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MODERN HISTORY IN A UNIVERSITY

*Inaugural Lecture of the
Professor of Modern History
delivered at the College
on 1 December 1961*

by

PROFESSOR ALUN DAVIES

M.A., F.R.Hist.S.



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA

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MODERN HISTORY IN A UNIVERSITY

MY first public lecture at this College gives me the opportunity to say how much I value the honour of being the first occupant of its chair of modern history. I assume it with feelings compounded of delight, gratitude, and responsibility: the delight of an expatriate at returning to what Giraldus Cambrensis called 'my native soil and agreeable territory', tinged as this delight is with memories of an intensely personal kind associated with Swansea and the surrounding region; gratitude for once more having the opportunity of having something of a hand in the work of the national University of this land which has given me so much, and at what is obviously a momentous period in the history of higher education in this country; the precise nature and scope of my responsibility I hope to define to you during the course of this lecture. I can at this stage but assure you that I am conscious of its gravity in full measure, but that I am much cheered by the consideration and co-operation which I have already received on all sides from members of the College in general and from Professor Glanmor Williams and my other colleagues in the Department of History, in particular.

An inaugural lecturer is faced with one of two choices. He can either demonstrate some aspect of his expertise in the form of a specialized piece of research. Alternatively, he can use his platform from which to think out aloud about his subject. To have put before you some particular problem from a carefully circumscribed field would, I confess, certainly have been the easier, the safer, and possibly the more profitable course. But as this is a new chair, it seems to me to be more appropriate on this occasion to speak on matters relating to the study and teaching of modern history in a University College such as ours. It is particularly relevant

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as we prepare ourselves for the full impact of those twin giants, Bulge and Trend. As they loom ever nearer we would do well, I think, to reflect upon some of the current developments and problems in the study of modern history, and consider how far our resources respond to our obligations and needs, not to speak of our wants.

What, first of all, do we mean by 'modern history'? It is a truism to say that all division of history into periods is artificial and misleading. 'Such is the unity of all history' said Maitland, in a memorable epigram, 'that any one who endeavours to tell a piece of it must feel that his first sentence tears a seamless web.' Sir Alfred Zimmern said much the same, when he suggested that it would be an insult to the shades of Gibbon and Freeman to suggest bounds either of space or of time to their activities.¹ But such has been the effect of industrialization upon historical as upon every other academic study that division of labour has now to be an accepted canon of our craft. We must begin and end somewhere. Traditionally, the starting-point for beginning the study of modern history is somewhere around the end of the fifteenth century, with the discovery of new continents and the passing of the world centre of gravity from the shores of the Mediterranean to those of the Atlantic. But since the earlier centuries of the modern period are already in safe hands here, and since, as I shall try to explain, there is a large enough task ahead, I propose to interpret my special responsibility as beginning somewhere about the middle of the eighteenth century.

The last decades of the eighteenth century do, it seems to me, provide a most appropriate starting-point for a study of more recent times. Since a break has to be made somewhere, this is a most convenient point in the history of the West at which to make it, from several points of view.

¹ Sir Frederick Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law*, 2nd ed. (London, 1911), vol. i, p. 1; Alfred Zimmern, *The Study of International Relations* (Oxford, 1931), p. 10.

Politically, there are stirrings for reform in most European countries; the old-fashioned type of absolute monarchy hastens to adjust itself and to modernize its states. On the periphery, Russia advances into Europe and the Eastern Question takes its modern form. Overseas, the old colonial empires begin to break up and a new world comes into existence to redress the balance of the old. Economically, trade expands increasingly, industrialization gets under way. Socially, the ascending middle classes grow more and more dissatisfied with existing structures. Intellectually, we are at a curious half-way house between an older world and the modern one, still surrounded by preconceptions surviving from the past, yet with the outlines of the intellectual temper of more recent times emerging quite clearly.

