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**THE POPULAR  
HISTORY OF  
ENGLAND**

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THE POPULAR

HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

CHARLES KNIGHT.

VOLUME I.

FROM THE INVASION OF CÆSAR TO THE END OF THE REIGN  
OF HENRY IV.

*First American Edition.*

NEW YORK:

AMERICAN BOOK EXCHANGE,

TRIBUNE BUILDING.

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HISTORY

VOLUME I

FROM THE INVASION OF THE END OF THE REIGN

DEDICATION

report apparent safety and manifest prosperity. I echo the  
universal feeling in expressing my conviction that to the con-  
stitutional principles and public virtues of the Queen, and to  
the great example of private excellence exhibited by Her  
Majesty, and the deep-felt interest I have taken in her  
very much of the nation's history, and the character of the  
Queen's benevolent and patriotic labours, was the unwearied  
endeavour of your Royal Highness's illustrious Father to  
bring to the people of this country the history of our  
country.

TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

ALBERT EDWARD

PRINCE OF WALES, K.G., ETC., ETC.

With the earnest prayer that by the Divine blessing your  
Royal Highness may be enabled to accomplish in every dutiful work  
I now lay long in the enjoyment of all domestic happiness  
as surrounded by the affection of the People.

SIR,

My attempt to write a History of England more in unison  
with the requirements of the present age than the Historie  
still in common use, which were published in the last cen-  
tury, has reached its close, after a continuous labour of long  
duration. My work is concluded at the period when your  
Royal Highness is about to complete your twenty-first year.  
On this auspicious Birth-day, I present this History to your  
Royal Highness, dedicating it to you with profound respect.

The History of our country, thus soliciting your Royal  
Highness's gracious reception, was entitled "Popular," as  
being intended to form a History of the People as well as a  
History of the State. In tracing the gradual advance of this  
People out of slavery, feudal oppression, and regal despotism,  
to the attainment of equal justice and well-guarded rights,  
my duty has been to show how the union of Liberty with  
Order has at length made the British Throne the securest  
in the world, reposing upon deep-rooted institutions  
possessing that capacity for safe because gradual develop-  
ment, which, at every stage of our national progress, has  
been fruitful in salutary improvement.

Humbly acknowledging the bounty of that Providence  
which has conducted this nation to a period of unexampled



DA

DEDICATION.

se, apparent safety, and manifest prosperity, I echo the  
ersal feeling in expressing my conviction that to the con-  
stitutional principles and public virtues of the Queen, and to  
the great example of private excellence exhibited by Her  
Majesty and the deeply-lamented Prince Consort, we owe  
very much of the good we now enjoy. Those social amelio-  
rations which have been the happiest characteristics of the  
Queen's beneficent reign, and which it was the unwearied  
endeavour of your Royal Highness's illustrious Father to  
promote, will, I have the assured belief, receive a new im-  
pulse from your Royal Highness's fostering care.

With the earnest prayer that by the Divine Blessing your  
Royal Highness may be strengthened in every patriotic work,  
and may live long in the enjoyment of all domestic happi-  
ness, surrounded by the affections of the People,

I have the honour to subscribe myself

Your Royal Highness's obliged and devoted Servant,

CHARLES KNIGHT.

PREFACE.

I wish to set down, with plainness and sincerity, the  
motives that have induced me to undertake a New History of  
England, and the objects I propose to myself in the task.

In October, 1854, upon the occasion of Lord John Russell  
delivering an address at Bristol on the Study of History, the  
following observations appeared in "The Times":—

"We have no other *History of England* than Hume's.  
The cool, scoffing philosopher, who could relate with unruffled  
temper the outrages of despotism, the vices of kings, and the  
extravagances of superstition, and reserved his criticism for  
genius and his sarcasms for zeal, still retains his place on our  
shelves and our tables. Goldsmith has put him out of boys'  
schools, and Mrs. Markham has hit on a style that does  
admirably for young ladies; but when a young man of eigh-  
teen asks for a *History of England*, there is no resource but to  
give him Hume."

