motivation of historical writing.

The vogue of chronicles was continued into the thirteenth century by Robert of Gloucester. Robert freely used Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, and other sources, and his work would be of little value were it not for his vivid reporting of the Battle of Evesham, and other important events of the reign of Henry III. In the same century also there developed a school of writers known as the monastic historians. The influential monastery at St. Albans produced the most noteworthy of

these historians, among whom Matthew of Paris most deserves our attention. Matthew's Chronica Maiora was begun in 1236. He can be considered a critical historian because: (1) he corresponded both at home and abroad regarding his material, (2) he took great pains with the verification as well as the collection of material, (3) his book is orderly and well written, and (4) he was a severe but honest critic of the misgovernment of his time both in church and state.

From Matthew of Paris until the sixteenth century there was little historical writing worthy of note, Fabyon's Chronicle being the only exception. There were long narrative poems of historical subject matter, but these were not primarily historical in purpose. Such contemporary records of social, economics, and political character as the Paston Letters are of value to the modern historian as source material, but they scarcely can be included in a survey of historical writings. Similarly, the vast amount of official documents which survive from the Middle Ages, such treasures as the Domesday Book, the Pipe Rolls, Rolls of Parliament, Charter Rolls, Patent Rolls, and many others, are sources for the modern historian rather than evidence of a conscious historical purpose in the period of their authorship.

It is significant that William Caxton, the first English printer, whose choice of books to print was determined mainly by his sense of public interest, did not print any English history. The late fifteenth century was perhaps too turbulent to provide the leisure and opportunity for much writing about the past.

From this survey of historical writing in England before 1600 we can make a number of generalizations. Historical works in the Anglo-Saxon period were motivated by religious purpose and were indiscriminate



in the use of fact and fiction. As the nation developed political unity, especially following the Norman Conquest, histories became expressions of fervent patriotism and served to provide the nation with a heroic, if not wholly truthful record of the past. In the twelfth century, which marks the beginnings of the period of enlightenment culminating in the Renaissance, there was a disposition to evaluate authorities, and to record contemporary events accurately for the sake of future generations. Thus we come to the beginnings of the Renaissance in England.

## CHAPTER II

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD

The remarkable period of the English Renaissance may be divided into two parts. The first part begins with the triumph of Henry VII at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. This part includes his reign and those of his successors, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Queen Mary, extending to 1558. The second part extends to the death of Elizabeth in 1603.

The most significant cultural development in England during the first of these periods was the rise of humanism. It is imperative that we consider the influence of the humanists on the writing of history. This requires that we should understand the distinctive character of the humanism of the first half of the sixteenth century.

It is a commonplace observation that the humanists turned back to the culture of Greece and of Rome and studied the languages and arts of the peoples of antiquity. That fact, in itself, did not make them humanists. Rather, it was the purpose which moved them to study. They were interested primarily in the improvement of the lot of man on this earth, in the refinement of his mind and spirit, in the extension of his intellectual experience. Such improvement, they believed, following Plato, who is the chief philosopher of the Renaissance, could be achieved by a diligent study of the best of ancient culture. In the light of this modern purpose, the humanists undertook to reform education, the church, and all other institutions by which the life of man is affected.

An excellent statement of the humanist viewpoint is found in the little known essay by Thomas Lupset (1495-1530) entitled An Exhortation

to Young Men<sup>1</sup> (1529) in which the author, a young Oxford graduate and a member of Dean Colet's household, advises a merchant friend what books to read and how to read them. The essay is thoroughly Platonic in its philosophy, and, as the following passage shows, emphasizes the mental discipline which results from reading well chosen books.

It is not the reading of many books that getteth increase of knowledge and judgement: for the most part of them that readeth all indifferently confound their wits and memory without any notable fruit of their reading. It must be a diligent reader that shall take the profit of his labour and diligence. No man (specially of them that have other occupations) can use reading but in very few works, the which I would should be picked out of the best sort, that the fruit of the reader's diligence may be greater. I see many lose their time when they think to bestow their time best, because they lack judgement or knowledge to pick out the books, the which be worthy to be studied. And in everything an order well observed bringeth more profit than any labour or pain beside.<sup>2</sup>

Another illustration of the humanistic emphasis, this one more definitely related to history, is found in John Shute's The First and Chief Grounds of Architecture, first published in 1563. Shute based his work on the Ten Books of Architecture by Vitruvius, the standard manual for sixteenth century architects. The English architect, in urging his fellow craftsmen to study all branches of knowledge, included history as an essential in the education of an architect.

An architect also must have a knowledge in histories; there be moreover multitude of causes in buildings, and very many ornatures and garnishings of which he must needs give answer, from whence they come, and for what purpose they are made.<sup>3</sup>

In the period dominated by this kind of humanistic thought, it would

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in Complaint and Reform In England, ed. by Dunham and Pargellis, pp. 101-124.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 166.



be strange to find no notable contributions to historical writings. chief historical writers of this period were Polydore Vergil, Sir Thomas More and Edward Hall. Each of these made a definite contribution to the advancement of historical writing.

Polydore Vergil was an Italian who came to England to collect "Peter's pence", a tax assessed by the Roman church. He was so much pleased by the beauty of the English countryside that he decided to settle in England. With a background of Italian Renaissance culture and a humanistic bias, he studied the history of his adopted country and in 1505, at the command of Henry, he began a labor which required seventy-eight years to complete, a history of England entitled Polydori Vergilii Anglicae Historiae Libri. Vergil, unlike the chroniclers, told a connected story and was discriminating in his use of authorities. He anticipated Bacon in his belief that a historian should present the facts and let the reader draw his own conclusions.