But if we may agree upon a beginning, where do we end? Surely, wherever and whenever there exists a sufficient body of material on which the historian may work. The end of the Second World War is as convenient a terminal date as any. By then the new world which, as I said, was coming into existence to redress the balance of the old at the end of the eighteenth century, had come to dominate it. No longer was the world centre of gravity in Western Europe but Western Europe, together with outlying parts of the English-speaking world, was, to a considerable degree, dominated by North America.

Within these limits in time, there exists a wide and rich field of study. I need not, I think, in this day and age, take up much time in pleading the validity of the recent past as a field for historical study. The debate on this subject should now long since be over, and the value of such work, judged by the strictest historical canons, has been amply vindicated by a variety of studies. Even so, the bogey is raised from time to time that in order properly to exercise the fundamental virtues of objectivity and perspective, the true historian must not work upon a period that is close to

him in time. Distance alone lends detachment to the view, and enables one to see above and beyond the confusing clouds of passion and emotion.

I would hope that this venerable bogey is fast being laid to rest. On his tombstone I would engrave the words: 'All the past is past; a thousand years are as yesterday, and yesterday as a thousand years.' The historian of recent times has no cause for undue sensitivity upon this issue of objectivity and perspective. I think the matter was well put by the headmaster of the Languedoc school in which that great French historian, and remarkable man, Marc Bloch, served his first term as teacher: 'Here, with the nineteenth century, there is little danger; but when you touch on the religious wars, you must take great care.'¹ We delude ourselves if we think that it is only when events have receded sufficiently that we can gain a perfect vantage-point for a view over the past. For such perfection is not to be found neither in men nor in the history they write. Each generation, even if it sees fit to tackle the same problems, sees them in a different perspective and in a different light; and the changed focus is not of necessity the truer one.

As Mr. E. H. Carr so neatly put it in his Trevelyan lectures at the University of Cambridge earlier this year:

... the historian must not be tempted to think of himself as an eagle surveying the scene from a lonely crag or as a V.I.P. at the saluting base. Nothing of the kind! The historian is just another dim figure trudging along in another part of the procession. And as the procession winds along, swerving now to the right and now to the left, and sometimes doubling back on itself, the relative positions of different parts of the procession are constantly changing. . . . New vistas, new angles of vision, constantly appear as the procession—and the historian with it—moves along. The historian is part of history. The point in the procession at which he finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past.²

¹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (Manchester, 1954), p. 38.

² E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, 1961), p. 30.

It is misleading, therefore, to draw a clear-cut distinction between two types of historical study—on the one hand, 'contemporary history', as it is loosely called, the history related by men who have themselves lived through the events which they discuss and so, presumably, have committed themselves so deeply in thought, if not in deed, to one side or the other that they must write as partisans. On the other hand, there is 'academic' history, which comes very much later, when the student of the past has discovered what Professor Butterfield has called the 'structural features of a conflict' in which all the contending parties were bound, and he is thus able to rise above the entangling toils of partisanship. Of course, the historian should strive to shun partisanship like the plague, but to equate it with the passage of time is to take far too over-simplified a view.

But detachment is not enough. The search for records, their examination and evaluation, the selection and use of those that bear upon a particular problem, the definition and redefinition of that problem, and finally, the attempt to explain it—all these are a vital part of the historian's discipline and drill. But he needs more than the cold and deadly impartiality of the seminar or the library. As Sir Keith Hancock has remarked, attachment is as important as detachment, and at certain stages in any historical inquiry, it may even be more important.¹ The historian needs a warm sympathy as well as a cool head. He has to try not just to put himself at some distance from the situation he is examining but, on the contrary, to put himself into it. He must get close to the people he is writing about, and with what they were trying to do, before he delivers judgement upon them. For it is people, after all, who make history and history, in E. C. Bentley's immortal words, is 'about chaps'. Not only, then, must the historian review the past, but he must to some extent re-create it—the *résurrection intégrale* of men

¹ W. K. Hancock, *Country and Calling* (London, 1954), esp. pp. 209-29; *Politics in Pitcairn and Other Essays* (London, 1947).

and events of which Michelet spoke, and which makes a work like his history of the French Revolution still worth reading after eighty years of much more 'scientific' study of the period.