Many of the materials for "The Popular History of Eng-  
land" had been collected and arranged before these remarks  
were published. I had long desired to write a *History of the  
People*; a history which should not merely disport in "a gay  
wilderness of anecdotes, manners and customs, furniture and  
fashions," but should connect domestic matters with the  
course of public events and the political condition of the  
various classes of society. One observation of the accom-  
plished journalist gave a definite character to this desire. I  
considered the "young man of eighteen" the representative  
of a very large class of readers in the present day—those, of



either sex, who with the average amount of intelligence that has now made us a reading people, have no superabundant leisure for pursuing the history of their country as a laborious and difficult study. The lawyer and the statesman cannot be satisfied with a compendious history. They must toil through much of the same mass of documentary material as that upon which the historical writer constructs his narrative. But for the great body of present readers, even twenty octavo volumes constitute a formidable undertaking. Hume was compendious compared with Rapin. But when we are content to forget "the scoffing philosopher" in the narrative powers of one of the most perfect masters of style,—and can even patiently endure his studied perversions of historical evidence in our wonder at the skill of the most subtle of casuists,—we have yet to seek for a History of England. Hume gives us the history of our country to 1689. More than a century and a half of the most instructive history of modern times is to be sought in professed "Continuations," which, if they are free from the taint of Hume's manifold defects, have little claim to share the honor of his surpassing merits. Smollett takes up the narrative of Hume; and, with no great labour of research, finds his way through another seventy years. We have to choose between the "Continuations" of Smollett, for the history of nearly a century before we reach our own period. Looking at the bulk of these various performances which have been accustomed to travel in an ill-assorted companionship with Hume, we may ask if a history of proportionate dimensions is not wanting in our time? Above all, is not a *compendious* work, full without overflowing, and written upon an uniform plan, particularly needed, "when a young man of eighteen asks for a History of England?"

In coming to a definite view of the nature of the book which I should desire to offer, I had no inducement to depart from my original design of writing a History of the People. Such a history appears to me best suited for those who are putting on the duties of life, and looking forward to discharge them with a clear view of their rights and obligations, founded

upon a comprehensive understanding of the past. But to avoid giving an impression that I was about to write the Domestic History of our country, apart from its Public History, I determined to entitle my book "The Popular History of England." Let me endeavour to explain my views on this second point.

Dr. Johnson, in conversation with Dr. Robertson, is related to have said:—"I have heard Henry's 'History of Britain' well spoken of; I am told it is carried on in separate divisions, as the civil, the military, the religious history. I wish much to have one branch well done, and that is the history of manners, of common life." To this Robertson answered:—"Henry should have applied his attention to that alone, which is enough for any man." Dr. Robertson, I presume to think, did not take a complete view of this subject. "The history of manners, of common life," is essentially dependent upon "the civil, the military, the religious history" of a nation. Public events act upon the condition of a people, and the condition of a people interchangeably acts upon public events.

But History, as it is generally written, deals too exclusively with public events; and it is carried on too much "in separate divisions." We ought not only to chronicle the acts of sovereigns and statesmen, but we should "read their history in a nation's eyes." We should understand the inseparable connection between the State history and the Domestic. When there is prosperous industry and fireside comfort, then, it may be assumed, there is good government. When labour is oppressed and homes are wretched, then, however powerful may be authority and arms however triumphant, there is "something rotten in the State."

Properly to trace this essential connection between Government and People, we must look at history from a new point of view. We must put the People in the foreground. We must study events and institutions, not as abstract facts, but as influencing the condition of a whole nation.

"The monstrous creed of millions made for one—"



it is gone. Let us look at the "millions" with another faith—the faith of our own times.

The People, if I understand the term rightly, means the Commons of these realms, and not any distinct class or section of the population. Ninety years ago, Goldsmith called the "middle order of mankind" the "People," and those below them the "Rabble." We have outlived all this. A century of thought and action has widened and deepened the foundations of the State. This People, then, want to find, in the history of their country, something more than a series of annals, either of policy or war. In connection with a faithful narrative of public affairs, they want to learn their own history—how they have grown out of slavery, out of feudal wrong, out of regal despotism, into constitutional liberty, and the position of the greatest estate of the realm. They want to know how the course of events, the principles of government and the progress of all our social institutions, have affected their condition. They want to know how the discoveries of science, and the refinements of art and literature, have raised them in the moral and social scale. They want to know how the great work of the elevation of industry has progressed from age to age in past times, and from year to year in our times. They want to learn the history of the English Home, as well as the history of the English State.