So critical was Vergil in his judgement of authorities that he regarded only contemporary testimony as being competent. For this reason he accepted the account of Gildas but rejected completely that left by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Of Gildas he wrote:

It is noe smalle argumente of his (Gildas<sup>4</sup>) synceritee that in uttering the trewth he spareth not his owne natione, and, whereas he speaketh littell good of his contriimenne, he bewaileth manie evels in them, nether dothe he feare in revealing the troth though he were a Briton, to write of Brittons that thei nether weare stoute in battayle nor faithfull in peace.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Edwin Greenlaw, "Historical Allegory", Variorum Spenser, p. 487.

Vergil's next statement had, as we shall see later, extremely far-reaching effects. In substance, he denied the existence of Arthur as a historical personage and discounted completely the net work of legend which had woven itself around that name. Of course, this made it necessary to dispose in some way of Geoffrey's account; so Vergil wrote thus regarding Geoffrey's assertion of Arthur's existence:

This saithe he, Gildas before him, but not I, which write nothing but that which hathe ben written before, wherefore there is noe man which justlie can be angrie with me for this sainge which was a reproche to the owld Britons.<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see in the next chapter, this challenge was answered by writers of the second half of the Renaissance.

Vergil is an authority on the reign of Henry VII. He liked the King and approved of his policies; so he recorded his reign in detail. In so doing he recognized and gave us a record of the changes which meant the death of the Middle Ages. His work is most careful and gives ample evidence of personal investigation and confirmation of all details.

Vergil's work has certain limitations and disadvantages, however. Because of a dispute with Cardinal Wolsey concerning church matters, Vergil acquired a lasting enmity toward this eminent churchman. Consequently, Vergil recorded a deeply prejudiced picture of him in his history. This discounts the reliability of his account of the reign of Henry VIII.

Further disadvantages may be seen in Vergil's writing of English history. He was an Italian and a Roman Catholic. As a result he hated Wyclif and the Lollards, with both of whom he had to deal. In addition

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 487.

he repudiated all of the national English legends of Brutus and King Arthur. These things being true, we find certain national and religious biases appearing in certain passages of his history.

In the first edition Vergil brought his history down to the year 1509. The second edition continued the progress to 1538. It is interesting to note that through his study of Gildas, that manuscript was edited for the first time (1525). Vergil's work was later used by Hall as source material for his Chronicle. Vergil wrote other works such as De Prodigis, De Inventoribus Rerum, and Proverbiorum Libellus.

Sir Thomas More wrote his historical work in 1513 and entitled it a History of Richard III. Like Vergil, More was a Tudor historian, and consequently, he gave a biased representation of Richard, the last of the Yorkist Kings. Of course More, like the other humanists, was attached to the household of Cardinal Morton who was primate and later chancellor of the realm under Henry VII. Living and writing in official circles, More naturally maintained only one viewpoint regarding the accession of the Tudors. He himself was on the payroll of the crown most of his life as a governmental employee. It is significant to note that Holinshed's source for the period of Richard III is this same history of More's.

There has been some discussion regarding the authenticity of More's authorship of Richard III. W. G. Zeeveld, in his article in P. M. L. A. (Dec. 1940), A Tudor Defense of Richard III (pub. 1616), says that John Morton, a political enemy of Richard III was the author of the History of Richard III which was attributed to Thomas More.

Sir George Buc in his History of Richard III (1619) attributed the work to Cardinal Morton, who wrote it, supposedly, as an act of revenge. Buc proceeds to assert that More consequently added a little to it and



brought it out under his own name.

On the other hand R. W. Chambers in the Modern Language Review for October, 1928, definitely assigns the authorship of Richard III to More. He says that the internal evidence of the history itself rules out Morton as a probable author. He claims also that the Latin and English versions were written at the same time. He bases his conclusion on the fact that Ascham and Bale, More's contemporaries, attributed the history to More.

Scholars now agree that More's history was written on the basis of firsthand information supplied to the great humanist by his patron, Cardinal Morton. It is therefore an authentic record of a very important period, that in which the centuries - old conflict between the feudal system and a centralized monarchy, was once and for all resolved in favor of the crown. The high quality of More's portrait of Richard III is attested by the fact that it has endured to the present, although it has been subjected to severe criticism by modern historians. With the writing of the History of Richard III (first published in Hardyng's Chronicle, 1543) we may date the beginning of modern historical biography.

A third Tudor historian who deserves our attention is Edward Hall, who died in 1547. Hall was a vigorous supporter of Henry VIII against the Roman church and his Chronicle, first published in 1542, was burned by order of Queen Mary. Hall's work illustrates very well the transition between the medieval chroniclers and the modern historians. For Hall used indiscriminately the older chronicles for the history of England to Henry VII, being content merely to translate common authorities into his own ornate style. But with the reign of Henry VIII, Hall becomes a careful, accurate recorder of what he saw and thought. Modern readers may be annoyed by his use of strange "inkhorn" terms, as in his praise

of Henry VIII "the undubitate flower and very heire of both the sayde linages," and they may be amused at his strong London prejudice against the "proud Cardinall," but to most students of sixteenth century culture, Hall ranks as an important link between the medieval and the modern in historical technique.