The historian's experience and awareness of his own times often help him better to sense the atmosphere and grasp the problems of whatever period he may be studying. I would hope, for instance, that someone who witnessed, as I did in France in 1940, the reality of invasion and conquest, and of the activities of what we have, since the Spanish Civil War, come to call 'the fifth column' should be better able to appreciate the predicament and psychosis of the men of the Great Revolution of 1789. Similarly, the problems and policy of a Metternich, after the whole of Europe had been turned upside down by revolution and war continuously for nearly a quarter of a century, have been differently and more favourably assessed by historians who have lived through two great wars and have seen the destruction of both the Habsburg Empire and the European equilibrium. An unfriendly and even hostile historiography which was the product of Western liberalism, Central European neo-liberalism, and German nationalism, and which depicted Metternich as a shallow, repulsive, dishonest, and reactionary tyrant, has by now given way to a far more sympathetic picture by historians, who have become disillusioned with liberalism and nationalism and with the weaknesses that sometimes followed democracy, in their portrayal of one who wanted to limit national sovereignty and who claimed that Europe was his fatherland.¹

This attachment, this 'resurrection of the past', may not be such a problem to the historian of later modern times. He is in a particularly favourable position as far as his

¹ For example, in the works of H. von Srbik (1925) and G. Bertier de Sauvigny (1959). See Peter Viereck, 'New Views on Metternich', *Review of Politics*, xiii (1951), pp. 211-28.

evidence goes. He has masses of material at his disposal—on paper, on wax, or on film which help him to get the 'feel' of his period. For example, a historian of the 1930's in Germany finds records of Hitler's speeches indispensable documentary material in order fully to apprise the nature of their delivery, the way the raucous voice rose to a screaming pitch of abuse and hysteria, and how these outpourings were punctuated by the maniac applause of those whom he led.

But while we may agree on the ease with which a historian of the recent past may appreciate the atmosphere of the times he is studying, its very volume raises several problems. Not only is there a voluminous and complex collection of documentary material, but also the testimony, both oral and written, which results from probing the memory of witnesses who are willing, and even eager, to have the whole story told and understood. The historian of recent times can converse with those who participated in events and he can get them to make available notes or memoranda on particular points. More than that, they can answer him back, so that, with luck, the historian is really conducting a lively and salutary dialogue with the past, cross-examining a voluble, and perhaps a slippery, but not a dumb witness. It is a task for which he can be ill-prepared; he will need just as many powers of detection, but of a different kind, as the medievalist poring over his charter.

For instance, Professor Asa Briggs, in writing the first volume of *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (1961) which takes the story to the official birth of the Corporation in January 1927, is based upon voluminous B.B.C. archives of some 6,500 items; the private papers of Lord Reith and his 'extremely full and informative diary'; in addition, there were numerous biographies and reminiscences of the pioneers to be drawn upon. Or, consider the problem of the student of international relations between 1919 and 1939. There already have been printed quite a full selection of diplomatic documents on important

matters from the British and American archives. A similar publication of German documents which were captured at the end of the war is going ahead, and there will be French and Italian publications. In addition, there is a vast League of Nations documentation. These contemporary, official documents must be supplemented by other papers of both organizations and individuals, not to speak of the oral and visual type of evidence to which I have referred. In the course of time, the archives of governments will be open in full.

Clearly, in view of this vast increase in the amount of material, the relation between the historian and his sources must carefully be considered. He cannot exercise his craft so closely on such large masses of source material; somebody must reduce some of it to manageable dimensions. As the years go by, the size of the problem increases mightily. Only the day before yesterday, the Keeper of the Public Records was estimating that the volume of records produced by bodies subject to the Public Records Act of 1958 will stretch each year for 100 miles. The Office would, of course, be reducing this vast bulk to the dimensions of one mile a year but the sifting is in itself an enormous problem. This is why it has been suggested that there is room for a middle class—an *entrepreneur* class, if you like—of scholars who would undertake this, in the way that the history of the last war, both military and civil, was, and is being, written—by independent historians who had special access to certain material but were loosely, and misleadingly, called 'official historians'.¹

