

READINGS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW

It is clear that all our information in regard to past events and conditions must be derived from evidence of some kind. This evidence is called the *source*. Sometimes there are a number of good and reliable sources for an event, as, for example, for the decapitation of Charles I, or for the march of Napoleon into Russia. Sometimes there is but a single, unreliable source, as, for instance, in the case of the burial of Alaric in a river bed.¹ For a great many important matters about which we should like to know there are, unfortunately, no written sources at all, and we can only guess how things were. For example, we do not know what the Germans were doing before Cæsar came into contact with them and took the trouble to give a brief account of them. We can learn but little about the bishops of Rome before the time of Constantine, for few references to them have come down to us.

Primary
or original
historical
sources.

Few, however, of those who read and study history ever come in contact with the *primary*, or first-hand

Secondary
sources.

¹ See below, p. 43.

sources; they get their information at second hand. It is much more convenient to read what Gibbon has to say of Constantine than to refer to Eusebius, Eutropius, and other ancient writers from whom he gained his knowledge. Moreover, Gibbon carefully studied and compared all the primary sources, and it may be urged that he has given a truer, fuller, and more attractive account of the period than can be found in any one of them. His *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is certainly a work of the highest rank; but, nevertheless, it is only a report of others' reports. It is therefore not a *primary* but a *secondary* source.

Historical manuals usually contain third-hand information, or worse.

Most of the historical knowledge current among us is not, however, derived from even secondary sources, such as Gibbon and similar authoritative writers, but comes from the reading of text-books, encyclopedias, stories, dramas, and magazine articles. Popular manuals and articles are commonly written by those who know little or nothing of the primary sources; they are consequently at least *third* hand, even when based upon the best secondary accounts. As a matter of fact, they are usually patched together from older manuals and articles, and may be four, five, or six removes from the original source of knowledge.

Repetition the enemy of accuracy.

It is well known that the oftener a report passes from mouth to mouth the less trustworthy and accurate does it tend to become. Unimportant details which appeal to the imagination will be magnified, while fundamental considerations are easily forgotten, if they happen to be prosaic and commonplace. Historians, like other men, are sometimes fond of good stories and may be led astray by some false rumor which, once started into

circulation, gets farther and farther from the truth with each repetition.

For example, a distinguished historian of the Church, Cardinal Baronius, writing about 1600, made the statement, upon very insufficient evidence, that, as the year 1000 approached, the people of Europe generally believed that the world was about to come to an end. Robertson, a very popular Scotch historian of the eighteenth century, repeated the statement and went on to describe the terrible panic which seized upon sinful men as the awful year drew on. Succeeding writers, including some very distinguished ones, accepted and even elaborated Robertson's account. About thirty years ago, however, a French scholar pointed out that there was really no adequate basis for this strange tale. To the chroniclers of the time the year 1000 was clearly no more portentous than 997 or 1003. This story of the panic, which passed current as historical fact for some three hundred years, offers an excellent illustration of the danger of relying upon secondary sources.¹

Sad example of the mythical panic of the year 1000.

One of the first questions then to ask upon taking up an historical work is, Where did the writer obtain his information? Has he simply copied his statements from the more easily accessible works in his own language, however unreliable and out of date they may be; or has he, dissatisfied with such uncertain sources, familiarized himself with the most recent researches of the distinguished scholars in his field, in whatever language they may have been written; or, still better, has he himself made a personal study of the original evidence which

The importance of the question, Where did the writer obtain his information?

¹ See an interesting account of this matter by Professor George L. Burr in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. VI, pp. 429 sqq.

second-hand accounts can never produce. The mere information, too, comes to us in a form which we do not easily forget. The facts sink into our memory.

One who actually talked with Attila, or who witnessed the capture of Jerusalem by the crusaders, is clearly more likely to excite our interest than a writer of our own day, however much he may know of the king of the Huns or of the first crusade. It makes no great impression upon us to be told that the scholars of Dante's time had begun to be interested once more in the ancient learning of the Greeks and Romans; but no one can forget Dante's own poetic account of his kindly reception in the lower regions by the august representatives of pagan literature,—Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan,—people “with eyes slow and grave, of great authority in their looks,” who “spake seldom and with soft voices.”