In this chapter we have seen that humanism affected the writing of more critical history, and that it inculcated an interest in history that stimulated much historical writing. Vergil was humanistically critical of ancient legend, but was religiously prejudiced; More gave us the first historical biography, but was motivated by a political bias in favor of the Tudors; and Hall bridged the gap between medieval and modern, notwithstanding his florid style. We can discern in this period a growing concern for the preservation and use of historical records. The next chapter will deal with the colorful events which led to the rise of antiquarianism, and, indirectly, to the founding of invaluable modern libraries.

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## CHAPTER III

## THE RISE OF ANTIQUARIANISM

Another significant movement which affected the development of the historical method, particularly in the second half of the sixteenth century, was antiquarianism. This movement was an attempt to seek out and preserve all books and manuscripts which had survived the accidents of time and the ravages of war, mainly because of their value as relics of the past. For an understanding of this movement it is necessary to consider the historical events out of which the movement grew.

The primary impetus to the rise of antiquarianism may be seen in the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. A consideration of this action, so significant for its effect upon the writing of history, is essential.

It is often asserted that Henry's action in dissolving the monasteries was religious in its motive, that Henry was interested in destroying the fortresses of Roman Catholicism in order to promote the Protestant Reformation in England. Actually, his motive appears to be economic rather than religious. Evidence for the economic causation is clear in a pamphlet entitled A Supplication For Beggars, by Simon Fish (died 1531), which Henry certainly read and for which he commended the author. The story of Fish is told by Foxe, in his famous Acts and Monuments (1563).

Fish's pamphlet undertook to remind the King that England's economy was decidedly unbalanced. He wrote:



Lay then these sums to the aforesaid third part of the possessions of the realm that you may see whether it draw nigh unto the half of the whole substance of the realm or not, so shall you find that it draws far above. Now let us then compare the member of this unkind idle sort unto the number of the lay people, and we shall see whether it be indifferently shifted or not that they should have half. Compare them to men, women, and children, then are they not the four-hundredth person in number. Compare them to the number of men, so are they not the hundredth person. One part therefore in four-hundredth parts divided were too much for them except they did labour; what an unequal burden is it that they have half with the multitude and are not the four-hundredth person of their number?<sup>1</sup>

Now, this tremendous wealth, owned by the privileged few of the Church, had been accumulated by grievous exactions in taxes. The wealth was centered in the monasteries of the land. As Fish, historically minded like all the pamphleteers of the sixteenth century, pointedly asserted:

The noble King Arthur had never been able to have carried his army to the foot of the mountains to resist the coming down of Lucius the emperor if such yearly exactions had been taken of his people.<sup>2</sup>

Henry VIII in dissolving the monasteries had the support of vast numbers of his subjects whose opposition to the Church was mainly economic. But Henry did not have this support when it became known that great national treasures of books and manuscripts from monastic libraries were being destroyed or were being used as wrapping paper in apothecary shops. Matthew Parker has left an account of how the quadrangle at Canterbury was so littered with books that for three months one could walk across it without touching the ground. John Bale likewise pro-

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Fish, A Supplication For The Beggars. Printed in Complaint and Reform In England, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

tested the destruction. In the Preface to his edition of Leland's New Year's Gift, he wrote that some purchasers of monastic property

reserved books, some to scour their candelstyck's and some to rub their boots. Some they solde to grossers (grocers) and sope sellers and some they sent over see (sea) to the boke bynders, not in small nombre, but in shyppesfull to the wonderinge of the foreign nations.<sup>3</sup>

Bale also charged that many German students in England were taking books and manuscripts back to Germany, where they were displaying them as their own work. Evidently, the Nazis have historical precedents in their looting of the art of foreign nations.

So great was the anger at such wanton destruction that John Leland, Henry VIII's librarian, asked Cromwell's permission in 1536 to collect manuscripts for the King's library. Henry VIII commissioned him

per omnia regna et ditiones suas spatiari et antiquitates omnes, scripta, recorda, archiva, et quaecumque monumenta notatu digna in singulis biblio thecis, collegiis, sodalitiis, claustris, coenibus, basilicis, monasteriis, aliis q̄ locis quibuscunq̄ diligenter et fidelitur risuari et perscutari.<sup>4</sup>

Leland was an excellent choice for this work. He had attended Colet's school at St. Paul's; hence he had had a humanistic training. He was an indefatigable collector of all kinds of printed matter. His work is the forerunner of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, to which every researcher in English history is indebted, and his collections became the nuclei of many famous libraries, both private and public. As we shall see, his work greatly affected the writings of later sixteenth century

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<sup>3</sup> John Bale, Preface to Leland's New Year's Gift.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by L. Tonlin Smith, ed., in The Itinerary, London, 1907.

historians, including Holinshed and Camden.