Doubts are sometimes expressed on account of the restricted access to archives for the recent past, and the historian is told that he ought to wait until the archives are open to him. Of course, much depends upon the nature and location of evidence, and assuredly archives should be

¹ E. L. Woodward, 'Some Considerations on the Present State of Historical Studies', *Raleigh Lecture to the British Academy*, 1950.

opened freely in this country to a considerably later terminal date than is at present the case. But, in the meantime, the difficulties can be much exaggerated. Every historian would probably like a cache of documents of his own which would enable him to bring off a coup and thus make a revolutionary contribution to the study of his subject. Some may be lucky enough to do this; but most distinguished contributions are made by work on material which is already, and sometimes has long been, available. Suspicion of the availability, as well as the nature of material, is a proper attribute of historians at all times but in modern times the quantity and variety of information and of speculation is such that concealment is not easy. As an expert in these matters has so shrewdly commented about the study of modern diplomatic history: "The conception of the few essential documents in the locked drawer is . . . a picturesque survival from the days when all the essential documents *could* be gathered into one locked drawer."¹

Having set down my markers in respect of time, let me now turn to set them in terms of space. The purpose of the new chair is to develop the teaching of modern international history, as distinct from modern national Welsh and British history for which the College is already so well provided. In assuming this responsibility, I am happy to recall that this has been a feature of historical instruction at this College since its very earliest days. Some members of my audience this evening will recall how, from the days of Ernest Hughes, modern international history was taught here by W. N. Medlicott, now Stevenson Professor of International History in the University of London, and with whom I have been privileged to work these past six years. From the beginning Swansea has offered both general courses in this field and special subjects such as the Eastern question in the later nineteenth century, and the scramble

¹ W. N. Medlicott, 'The Scope and Study of International History', *International Affairs*, xxxi (1955), pp. 413-26.

for Africa; and valuable research work has been done here on both these subjects.

What, then, do we understand by 'international history'? The term has been variously defined and, between the wars, was given a highly optimistic, almost a mystical, connotation. Sir Daniel Stevenson, for example, who founded the two chairs of international history in the University of London, one at Chatham House and the other at the London School of Economics and Political Science, based his gift on the belief that war was caused by ignorance and the deliberate distortion of the truth both of the past and of the present. An impartial and scientific account of international history would help, therefore, to maintain peace by correcting misapprehensions and prejudices such as had caused the First World War. The term has, however, been most frequently interpreted as the history of the interaction of several sovereign states at government level. In this sense it is no more than 'pure' diplomatic history of the Great Powers, of the kind that was in its hey-day in the inter-war period. The years after 1918 gave a great stimulus to studies of this kind as men were concerned with the issues of the causes of and responsibilities for the war, and the problems of the peace settlement. Governments became very aware of the importance of the study of the recent past. Revolutionary governments in Germany and Russia, anxious to expose the régimes they had overthrown, published masses of diplomatic documents, and made it unwise for other governments not to do likewise. As a result, diplomatic historians were thick on the ground during the 1920's and 1930's. In the words which the history textbooks of the future will be sure ever to associate with Mr. Harold Macmillan, 'never had they had it so good'.

Inevitably, the reaction set in and historians began to argue that economic factors were just as important in the international relations of states as what 'one clerk from one Foreign Office wrote to another'. This argument was always,

