

WHAT IS EUROPE?¹

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THE origin of this work goes back to the winter of 1942 when a Conference of Allied Ministers of Education met in London to consider the possibility of producing a European history 'of an objective character' which might be available for general use after the war. The results of their deliberations are three volumes on the history of European civilization which, the editors hope, may be translated into other languages in order to communicate 'to the youth of Europe, as dispassionately and as justly as possible, some sense of the inheritance of Europe and the influence of that inheritance'.

In the dark days of the last war England was the hope of an oppressed Continent, and it would have been invaluable if the liberation of Europe, having had its point of departure in this country, could have been followed by an intellectual assessment of the spiritual values of the European past to meet the hopes of a despairing world. If the First World War can be regarded as the real end of the nineteenth century, there are grounds for seeing in the Second World War the end of a whole phase of European history which we would describe as the triumph and fall of human reason. Europe was confronted by a barbarian revolt of unreason. What was this Europe? What could, and indeed can, be salvaged from the past? Or should the question really be: what is the new view of man which the European inheritance compels us to accept? For that is what an inheritance means; not an end, a looking back, but a new beginning, a start with envied and valued possessions.

That inheritance will not be found in these pages. In a now famous passage of his *History of Europe*, H. A. L. Fisher wrote: 'Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave.' This is the historical school encountered here, and one seems to detect the same

1 *The European Inheritance*. Edited by Sir Ernest Barker, Sir George Clark, Professor P. Vaucher. (Oxford University Press; 5 gns.)

underlying belief in progress—is that not a pattern?—and humanism, as if these values had somehow remained untarnished in the purgatory of our times. Sir Ernest Barker would add ‘federalism and some mode of economic co-operation’. He writes in his concluding survey: ‘Europe can endure and prosper, and maintain the perpetuity of her inheritance, if she can mix some new and experimental form of federalism, suited to her own peculiar needs, with the other forces which have been and still are active in determining her life.’ You need be neither an existentialist nor a Communist to find that an inadequate faith with which to meet the spiritual crisis of modern Europe.

The nineteenth century is ‘the century of liberalism, socialism and nationalism’; in 1914 ‘Europe went into the melting pot in which it is still immersed’ because of the dissolution of the Turkish and Austro-Hungarian Empire. Of course, there is a recognition that other factors were at work. Professor Barker gives an impressive catalogue of the various elements, like Palestine and Greece and Rome, codes of morals and manners, systems of politics and law, art and science, that have gone to the making of Europe. But it is the very complexity of this catalogue which confuses. The visitor to a museum is wearied by looking at a mass of relics, however precious each of which may be, because there is no common strand, no unity and family likeness apart from one, humanist and rationalist liberalism, which is precisely the one that has been found wanting and unable to resist the revolutions of our age.

To the Greeks Europe meant the ‘wide prospect’, the ‘broad field of vision’, narrow as was in fact their geographical Europe, but the very complexity of the Europe here described makes it impossible to understand it. What we need, and what the general reader specially needs, is a simple answer to the question: what has happened to Europe and why? Historians like Troeltsch and Christopher Dawson in their respective fields have grasped that simple and unifying strand. The history of Europe cannot be understood without drawing together the great spiritual and existential crises which alone provide the keys to events otherwise meaningless and dull.

There was a cultural, and perhaps spiritual, unity in pre-historic Europe, which Professor Gordon Childe describes. It extended from Africa to Poland and Moravia and is revealed in

the amazing cave drawings of paleolithic man. But the spiritual problem of European unity as we really know it became acute in the ancient world which was not essentially European at all but Asian and Mediterranean. Dr W. W. Tarn, the author of this section, deals with all the facts of Greek and Roman greatness and decline, and he is particularly interesting on Alexander the Great. But it is not the facts that tell us of the crisis of a world as it became European.

There is a little chapter unrelated to what goes before or after, by Professor C. H. Dodd, on 'The Jews and the Beginning of the Christian Church'. It reveals the weakness of a method of narration consciously or unconsciously limited to political happenings. 'Jesus (his followers believed) stood for the cause of God, and had given his life for it.' Can one deal thus with the tremendous fact of God becoming man, and if one can, does that kind of history make sense? 'The doctrine of the Incarnation of the Logos gave the Christian faith a medium for interpreting itself to Greek-thinking people; and it also provided an instrument for the construction of a reasoned Christian theology.' But what was it like to be a Christian in the first century A.D. and to believe that?