Leland kept a record of his travels and discoveries, which was later published as Leland's Itinerary. The literary quality of this work is poor, but historically it is of immense value. John Bale, Leland's contemporary, urged that greater use be made of the historical records compiled by Leland. He cited two reasons for their neglect:

Slacknesse of empryntyng, that no studiouse persone, myndyng the veritees preferment, hath laboured their settinge out, to the common profite. An other is the want of ornature, that they have not bene changed into more eloquent stile, to the ful satisfyenge of delycate eares and wyttes.<sup>5</sup>

Another antiquary of the sixteenth century who, with Leland and Bale, was largely responsible for the collecting of official documents and historical records was Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury. Parker became Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University in 1545. He completely revised the system of records at the University and became diligent in collecting the spails of the monasteries for the University libraries. In 1546 some disappointed courtiers attempted to persuade Henry VIII to call for a return of these libraries to the Court. Parker succeeded in retaining possession of the books. He employed agents to buy all kinds of manuscripts, records and old books. One agent collected 6,700 books for Parker, most of which eventually went to the library of Corpus Christi, Cambridge. Among the books so acquired were the manuscripts of the famous Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and the Chronicle of Matthew Paris. Parker took great care that his books should be preserved. He directed that on his birthday, August 6, four people should audit his collection annually.

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<sup>5</sup> Bale, op. cit., p. 40.



It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Leland, Bale and Parker in the development of the historical method in the sixteenth century. Genuinely interested in collecting any written remains of the past, they made possible the great collections of historical documents to which later historians are immeasurably indebted. They also saw in their activities as collectors or way to participate in the great upsurge of nationalism which is one of the chief marks of the English Renaissance.

Leland was particularly active in this respect. He had been extremely indignant that Polydore Vergil had denied the historicity of Arthur on the ground that no records of Arthur's time gave evidence of his existence. Gildas, who lived at supposedly the same time as Arthur, did not mention the great British leader by name. Leland, using the resources of the libraries he catalogued, wrote vehemently, if not clearly, to disprove Vergil's assertions.

As I contemne fables, so I reverence and embrace the truth of the history; neyther will I suffer this to be taken away from mee at any time, but with losse of life.<sup>6</sup>

The controversy was long and bitter. We are not interested in it as a literary episode, but on account of the light it throws on the status of historical writing in the middle of the century; English patriots, deeply moved by the new nationalism which emerged from the Wars of the Roses and the accession of the Tudor dynasty, were eager to link the new royal dynasty to the star of the British hero, Arthur. The Tudors were Welsh; hence there was at least a racial tie between them and the great Celt. Among the Arthurian traditions was one that Arthur would return to his country to lead it in the hour of its great need and triumph. Previous

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<sup>6</sup> John Leland, *Itinerary*. Printed in Variorum Edition of Edmund Spenser, p. 9.

to the defeat of the mighty Spanish Armada in 1588, Elizabethans thought that Elizabeth's success in restoring and maintaining internal peace was due in large measure to the Queen's personal ability. After the Armada, they felt that the ancient Britons, who were descended from Troy, had come back into their own.

The historians of the latter half of the century, all of them indebted to Leland, Bale, and Parker and enabled by the antiquarians to multiply the use of source materials, gave ample evidence in the scope and detail of their historical writings of their indebtedness to antiquarianism. It is the purpose of the next chapter to examine the individual contributions of the most noteworthy of the historians in the second half of the century.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE LATER HISTORIANS

The antiquarian movement of the sixteenth century exercised a far-reaching influence upon later historical writers. The vast collection of material, which was the result of this movement, served as the basis for outstanding works by writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Among these historians is Raphael Holinshed. In 1548 Reginald Wolfe, printer to the queen, took upon himself the gigantic task of publishing a cosmography of the world, including a history and description of each country. Wolfe had free access to Leland's notes, and he used them to advantage. He employed learned men to write his book, among whom was Holinshed. The work went well until Wolfe died in 1573. His heirs were unwilling to continue his work on such a large scale; so preparations were made to publish first only the histories of England, Scotland and Ireland. Other experts were employed to aid Holinshed. William Harrison was to write the description of England and Scotland, and Richard Stanyhurst and Edmund Campion to write the account of Ireland.

The book was published in 1577, appearing in three large folio volumes. These were elaborately illustrated with woodcuts depicting executions and coronations, battle scenes and royal progresses. A large double page illustration of the siege of Edinburgh castle was also included. Volume I included the history of England from the earliest time to the Norman Conquest and Volume II completed the history from the



Conquest to 1577.

This book came to be one of the most trusted and quoted authorities on Elizabethan England. Most of the Elizabethan dramatists drew their plots and details for historical plays from the Chronicle. Holinshed has been accused of showing a strong Protestant bias in his work, but modern critics attribute this bias to later editors of the Chronicle who continued it ten years after his death.

The Chronicle possesses a great deal of merit because it is a true critical history. Holinshed is very objective throughout, carefully presenting both sides of every question and citing a great number of carefully selected sources. The style of writing is very clear but too oratorical to please the modern reader. Whenever he could Holinshed moralized, taught and drew lessons of patriotism and religion in his marginal notes.

The chronology of Holinshed's work was arranged by the same William Harrison whose Description of England is included in the Chronicle. The whole of Harrison's sketch is vivid and picturesque. It is true he accepts with simple credulity the legends of early England, but the minute he enters the world of fact he displays a comprehensive knowledge of many fields. He writes on almost every subject imaginable in connection with English life, and does it well. He describes the clothing of the English, their dogs, their universities, their churches, their cities, gardens, orchards, villages, people, forests, hills and valleys. He is one of the first writers to exalt the English navy. In a characteristic passage he describes his wishes for England, that he,

might live no longer than to see foure things in this land reformed, that is: (1) the want of discipline in the church: (2) the covetous dealing of most of our merchants in the preferment of the commodities of other countries, and

hinderance of their own; (3) the holding of faires and markets upon the sundaie to be abolished, and referred to the wednesdaies: (4) and that everie man, in whatsoever part of the champaine saile enjoieth fortie acres of land...<sup>1</sup>

His style is delightfully simple, without rhetoric or oratory. He sought nothing but the advantage and knowledge of his country; yet he did not let patriotism sway his opinions and perspective. He used Leland's famous notes among his sources and gives due acknowledgement for them. He gives us one of the most important and intimate pictures of Elizabethan life that we have.