I think, lurking in the background, partly on account of the influence of the writing of radicals such as J. A. Hobson on economic imperialism but largely on account of the intellectual influence of Marxian Socialism and the steady progress of the study of economic history. In Mr. A. J. P. Taylor's pungent phrase, 'Teachers of history put the works of Dr. Gooch or Professor S. B. Fay on top of their table and consulted Brailsford's *War of Steel and Gold* under the desk'.¹ Since the end of the Second World War the establishment of NATO, of the European Payments Union, the Iron and Steel Community, and latterly of the Common Market, has set some historians wondering how far their emergence is not solely the consequence of the war but of much previous developments in the history of Europe. The stock reply of diplomatic historians is that whatever considerations affect a country's foreign policy will find their place in the foreign office papers of that country. But this is to evade the issue. It is true that the task of finding the economic factors which went to the formulation of foreign policy is a difficult one but all too often the attempt has not been made. Let me take as an example one of the most outstanding of modern diplomatic historians and one of the most characteristic products of the period between the wars when diplomatic history attracted such a galaxy of able students, Harold Temperley. He made no real effort to investigate economic conditions. His *Foreign Policy of Canning* (1925), if I read it aright, ascribes the sympathetic relations between England and the South American states to Canning's diplomatic skill and he makes no particular investigation of the economic side of the relationship. Similarly his *England and the Near East: The Crimea* (1936), gives almost no specific information about the commercial basis for the relations between England and the Ottoman Empire. Even now, there is much unfinished business to be done before we can assess the validity of statements such

¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *Englishmen and Others* (London, 1956), p. 85.

as this startling one made by one of our leading diplomatic historians only four years ago, that in the later years of the nineteenth century 'financiers, not incompetent aristocrats, provided the driving force in foreign policy'.¹ The same holds true with regard to the exact importance of strategic considerations upon international relations: it is something of a shock, perhaps, to realize that even in the well-trodden field of Anglo-American relations during the nineteenth century the strategic importance of Canada has not yet been the subject of a significant study.

But I am not at present concerned with indicating gaps. What I am trying to stress is that international history is far more than the official relations between governments in precisely the same way as national history is more than the story of a government. Not that I am for one moment deriding the value of 'pure' diplomatic history as an academic subject. On the contrary, from a purely pedagogic viewpoint there is much to commend the exercise of comparing the diplomatic documents of two or more countries, and of tracing the course of negotiations through its various complexities. More, the history of diplomacy is obviously important in itself, since it deals with a frequently vital aspect of political life and relationships between nations. Again, the isolation of a certain factor in history for the purpose of detailed study is a prerequisite to the richer understanding of the whole. However, the process of tracing a series of diplomatic negotiations so often leads to the placing of undue emphasis upon a purely mechanical reaction to events. And the interpretation of international history as diplomatic history has created a situation that is unfavourable to the subject; it has promoted exclusive attention to one aspect, leaving other aspects to the care of others which means that they become the care of no one since we are all such narrow specialists these days. Further, it has meant that international history has been written most often from

¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers* (London, 1957), p. 99.

above. France does this, or England does that. Statesmen make plans and try, with varying degrees of success, to carry them out. But this is not the way things really happen. Detailed studies of foreign policy are very valuable but histories of international relations need to be broadened and deepened by economic and social analyses, and by the examination of domestic administrative and legal developments—by the consideration of such factors as the growth of parliamentary democracy, of socialism, of industrialization, and of population, to name but a few. Those which deal with the 1930's, for instance, have to give a great deal of emphasis to the great depression. They need also to be illuminated by the flashes of ideas, by the closer examination of moral, religious, and intellectual concepts, and the nature and strength of the flow of the passions of an age. We have to take the trouble to try and understand the cultural complexes that have tended to unite or to divide nations. There has latterly been a reaction in British political historiography against the approach and methods of the late Sir Lewis Namier who has been a dominant influence on it since the First World War. He has been accused of being the Darwin of political history, and of taking the mind out of history just as Darwin took the mind out of the universe. It is particularly important, I think, to put the mind back into international history for the period from 1815 to 1918. Thereafter, at least, we neglect it at our peril and, as the editor of *History* reminds us in his current editorial notes, *Mein Kampf* is as much required reading as Plato's *Republic* for the student of these times.¹

Let us not, therefore, have too much isolation of particular aspects of international history for exclusive study. Faulty organization of our historical work merely for the sake of convenience or of quick results is a dangerous proceeding at all times. The same criticism may also be made of the study of imperial history: there, too, the study of

¹ Alfred Cobban in *History*, vol. xlvi, no. 158 (Dec. 1961).

policy has been overdone; theses have been written about colonial history without going outside the resources of the Public Record Office, and we stand in need of studies which make far more use of the archives of missionary societies and trading companies.