The province of the historian is symbolised by those paintings of the Muse of History, which represent her with a half expanded scroll. She has a great office—to make the Past intelligible to the Present for the guidance of the Future:

"Past and Future are the wings  
On whose support, harmoniously conjoin'd,  
Moves the great spirit of human knowledge."

But the contemplative and passionless Muse also points out the humbler, but not less important duty of the patient antiquary, who unrolls many a forgotten document "rich with the spoils of time." This is the office which Sir Philip Sydney somewhat satirised when he described the historian, "loaden

with old mouse-eaten records; authorising himself, for the most part, upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation Hearsay; having much ado to accord differing writers, and to pick truth out of partiality." This is the especial labour of him who attempts to write a popular compendium of the History of England. But to be popular, he need not be unphilosophical; to be truly philosophical he must be invariably accurate, and occasionally minute. He has to select from a vast storehouse of facts; but he cannot make a judicious selection without a broad comprehension of their relative value. How these facts are to be grouped—what the prominence to be given to individual facts—depends very much upon his pre-conceived theory of the office of historian. "History," it is said, "is philosophy teaching by example." This aphorism was promulgated when it was thought expedient to regard history as a vast collection of raw material that might be worked up into illustrations of moral science, in which science political and religious theories were necessarily included. But the tendency of much modern historical writing has been somewhat in the opposite direction. Striking events and interesting personages have been exhibited in prominent relief, without any great attention to the figures of the back-ground, or the relation of the scene to the multitudinous occurrences and opinions of its own age or of previous ages. It is in the due admixture of the individual and the general that history should find the course of its highest duty—that of popular instruction. For myself, I may say that having no pretension to aim at what is called the dignity of history; not labouring to establish any preconceived theory of public good beyond asserting the great principle of social progress; and cherishing a disposition more to general tolerance than sectarian animosity; I aspire only to make the history of my country a connected narrative of the progress of the people of my country. If I accomplish this, I shall not be very careful about selecting facts that may especially vindicate "philosophy teaching by example." I shall tell fairly what I believe



to be true, without concerning myself whether it offend or conciliate adverse opinions, political or religious. The time is long since past, when the deposition of Richard II. was considered a dangerous precedent, as regarded the Crown; and the time is not far distant when Dunstan and Becket may have a candid appreciation without a real or implied prostration before any principle of Church supremacy. All men who have had a marked influence upon their time demand to be exhibited in connection with the circumstances amidst which they operated. On the one hand, whatever may be the spirit of an age, individual worth and delinquency, wisdom and folly, reason and passion, have had very much to do in the advancement or retardation of that spirit. On the other hand, the spirit of an age, however hidden or imperfectly seen, has always exercised a great control upon all individual action, for good or for evil. Gray, in his quality of a philosophical poet, has said that,

"Love could teach a monarch to be wise,  
And gospel-light first dawn'd from Bullen's eyes."

But out of the fierce passion of Henry, or the fatal ambition of Anne, no "gospel-light" would have shone, had not Wickliffe and Luther banished some of the darkness that preceded the dawning.

The one great fact that renders it so imperatively necessary that the Englishman should be familiar with the history of his country—not merely of its regal annals but of all the varying aspects of society—is this: All that we justly pride ourselves upon, whether in our institutions or our national character, has resulted from the principle of growth, and not of creation. The history of every nation "has been in the main sequential." Each of its phases has been "the consequence of some prior phase, and the natural prelude of that which succeeded it." \* Most especially must this great principle be borne in mind—a principle which the writer now quoted terms "the new science"—in writing upon English history,

\* "History, as a condition of Social Progress," by Samuel Lucas, M. A.