This Elizabethan age of which Harrison wrote possessed a mighty curiosity concerning the world. This is illustrated by the diligent voyages of discovery and exploration made by Elizabeth's seamen. Englishmen of the sixteenth century found it easy to synthesize their knowledge, to arrange the familiar and the new in orderly patterns. They had inherited the concept of "correspondence," that is the idea that all bodies of knowledge are related, and in their broad structures, similiar.<sup>2</sup> What they knew of the heavens corresponded to what they knew of the earth and to what they knew of the physical being of men. But in the first decades of the century, there had come, with humanism, a shift of emphasis or focus. Instead of being primarily concerned with thoughts of heaven, or of the invisible world, they became mainly interested in the life being lived in the present world. The historians became gradually conscious of the contribution of history to the improvement of

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<sup>1</sup> William Harrison, Description of England. Reprinted in Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. III, p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass. Chapter I.

life in the present. They came near to developing a definitely social purpose in their writing to give to their readers historical perspective by which the great social problems of their own day could best be examined and solved. Hence, the comprehensive plan of Wolfe and the combination of Holinshed's Chronicle with Harrison's Description of England mark a significant development in historical writing.

Furthermore, the Elizabethans had a passion for order. To them there were three kinds of God-given hierarchies: cosmological, natural, and political. Everything and every individual existed within the boundaries of one or more of these three orders. Goodness was identified as conformity to order and evil as nonconformity. As the heavenly bodies appeared to maintain a definite order, so all elements of the state and all the properties of man must be kept in order. Particularly significant to us is the parallelism between the hierarchy of the heavenly bodies and the degrees or ranks of men in the state. When individuals or groups attempted to move out of their proper sphere, as, for example, to usurp the throne, there was disorder and evil befell the Kingdom. Holinshed's account of the civil strife arising from violations of what seemed to him the divinely ordained order of the commonwealth, the contentions and rivalries of factions of nobles, must be interpreted against the backdrop of the Elizabethan concept of order. A study of Holinshed, therefore, is an excellent approach to an understanding of the great political controversies of the seventeenth century. History had become more than a chronicle. Interrelated with other bodies of knowledge, it had become a vital factor in Renaissance thinking.

Another historian of the latter part of the sixteenth century was Sir William Camden. Under his influence the chronicle reached the height of importance. Camden was the official historian of Queen Elizabeth



and was considered an eminent antiquarian by his contemporaries. His book, Rerum Anglicorum et Hibernicorum Annales Regnante Elizabetha, is an excellent modern history, with the events recorded in proper order, proportion and importance. It was published in 1615 and covered the history of England down to 1588.

In 1586 Camden wrote his Britannia as a result of a trip through England. Some writers, among them Ralph Brooke, charge Camden with using Leland's Itinerary and Collectanea and not acknowledging them.<sup>3</sup> Other writers contend that these acknowledgements were made in the marginal notes of Camden's work. Be that as it may, we do know that Camden did make use of Leland's material just as did many other writers of the age. His work should not be discounted for that reason. It is the result of diligent research and it was recognized as such in his time.

His work has been criticized because it has too rigid a chronological division, and too long quotations from documents. Unfortunately, too, it was written in Latin. Its virtues are: its clearness of expression, its universal interest and its patriotism. It should be noted here, that Camden, like all of the Tudor historians, wrote for the purpose of elevating the queen and defending Protestantism. He recognized, however, the gigantic forces of the times which were moulding a new England, and he recorded them. He loved England and wrote for her glory, revealing to the reader, her towns and cities, her beautiful countryside, her ancient ruins, her learning, and her strength. The importance of Camden's work as a historian is indicated by the use of his name by the Camden

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Brooke, Discovery of Errors, p. 96.

Society, to whom we are indebted for many invaluable publications of historical studies.

Sir John Hayward, on the other hand, was a completely impartial, critical historian. He was interested, mainly, in the policies and trends of history rather than the small events. He was not a chronicler, but adopted historical writing as a profession. In his work he tried at all times to copy the ancient historians. He wanted to be the Tacitus of England. There is evidence that he borrowed from the historical plays of Shakespeare, hence unknowingly copying some of the changes Shakespeare made in history for the purpose of dramatic effect. His writings included an account of the first year of Henry IV's reign and the deposition of Richard II; An Answer to the First Part of a Certain Conference Concerning Succession; A Treatise of Union of the Two Realms of England and Scotland; The Lives of the Three Norman Kings of England and Life and Reign of King Edward VI.

The chapter would not be complete did we not consider the names of John Stow and John Speed. These men wrote very much alike, Stow being the more industrious of the two. In 1561 he published an edition of Chaucer's work; in 1565 he wrote a Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles, and in 1580 The Chronicles of England from Brute until this present yeare of Christ 1580. There are certain faults seen in his work. He uncritically records all the legends which had passed as good English history and his style is not scholarly in the least. It is quite easy to understand, however, and he is the first of the chroniclers to recognize the value of literature in the moulding of history. Like all the chroniclers he records too many small, relatively unimportant incidents and moralizes too much.