Moreover, the study of the sources enables us to some extent to form our own opinions of the past, so that we need not rely entirely upon mere manuals, which are always one, and generally two or three, removes from the sources themselves. When we get at the sources themselves we no longer merely read and memorize; we begin to consider what may be safely inferred from the statements before us and so develop the all-important faculty of criticism. We are not simply accumulating facts but are attempting to determine their true nature and meaning.

The power to do this is not alone necessary to scholarly work; it is of the utmost importance as well in dealing with the affairs of everyday life. To take a single illustration: one cannot fail to see from a study of the sources that Luther was exceedingly unfair to his

A study of the sources cultivates judgment and fair-mindedness.

enemies and ascribed their conduct to evil motives when they were acting quite consistently and according to what they considered the truth. His opponents, on the other hand, treated him with equal unfairness and proclaimed him a wicked and profligate man because he refused to accept their views.

We meet precisely the same unfairness nowadays, as, for instance, in the case of a municipal election, where each party speaks only evil of the other. It is, however, not so hard to look impartially at the motives and conduct of men who lived long ago as it is to be fair-minded in matters which interest us personally very deeply. By cultivating sympathy and impartiality in dealing with the past we may hope to reach a point where we can view the present coolly and temperately. In this way really thoughtful, historical study serves to develop the very fundamental virtues of sympathy, fairness, and caution in forming our judgments.¹

Even as lately as a hundred years ago the path to the sources of European history was still a thorny one. The manuscripts of historical importance were often scattered about in innumerable small collections, chiefly in the monasteries. The documents were stacked up in dark rooms, damp cellars, and dusty garrets. They were often carelessly transcribed, full of blunders, and illegible except to those specially versed in the art of deciphering ancient handwriting. There were usually no catalogues and nothing to guide the investigator to the material of which

Former difficulties in the way of using manuscript sources.

¹A fuller discussion of this matter will be found in the excellent introduction to *Historical Sources in Schools* (a report drawn up by Professor C. D. Hazen and others for the New England Teachers Association), The Macmillan Company, 1902, 60 cents.

he was in search. He was forced to travel from place to place and turn over masses of worthless or irrelevant matter in the uncertain quest for the little which might be useful to him.

Amenities of modern historical investigation.

But all this is changed. The scholar may now sit at a convenient desk in a comfortable, well-lighted library; he has a clearly printed book before him, the text of which has been established by a comparison of all the known manuscripts of the work in question. These have been collated by an expert; errors have been eliminated, and difficult passages annotated. The work has been carefully analyzed and supplied with an index, so that one may discover in a few moments just those paragraphs which have to do with the subject in hand.

How the sources have been printed in convenient collections.

The task of rendering the sources available has been a long and painful one, and has been going on for three or four hundred years. As early as the sixteenth century scholars began to bring together the mediæval chronicles and print them in convenient collections. In the time of Louis XIV a group of Benedictine monks in France won new distinction for their ancient order by publishing several admirable series and by preparing treatises to facilitate historical research.

Progress during the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century witnessed a development of the critical scientific spirit which has made it necessary to reprint many sources that had appeared previously in a defective form. Moreover, thousands of volumes of precious material hitherto available only in manuscript have been added to our resources.

The *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.

The most notable of the many collections is that which has been in course of publication in Germany since 1826, — the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Begun under

the auspices of an historical society, it was, upon the death of Pertz, the original editor, placed under the supervision of a government commission (1875). The volumes published since that date have established a standard of the highest excellence.¹

In England many volumes of historical material have been issued since 1858 under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, and constitute the so-called "Rolls Series." France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, and other European countries have each their series, great and small. Some of these enjoy the support of the government, but the greater part of them are due to the enterprise of historical societies or individual scholars.²

So rapidly are the sources being printed that it is no longer necessary in most fields of historical research to rely, as formerly, upon the manuscripts in the European libraries and archives. Some, at least, of our very best university and public libraries now contain many of the great collections of printed sources, and it is possible to carry on satisfactory historical research in some fields in Boston or New York as well as in London or Paris.³

It would be useless to enumerate the names of these many series, even of the very important ones, for it is impossible to infer from the general title of an extensive set what particular works and documents it contains. Moreover, the modern publication, investigation,

Research in European history can now be carried on in the great libraries of the United States.

Examples of the modern apparatus for historical research

¹ For a description of the *Monumenta* see below, pp. 262 sq.