Another feature in the present situation where modern historians are said not to be fulfilling expectations that may be reasonably required of them is in their failure to free themselves from the myopic concentration on Western Europe and to adjust their outlook to the radically changed perspective wrought by the earth-shaking events of the past fifty years. That this perspective was changing was already obvious as a result of the First World War which was not really a world war in the precise sense of the term, but rather a civil war of the states of Europe with certain world-wide consequences, such as the growth of Arab and Indian nationalism, of anti-foreignism in China, and above all, the Russian Revolution of 1917. Some of the outstandingly significant developments of the inter-war years, such as the Soviet impact on the Western World, the crushing consequences of the American slump of 1929, and Japan's first step exactly thirty years ago, on the road that led to Singapore and Pearl Harbour ten years later—all these hastened the shift in perspective. American history, at least, began to creep into university syllabuses, and some Russian history, although Far Eastern history remained something of a Cinderella. But the War of 1939–45, although it, too, was to begin with, a European civil war, became a global war in truth twenty years ago this coming week when Japan and the United States became involved. It has been maintained that this war caused a shift in historical perspective almost as revolutionary as one of those great geological upheavals which throw up one stratum and depress another, and this viewpoint has led to the persuasive argument for the scrapping of our histories of Europe, for merely to tinker with them and bring them up to date is worse than useless;

they all need to be written anew with another set of values in a new world in order to give us a larger view of our past and to adapt it to the new perspective in which the old Europe stands in a new age of global politics and global civilization.¹

Such an approach has come as a breath of fresh air to historical studies of all periods. It is not as novel as some of its devotees seem to think. Historians of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, such as Voltaire, were unwilling to confine themselves within the European tradition but aimed at being truly universal, both in space and in time, in spite of the limitations of their knowledge and their frequently propagandist purpose of showing how all nations had contributed to the progress of mankind.² Thereafter, the emphasis of the nineteenth century was on the history of the triumphant or emergent nation state and upon the extension of its civilizing power overseas and 'international history' became either a collection of the histories of several separate European countries or of their purely diplomatic relations.

In the light of all that I have said, let me now turn to put before you as practical propositions what I consider to be the prospects and the agenda for future work. Firstly, in so far as the study of later modern European history is concerned, the consolidation and strengthening of previously acquired positions. Europe is ever behind us, as Henri Contamines has phrased it, and we must continue to dig yet more deeply into its history. To take but one example, I trust that the controversial thesis of Jacques Godechot and R. R. Palmer that there was a 'world revolution of the West' between 1770 and 1849 of which the Revolution in

¹ The outstanding exponent of this view in this country is Professor Geoffrey Barraclough. See, especially, his *History in a Changing World* (Oxford, 1955) and 'Europe and the Wider World in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in A. O. Sarkissian (ed.), *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography* (London, 1961).

² J. H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian* (Oxford, 1958).

France was a part, although an important part, will be to stimulate closer examination of the revolutionary groups in various lands and of the social structures of which they were part.¹

Secondly, no less fundamental is an extension of the range of study. When we read the history, for instance, of the century from 1815 to 1914 which, in M. Renouvin's phrase, marks 'the apogee of Europe', a period when its wealth and numbers were increasing, and its living standards rising, we need also to pay attention to the significance and consequences of the movement and settlement of more than 40 million people who emigrated from Europe during this period. Or again, should we not study not only the impact of the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848 in Europe but also the imitations of the Russian Revolution of 1905 in several parts of Asia—in China, in Persia, and in the Ottoman Empire? And further, an interest in the history of societies other than our own in very different parts of the world is an obligation, not only because they make up about three-quarters of it, but simply because such seems to me to be the bounden duty of a university.

But this extension of the field of study, be it only for the past two centuries, places the student of modern history in a dilemma. Shall he resign himself to being superficial? Or to being the narrowest of specialists? To attempt too much ends by giving too little, and in a crowded period such as this, we have to do our best to see to it that those aspects which have the deepest significance should receive the major attention. This is no easy task: we can easily get our proportions wrong, and be like the teacher of whom Professor Dexter Perkins tells the story who gave a course on the Renaissance and devoted his major attention to the political rivalries of the Italian city states.