John Speed, on the other hand, loved rhetoric, but he was extremely careful in acknowledging the sources he used. He is very patriotic and describes national events in glowing terms. A Historie of Great Britaine is the only work accredited to him.

In a summation of this chapter the following points may be noted. During the latter half of the sixteenth century men began to realize the interrelations of knowledge and, in so doing, they found that history took on a new importance. They therefore became increasingly interested in it and desired to see it so written as to show its relationship to other fields of knowledge. As a result we have the Holinshed Chronicle with its accompanying descriptions. The zenith of the chronicle was reached under Sir William Camden, who first recognized the importance of recording history in the proper proportion and perspective. Lastly we find an attitude of critical impartiality taken in the work of Sir John Hayward. This attitude most nearly approximates that taken in the writing of history today. It was accompanied by the development of a critical method in other fields. In the following chapter the relation between the historical method and developments in other fields of knowledge will be examined in greater detail.



## CHAPTER V

THE RELATION OF HISTORY TO THE ART AND SCIENCE OF  
THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

In the previous chapter we spoke of the contributions of several true historians. In this chapter we shall see how many of their works were used as source material by their contemporaries who wrote mainly for the stage.

In Elizabethan England the stage took the place of the newspapers. It was just as influential in the moulding of public opinion as the modern newspaper. People came to the theatre as they would come to a public forum. There public matters were discussed in the play. The sixteenth century dramatist was a columnist in his own right. He wrote a contemporary chronicle and interpreted current events. He used the resources of history in order to shape public opinion and to illustrate his theories of government, or the theories of his patron. If we understand these facts, we come to realize the tremendous importance of the Elizabethan plays, and we shall easily be able to justify the inclusion of dramatic literature in a study of this nature. To the Elizabethans, drama was not literature, nor was it recognized as worthy of such cultural designation until after Shakespeare and Ben Jonson had written the best of their plays. Drama, rather, was a mixture of entertainment and propaganda, of journalism and art.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Holinshed's Chronicle in the latter half of the sixteenth century. We do know, however, that Shakespeare used it as the main source of the history con-

tained in his historical plays. It must be remembered that these historical plays were written for people who knew their English history. The genius of the English people has been predominately political and social; and the Shakespearean audience had been informed concerning the histories of their royal and aristocratic families from their youth up. It should also be remembered that the people of the Renaissance still looked for lessons in history, lessons concerning morality and life. A consciousness of this is shown in the following passage from Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part II.

There is a history in all men's lives,  
Figuring the nature of the times  
    deceas'd;  
The which observ'd, a man may  
    prophesy,  
With a near aim, of the main  
    chance of things  
As yet not come to life, who  
    in their seeds  
And weak beginnings lie  
    intreasured.  
Such things become the hatch  
    and brood of time.<sup>1</sup>

Not only does this passage signify a consciousness of the lessons of the past which history teaches; but also it defines a new purpose in history--namely, that of shaping the future. In other words Shakespeare is saying that men may more nearly discern the right course to take in the future if they but intelligently study the past and note its trends.

Shakespeare wrote ten historical plays. Four concern the house of Lancaster. These are Richard II, Henry IV, Parts I and II, and Henry V. Four concern the house of York. These are Henry VI Parts I, II and III and Richard III. The remaining two plays are King John and Henry VIII.

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, i, 80-86.

A hundred years of English history, beginning about 1390 and ending with the Wars of the Roses—are recorded in Shakespeare's plays.

When William the Conqueror invaded England he set up a decentralized government by giving his nobles tracts of land over which they exercised absolute sway. Consequently, for two or three hundred years after the Norman Conquest a struggle for supremacy was going on between the King and the nobles. Each faction bid for the support of the common people. By Shakespeare's time the King had triumphed. He was supreme and England was a highly centralized state under an absolute monarch. The Elizabethans had deduced from their own history that this was the best form of government. Shakespeare reflects this belief in many ways. His treatment of history, representative of the mind of Elizabethan England, affords definite evidence that a new purpose in the study of history had dawned in the consciousness of Englishmen. This purpose significantly reflects the growing respect for the inductive method of treating data, a method often attributed to Francis Bacon but actually employed by many men before Bacon's time. Shakespeare was subjecting the data of history to examination, and came to see that the political experience of the English people through the age of conflict ending in 1485, pointed to the conclusion that a strong centralized monarchy was a better government than a decentralized feudal system.

This is clearly the deduction to be made from the greatest of his historical trilogies, Henry IV, Parts I and II and Henry V. These plays begin with a conflict between Hotspur, a feudal lord who is demanding feudal rights from the King and Henry IV, who insists that the erstwhile feudal privileges have passed to the crown. Shakespeare follows Holinshed in the details of this conflict, which cannot therefore be attributed to



dramatic or creative imagination. Furthermore, as the story of Prince Hal or Henry V progresses, we discern that those qualities which make him an ideal King, as Shakespeare represents him, are the decisive qualities which make him master in a situation of feudal conflicts. Henry V's respectful treatment of the Lord Chief Justice, however, is intended to show that the King's absolutism is limited by the law of the land. The monarchy is, in this respect, a limited monarchy after all.