And so we go on, unenlightened, to the other great crisis of the fourth century, a crisis so very similar to that of our own times. We are told 'why' the Roman Empire collapsed but not, which is far more important, what precisely it was that saved Europe from darkness. Of course, the facts are here: the Papacy, St Benedict, monks and kings, but facts do not explain; they are, in Lord Acton's words, 'a burden to the memory, not an illumination of the soul'. Professor F. L. Ganshof, of the University of Ghent, can write about the Middle Ages without seeing in the struggle between Popes and Emperors much more than a political conflict. He does not go into the profound clash between two fundamentally opposed concepts of society. We do not learn what the idea of the Holy Roman Empire meant to medieval man, what it felt like to be a Ghibelline or a Guelf. Not that there is not a painstaking account of all the relevant facts—and there are so many more—but an understanding of the real spiritual problems, of the beginning of the divergence between Byzantium and Rome, is nowhere conveyed, and yet without it and its effects on later centuries the European inheritance is incomprehensible.

A wider approach is that of Professor Sir George Clark who

deals with the 'Early Modern Period', the Reformation, the Discoveries, the Wars of the seventeenth century, concluding, perhaps too much in the English strain of misunderstanding the term, with the 'Baroque' age. He is followed by two French historians, Professors Vaucher and Mornet, on the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, but here again the wood cannot be seen for the trees. The events, the ideas and the men are all there, but we can never feel the force of the impact on Europe of Cartesian man, of the view of man as the measure of all things, and consequently of the later collapse of that rationalist and romantic *Weltanschauung*. The Reformation displaced the Church; the eighteenth century displaced Christ and the Christian ethics and dogma and substituted its own dogma of man and secularism. There is no analysis in these chapters of what this has meant and still means for the European inheritance, how deeply influenced the nineteenth century and our own has been by a theory of politics and education and society which took no account of original sin and supposed man naturally able to institute a way of life for the discernment and the realization of good. Nor do we understand why the roots of nineteenth-century authoritarianism and twentieth-century totalitarianism must be sought in the democratic religion of the French Revolution, and earlier still in the Athenian political experience, and as Lord Percy of Newcastle would have it, in the displacement of 'Augustinianism' from the State in to the Church.

Professor Geoffrey Bruun writes on the nineteenth century, and by virtue of his New World perspective, his is perhaps one of the best contributions to these volumes, going beyond the external facts into the social and economic tensions which we have inherited. In an interesting chapter on the problems of the 1914-1950 era, Professor Vermeil introduces the comparison between traditional and modern 'atonal' music as a help towards an understanding of the conflict between western humanism and the disharmony of the human mind, awakened long ago by Copernicus's view of the world and stimulated both by the scientific inventions and the extraordinary increase in populations. But his findings, and in particular his emphasis on the German responsibility for the European chaos, have not been related to the conclusions of the other contributors. The problem

of Germany, and the political as much as the religious, is the problem of Europe in *miniature*, and cannot be understood without mentioning the impact on Europe of the first division of the Carolingian Empire by the Treaty of Verdun in 843, and the effects of nationalist disintegration on the position of the Emperor as a 'Justice of the Peace' of Europe.

The choice of nine scholars—four British, one Belgian, three Frenchmen and one American—can hardly be regarded as representative; the omission of Spanish, German and Scandinavian contributions is a serious defect. The selection of the illustrations and of the series of interesting documents appended to each of the seven major divisions of this History deserve a special word of praise. But we cannot help regretting that an impressive scholarly effort has gone into the making of just another quantitatively bewildering work on European history. The Communist view of man is an aberration of the European inheritance but it is the only philosophy that appears from these pages to have made the necessary effort of shaping the past according to a new vision. The Christian view of man which is the heart of the European inheritance remains hidden in the humanist undergrowth.

CATECHISM FOR ADULTS—II: GOD

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THE Apostles' Creed, like all creeds, is a formal summary of salient points in the tradition—in the *paradosis*, what is handed over in the spirit from the Apostles to the end of time. Though it was not drawn up by the Apostles it does represent a systematic elaboration of the trinitarian formulae and clauses found in the Epistles of St Paul. The evidence suggests that in the primitive Church the creeds take shape first in association with the interrogations which are part of the baptismal rite, and secondly in the catechetical instructions. Be that as it may, there is no evidence for fixed official creeds till the turn of the second century when the Roman Creed was formulated as a declaratory creed for catechumens—this is the creed which, with