¹ For a full-scale exposition of their thesis see J. Godechot, *La Grande Nation* (Paris, 1956) and *La Contre-Révolution* (Paris, 1961); R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, vol. 1; *The Challenge* (Princeton and Oxford, 1959).

The wind, in truth, bloweth where it listeth. The past is too complex and too reluctant to yield its secrets to permit of anything but an open-minded and sympathetic approach to the relative merits of all periods. Far be it for me, therefore, to pontificate about the absolute necessity of new courses, although I do believe that historical studies would do well to throw some lumber overboard from time to time. I would, however, put before you some lines along which development seems to me to be possible and desirable on two grounds: firstly, in order that the increase in student numbers may be accompanied by some diversification of fields of study, and not amount to merely swelling existing courses; secondly, so that this study is in line if, I understand things aright, with studies in cognate departments, especially those of Politics, Economics, and Geography, with which I am already concerned, and the interesting developments in the social studies which lie ahead.

I would hope to widen the range of choice for Honours students so as to make available courses on the history of the British Empire and Commonwealth and on the history of the U.S.A. The latter would consider especially the development of the U.S.A. as an 'empire', both on the American continent, and as a great world power. It would see how far it is, in the suggestive words of Professor Van Alstyne, 'a typically ambitious and expanding national state . . . the Germany of the American continents; though geography and other considerations have given it far more freedom of movement than the German Reich ever possessed'.¹ I also envisage the introduction of the study of Russian and Far Eastern history, again paying special consideration to the expansion of these empires and their role in the modern world. This raises several practical problems of an even more difficult nature than the study of Commonwealth and American history. There is the

¹ Richard W. Van Alstyne, *The American Empire: Its Historical Pattern and Evolution* (London, 1960), p. 27.

question of the availability of teachers who have adequate linguistic equipment, some familiarity with the area and the possibility of continued contact with it; the opportunities and inducements for research in these fields; and the provision of library and archive resources. Such help must await upon the implementation of the recommendations of the sub-committee of the University Grants Committee on Oriental, Slavonic, East European, and African Studies under Sir William Hayter and his colleagues. The comprehensive set of proposals which the report makes, generally speaking, in order to bring the study of the non-western world into the main stream of university life, are, I have reason already to know, of immense interest to those of us in Swansea who are devoted to modern studies in general, and to social studies in particular.¹

In the meantime a start can, I think, be made. At the undergraduate level, enough translations of texts of all kinds exist to meet our needs. There already exist complete volumes like Mrs. Degras's *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1917-1941* (1951-3) or Tong and Fairbank's *China's Response to the West, 1839-1923* (1954) or Arthur Waley's *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (1958), or W. G. Beasley's *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy* (1955) to mention but a few, and we may supplement these for our immediate pedagogic needs, with documentary material from the appendixes to specialized monographs, the files of *The Slavonic Review* or the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, not to speak of theses written at specialized centres.

All this has, as I see it, a distinct pedagogic significance in the College. It links up with the activities that are already afoot in other Departments—with the studies of the regional geography of Europe, North America, South Asia, and Africa; with the examination of foreign governments

¹ *University Grants Committee: Report of the Sub-Committee on Oriental, Slavonic, East European, and African Studies* (London, 1961).

that goes on in the Department of Politics; and the economic development of the Great Powers since 1870 of the Department of Economics. Further, it links us up with other universities both at home and abroad and will, I hope, encourage still further mutual exchanges of ideas and persons. Again, I trust that the presence in these courses of overseas students will be very much to the advantage of the study of both European and extra-European. Those of us born and bred in the Western European tradition need to find out from the extra-Europeans something of the consequences of some of the historical forces we shall be studying. Those who come from outside Europe, having endured the impact and adopted the ways, stand in the same relation to the history of European government and administrative practices, cultural traditions, and scientific and technological 'know-how' as we ourselves do to Greece, Rome, and Israel.