To appreciate fully this use of history by Shakespeare, we must see how thoroughly it harmonizes with the scientific ideas of the age. In fact, one is struck by the unity and consistency of sixteenth century thought. It contrasts markedly with the lack of synthesis in modern thinking. Basic in Renaissance thinking was the value of order. As there was order in the heavenly bodies, so there must be order in the state and even in human nature. The concept of order, furthermore, was obtained from the study of astronomy, the dominant science of the age. Men came to believe that the stars and planets held their several ranks and positions because each sustained a definite relationship to the sun, the supposed center of the universe. Similarly, order in the state demanded that each subject be loyal to the King, the center of the state.

It is not accidental that Shakespeare uses frequently the image of the sun to present the position of the King in the state. So Prince Hal alludes to himself as a sun in his famous soliloquy:

I know you all, and wil a while uphold  
 The unyokt humour of your idleness  
 Yet herein will I imitate the sun,  
 Who doth permit the base contagious  
     clouds  
 To smother up his beautie from  
     the world,  
 That when he please again to be  
     himself,  
 Being wanted he may be more  
     wondered at.

By breaking through the faul  
                                   and ugly mists  
 Of vapors that seem to strangle him.<sup>2</sup>

Again Richard II compares his kingly power to that of the sun is routing the mists and vapors that cloud the earth.

Discomfortable cousin. Know'st thou not  
 That when the searching eye of heaven  
                                   is hid  
 Behind the globe, that lights the  
                                   lower world,  
 Then theives and robbers range  
                                   abroad unseen  
 In murders and in outrage,  
                                   boldly here;  
 But when from under this  
                                   terrestrial ball  
 He fires the proud tops of the  
                                   eastern pines  
 And darts his light through  
                                   every guilty hale,  
 Then murders, treasons and  
                                   detested sins,  
 The cloak of night being pluck'd  
                                   from off their backs,  
 Stand bare and naked, trembling  
                                   at themselves?<sup>3</sup>

In the same play, Salisbury describes the fall of Richard in terms of falling stars and the setting sun.

Ah, Richard, with the eyes of heavy mind  
 I see thy glory like a shooting star  
 Fall to the base earth from the  
                                   firmament.  
 Thy sun sets weeping in the  
                                   lowly west,  
 Witnessing storms to come,  
                                   Woe, and unrest.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry IV, Part I, I, ii, 219-225.

<sup>3</sup> Act III, ii, 37-46.

<sup>4</sup> Act II, IV, 19-22.

Such imagery illustrates how the Elizabethans thought of Kingship, the state, and the relations of commons and nobles to the crown. The point of most importance to this study is that such a theory of kingship was derived inductively from the study of history and was substantiated by the science of the age according to that mode of thought which is characteristic of the Renaissance and which is sometimes called the "doctrine of correspondences".<sup>5</sup>

Another important factor in the shaping of the philosophy of history and the development of the historical method is illustrated by these same historical plays of Shakespeare. It is the concept of causality, by which history is treated as a continuous sequence of events. Shakespeare's earliest efforts in historical drama (Henry VI, Parts I, II and III and Richard III). But the dramatist, in the course of his writing, hit upon the plan of presenting a continuous history from the reign of Richard II (1377-1399) to the accession of Henry VII. The plan is evidenced by the use of connecting links between the plays, as, for example, the allusion to Prince Hal in Richard II, and the use of prophecies which anticipate the outcome of events contemporaneous with the prophets. John of Gaunt's prophecy (Richard II, II, i, 31 ff.) and Richard's prophecy that Northumberland would prove false to Henry IV (Henry IV, Part II, III, i, 87-92) are examples. As one reads these historical plays in chronological order, one perceives a definite purpose evolving, the tracing of the conflict between feudalism and monarchy and the emergence of the crown as the symbol of sovereignty in the Kingdom.

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<sup>5</sup> Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass, 1936.



It is imperative, both to the historian and the literary student that the cultural expressions of the Renaissance be examined in the light of the new science that was being directed by the work of men like Copernicus and Tycho Brahe.

When Copernicus wrote his Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies (pub. 1544), everyone believed that the earth was the fixed center of the universe and that the apparent movements of the heavenly bodies were indeed real movements. This was the doctrine originated by Ptolemy 1,400 years before the time of Copernicus. It is true that Pythagorus had taught that the sun, and not the earth, was the center of the universe; but he advanced only the theory and had no scientific proof. This necessary proof is what Copernicus supplied. Which, said he, is the more rational? That the earth should revolve on its axis every twenty-four hours or that the planets should revolve around the earth in the same amount of time, many of them having to travel much larger circles than the earth at the equator. Like Ptolemy, Copernicus weighed both sides of the question but he arrived at a different conclusion. In so doing he completely revolutionized the cosmological concepts of his day and laid the foundations for the remarkable calculations of modern astronomy.

What a shock was administered to the Elizabethans when it was proved beyond a doubt that the earth is not the supreme factor in the universe! A revised concept of man and his importance inevitably followed. Man and his history came to be considered against the backdrop of a mighty universe in which man lost much of his importance. In the dedication of his work to Pope Paul III Copernicus gives the essence of this new cosmological order.

The relative positions and magnitudes both of the stars and all their orbits, and of the heavens themselves, become so closely

related that in none of its parts can anything be changed without causing confusion in the other parts and in the whole universe.<sup>6</sup>

How easy it became, then, to attribute the disasters of earth to an unlucky coincidence of the heavenly bodies.