with the advantage of our modern additions to the materials of historical knowledge. It will be my first endeavour to keep this principle in view, in treating of our national history, civil and ecclesiastical, before the Conquest. The early history of the Anglican Church—its martyrdoms and its conversions, its humanising influences of piety and learning, its rich endowments, its corruptions, its struggles for supremacy—is a history to be traced in all the subsequent elements of our ecclesiastical condition. Upon the Roman and Saxon civilization were founded many of the great principles of government which have preserved their vitality amongst us during the lapse of sixteen centuries. The Norman feudality could not destroy the municipal institutions which we derived from the one, nor weaken the spirit of personal liberty which we inherited from the other. The Norman despotism was absorbed by the Anglo-Saxon freedom; and feudality could only maintain itself by the recognition, however incomplete, of the equal rights of all men before the law. From the deposition of Richard the Second to the abdication of James the Second, every act of national resistance was accomplished by the union of classes, and was founded upon some principle of legal right for which there was legal precedent. Out of the traditional and almost instinctive assertion of the popular privileges have come new developments of particular reforms, each adapted to its own age, but all springing out of that historical experience which we recognise as Constitutional. It is this step by step progress which renders it so imperative upon the modern historian not to leap over any one phase of national advance; and thus it necessarily results that it being now seen that no portion of the history of our country is unimportant, our earlier history must require an expanded treatment, if we would rightly comprehend the essential connection of every one of its parts as links of the same chain.

It may be desirable to indicate, very briefly, the general distribution of the several parts of this History. It will not be carried on "in separate divisions." It may be convenient to a writer to treat of a period under distinct heads, such as



those adopted by Dr. Henry—Civil and Military; Ecclesiastical; Constitution; Learning; Arts; Commerce; Manners;—but such an arrangement necessarily involves a large amount of prolixity and repetition. The intervals, also, at which the several divisions occur in works so conducted are much too long; for, in a century and a half, or two centuries, social changes are usually so great, that the Laws, Learning, Arts, and Customs of the beginning of such a period have little in common with those of its conclusion. At convenient intervals, in this work, a Chapter will follow the State History, in which these various aspects of Society will be embraced. Thus, accompanying the early narrative, Chapter III. is devoted to such matters in connection with the Roman period, under the head of “Condition of the Country at the end of the Third Century.” The same principle will be adopted at a marked point of the Saxon period; the same of the Norman; and so on to modern times. Neither will the distinction of Reigns be so emphatically observed as is usual in our histories. The Regnal years are most convenient chronological marks—as useful as mile-stones to the traveller. But as the traveller does not halt at each mile-stone to survey the country, so the historical reader should not be compelled to make a dead stop, when a second William succeeds to a first, or a third Edward to a second. Except in very remarkable cases, which may be called revolutionary, society undergoes little change at the immediate period of the accession of one Plantagenet to another Plantagenet, or even of a Stuart to a Tudor. The changes are gradual, like those of the natural world. Great historical eras are as marked as the Seasons. But as Spring slides into Summer, and Autumn into Winter, so we pass on from Domesday-book to the Charter of Liberties, and from the Conformity Bill to Catholic Emancipation, not by jumps from reign to reign, but by progressive scenes, in which other than Sovereigns are conspicuous, and in which the accessories representing public opinion and society are of as much importance as the chief actors.

CHARLES KNIGHT.

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ALBION was once believed to have been originally a part of the Continent: "That our ISLE of Albion hath been CONTINENT with Gallia hath been the opinion of divers." Thus writes Richard Verstegan, some two centuries ago, and supports "the opinion of divers" with "sundry pregnant reasons."\* One very satisfactory reason was pleasantly imagined, a century earlier, by Sir Thomas More: "Howbeit as they say, and as the fashion of the place itself doth partly show, it was not ever (always) compassed about with the sea. But King Utopus, whose name, as conqueror, the island beareth, even at his arriving and entering upon the land, forthwith obtaining the victory, caused fifteen miles space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up; and so wrought the sea round about the land."† If King Utopus (by which name is shadowed forth Brutus, the mythic coloniser of Britain) had not performed this prodigious feat—compared with which a ship-canal through Darien would be the work of children scratching runnels in the sands—or if some greater power had not willed, in countless ages before Troy fell, and Brutus was a wanderer, that this labour was unnecessary—no History of England would have been written. The Commentaries of Cæsar, our first authentic historian, would have dealt with that small peninsula as a portion of Gaul. The Roman, the Saxon, the Dane, the Norman, would not

\* Restitution of Decayed Intelligence, chap. iv. 1673.

† Utopia, book ii. chap. i.