And so I come to the last, and the widest, question of all. What is the purpose and value of all this study that I have outlined? 'What good comes of it at last?', quoth little Peterkin.

Time was when large claims were made for the relevance of historical study. When this century began, there was a fine faith in history and in its exciting potentialities. 'The knowledge of the past', believed Lord Acton, who planned the original *Cambridge Modern History*, 'the record of truths revealed by experience is eminently practical, as an instrument of action and a power that goes to the making of the future'. 'Few things are more likely to contribute to the stability and prosperity of a democratic state than the training of its members by an intelligent study of history', proclaimed Sir Richard Lodge in 1894, thus echoing Sir John Seely.¹ Since then, historians have become much more reluctant to make such claims and by the time the first

¹ Lord Acton, *Lectures on Modern History* (London, 1906), p. 2; Richard Lodge, *The Study of History in a Scottish University* (Glasgow, 1894), p. 10.



volumes of the *New Cambridge Modern History* began to appear in 1957 the mood had greatly changed and the fine faith of Lord Acton had given way to disillusionment, scepticism, if not disdain. Latterly, the activity of being a historian has been considered by Michael Oakeshott as being of no contemporary relevance. To him the past seems reasonable enough as 'a field in which we exercise our moral and political opinions, like whippets in a meadow on Sunday afternoon'; the historian of today, however, 'has no love of a living past, replete with messages and instructions; his task is to endow the past with death, for the past he adores is dead'.¹

It may be that in achieving its academic respectability, the subject has lost something of its enthusiasm, sense of adventure, and contemporary relevance. It may be that the ever-increasing specialization and compartmental segregation may rebound adversely on the role of history in the general education of students. I do not believe that this is so. For me to attempt to define what I mean by 'general education' at this stage of my lecture would be to exhaust time and to encroach upon eternity. I shall, therefore, simply make one or two more of the sweeping statements which are the privilege and the peril of inaugural lecturers who speak on broad, general subjects such as mine.

I shall say, firstly, that I like the definition of general education as the thinking about and discussion of general questions affecting the human situation. Whether you like this definition or not, perhaps you will agree that the problem of general education is one of the most urgent and difficult ones that is facing our universities. I conceive of my subject as being able to contribute something to this task because of its relation with cognate subjects, which it should ever refresh with an awareness of the complexity of human experience.

¹ Michael Oakeshott, 'The Activity of Being a Historian', *Historical Studies I: Papers read before the Second Irish Conference of Historians* (London, 1958), pp. 1-19.

Secondly, it is the task of the historian to determine and to rethink the past. In his capacity as a historian, it is not for him to provide the final answers or a general scheme of things, to proclaim historical laws and say that the future should be planned accordingly. But he would be less than human if he did not think upon the final causes or on human destiny, and to make certain fundamental assumptions in dealing with any period that is really big enough to be worth studying. Sir Maurice Powicke calls this 'a constructive outlook over the past':¹ the nature of it depends on our view of the present and of the future. I do not see why historians should ever fool themselves that they can do without it. Where there is no vision, the subject, like the people, perisheth.

Finally, in the words of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, 'example and fact' are always preferable to 'methodological articles and theoretical discussion'. Action is far more stimulating than precept. Those who, like myself, have had the great good fortune to study under a great historian know this. I remember quite clearly the restless curiosity with which he surveyed his field, his readiness always to learn from other disciplines and, above all, his constant awareness of his own period and its problems in the whole record of human experience.² I call these qualities again to mind as I take my place in the increasingly full and vigorous life of this University College, and seek to make my contribution to it. The opportunity is exciting; the only thing that casts me down are my own limitations. I hope that I may at least have the imagination and zest with which to attack my task. For as the College motto has it, *Gweddw crefft heb ei dawn*.

¹ F. M. Powicke, *Modern Historians and the Study of History* (London, 1955), p. 174.

² Some of us who were his pupils or colleagues have written something of this in *Hommages à Georges Lefebvre* (Paris, 1960).

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