This concept is advanced by the second great revolutionist, Tycho Brahe. In a series of lectures he gave at the University of Copenhagen he told the young Danish students that: "a special use of astronomy is that it enables us to draw conclusions from the movements in the celestial region as to human fate".<sup>7</sup> Brahe, a young Danish nobleman has won everlasting fame by his discovery of a new bright star in the constellation of Cassiopeia. His opinion of this star was thus expressed:

The star was at first like Venus and Jupiter, and its effects will therefore, first, be pleasant; but as it then became like Mars, there will next come a period of wars, seditions, captivity, and death of princes and destruction of cities together with dryness and fiery meteors in the air, pestilence and venomous snakes. Lastly, the star became like Saturn, and thus will finally come a time of want, death, imprisonment and all kinds of sad things.<sup>8</sup>

Brahe inaugurated scientific precision in the field of astronomical measurement and sought to compromise the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems of the universe. According to his theory the planets moved around the sun which, in turn, revolved around the earth. He is evidently a transitional thinker standing between the medieval and modern eras and attempting a compromise of the two.

In this chapter, as the result of considering the evolution of historical thinking in relation to science and dramatic expression, we

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Copernicus, Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies. Reprinted in S. P. Mizowa Nicholas Copernicus, 1943.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Robert Ball, "Tycho Brahe", Great Astronomers, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

have noted several important steps. These may be summarized as follows:

- (1) history, used as the subject matter of drama, was treated inductively, and certain conclusions as to the nature of the ideal state and the most desirable type of government were drawn from the surveys of the past;
- (2) historical studies provoked the question of whether it may not be possible to predict the future by noting the sequential relations of cause and effect in past events; and (3) historical writing was directly affected by the dominant scientific ideas of the age, which tended to establish the relation of human destiny to the physical phenomena of the universe, the conception of which had been greatly changed by the work of Copernicus and Brahe.

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## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

It is now possible for us to appraise the progress made in sixteenth-century England in the development of historical method by writers and students of history. Before the sixteenth century, chroniclers wrote primarily for religious or patriotic reasons. Before 1066, chronicles attempted to show that the evils which befell the British nation resulted from the sins of the people. In the Middle Ages, chroniclers were interested in tracing, particularly for the Normans who wished to become Englishmen, the history of their adopted country in order to show its greatness. However, with the exception of a few men of modern spirit, William of Newburgh for example, these chroniclers made no attempt to distinguish between fact and legend, and used their sources indiscriminately. They gave no evidence of understanding history as a continuity of cause and effect.

With the beginnings of the Renaissance and the rise of humanism, historians became more critical. Polydore Vergil challenged the authenticity of the Arthurian legends, which had come to have the sanctity of national hero-worship. Sir Thomas More wrote a scholarly life of Richard III, which, however, was not without prejudice, since it was being written in the reign of Henry VII, who took the throne from Richard. The humanists, furthermore, were interested in a synthesis of knowledge and, by virtue of their diverse studies, were able to modify the method of historical writing according to scientific principles. The best expression of humanistic caution is found in Holinshed's account

of his method:

For my parte, I have in things doubtfull rather chosen to shewe the diversitie of their writings, than by over ruling them, and vsing a peremptory censure, to frame them to agree to my liking, leaving it nevertheless to eche mans iudgement to controlle them as he seeth cause. If some where I shew my fancie what I thinke, and that the same dislike them, I crave pardon, specially if by probable reasons or playner matter to be produced, they can shew mine errour, upon knowledge whereof I shalbe ready to reforme it accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

As the humanists introduced a more scholarly judgment and critical use of sources, so the antiquarians advanced the work of historians by preserving from the ravages of the monastic disestablishment the invaluable libraries of the great monasteries. Without the book-collecting enthusiasm of men like Leland, Bale, and Parker, vast stores of source materials would have been sold to London merchants as waste paper or would have been carried overseas by predatory German scholars. The work of Camden, Stow, and many other historians of the late Renaissance would have been impossible except for the preservation of books by Leland and his fellow antiquarians. We have noted that Leland's work actually laid the foundation for the Historical Manuscripts Commission and the founding of such great libraries as the Bodleian and the British Museum.

Finally, we have observed how the dramatists of the age, particularly Shakespeare, have treated history. To include the dramatists has been necessary inasmuch as they were largely responsible for the propagandist use of history and for the popularity of certain historical characters and themes.<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, like other dramatic users of history, was not without bias. His omission of the Magna Carta scene from the play on

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<sup>1</sup> Lamson and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 508.

<sup>2</sup> It is a curious fact that the modern conception of Julius Caesar is derived more from Shakespeare's play than from Caesar's writing or historical accounts of his career.

King John shows how little significance he attached to that historic event. He also drew certain conclusions from English history which were expediently in agreement with the principles of political science practised by Queen Elizabeth. His contribution to historical method, evidenced by the evolution of a definite plan in presenting the panoramic view of one hundred years of English history, lies in his careful analysis of motivation, of the tracing of causality in political events, and in his idea that the study of history may well enable men to shape the future as they will.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the writers of history in the sixteenth century bridged the gap between the medieval and the modern. They found history a mass of disconnected fact and fiction, indiscriminately used to glorify England or to preach morality. They passed on to their successors a sense of order and authority, a passion for the preservation of historical record, and an intimation that through the painstaking writing and reading of history man may achieve the enlightenment essential to an intelligent approach to the things to come.



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