² See Bourne, *The Teaching of History*, Chapter II, for a brief account of the enterprises in this field. A fuller account is given by Wattenbach, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen*, "Einleitung," pp. 1-40.

³ The chief collections of material, whether in the original languages or in English translation, will be found mentioned in the bibliographies given below at the close of the chapters.

and criticism of the sources have led to the preparation of a number of indispensable works of reference which do not aim to deal directly with history but to serve as a guide to those in search of the material upon which the historian must rely. A very few of the most noteworthy will be mentioned here as illustrations of the apparatus necessary in all professional historical study.

To learn what the sources are and where they may be found is the first requisite of historical investigation. A French writer, Langlois, has published a very useful bibliography of historical bibliographies,¹—a catalogue of the best lists of sources and of historical treatises.

Such lists are very numerous and often voluminous. The most useful and scholarly is Potthast's *Wegweiser*, or "guide," in two stout volumes.² The compiler has, with infinite patience, sought to bring together in an alphabetical list the sources for the history of western Europe from the year 400 to 1500, and to state when and where they have been printed. One anxious to learn whether there has been a new critical edition of a particular chronicle, or whether there are any lives of St. Boniface, or Gregory VII, or Frederick Barbarossa, written by those who lived in their times, can obtain the desired information from Potthast, as well as a list of modern works relating to the topic under consideration.

Admirable guides exist for the study of particular countries. German scholars have compiled a list³ of all the

¹ Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie historique*, Part I, "Instruments bibliographiques," 2d ed., Paris, 1901, 4 fr.

² *Wegweiser durch die Geschichtswerke des Europäischen Mittelalters bis 1500*, 2 vols., 2d ed., Berlin, 1895-1896, M. 26.50.

³ Dahlmann-Waitz, *Quellenkunde der deutschen Geschichte*, 6th ed., Göttingen, 1894, M. 12.

Bibliographies of sources.

Potthast's *Wegweiser*.

Bibliographies for particular countries.

important books and articles relating to the history of their own country from the time of Tacitus to the present day. A still better and more extensive work by Molinier and others is in course of publication for the history of France.¹ Of course the history both of France and of Germany is so closely associated with that of other European countries that the above-mentioned guides are very valuable for the student of general European affairs. A similar collection of titles has been prepared by Professor Charles Gross for England.²

After discovering the sources it is essential to determine their character and reliability. There are special treatises upon this important subject.³ The best and most generally useful is perhaps Wattenbach's *Historical Sources for Germany during the Middle Ages*,⁴ in which the various writers and their works are thoroughly discussed. Molinier gives many useful hints in his great bibliography referred to above. A discussion of the historical writers of the Middle Ages is given in *Early Chroniclers of Europe*.⁵ I know of no other work of the kind available in English except that of Flint, who, in his interesting *History of the Philosophy of History*,⁶

Criticism of the sources.

¹ *Les sources de l'histoire de France, des origines aux guerres d'Italie (1494)*;—to be continued to 1815—5 vols., Paris, 1901 *sqq.*, 5 fr. a volume.

² *Sources of English History*, Longmans, 1901, \$5.00.

³ For brief accounts of the results of modern criticism of the sources see the Introduction to Henderson's *History of Germany in the Middle Ages*, and Bury's Introduction to his edition of Gibbon, pp. 45 *sqq.*

⁴ *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter bis zur Mitte des 13ten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., 6th ed., 1893-1894, M. 20. (Vol. I of a 7th edition appeared in 1904.)

⁵ *England* by Gairdner, *France* by Masson, and *Italy* by Balzani. Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 3 vols., London, 1883-1888.

⁶ Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894, \$4.00.

takes up in turn the writers dealing with France, especially in modern times. Bury, in the appendices which he has added to his edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, mentions and criticises briefly many sources. Indeed, it is not at all uncommon in modern scientific histories to find similar discussions.

By far the most important treatise upon the use of the sources and the methods of historical investigation is that of Bernheim.¹ Every one proposing to devote himself to historical research should be thoroughly familiar with this remarkable work. No other single volume contains such a wealth of valuable information in regard to almost all branches of knowledge which directly concern the historical student. Suggestive, but far less exhaustive than Bernheim's manual, is the *Introduction to the Study of History* by Langlois and Seignobos.²

For an explanation of the many troublesome terms and expressions used in mediæval writings one should turn to the monumental Dictionary of Mediæval Latin originally compiled by Du Cange and first issued in 1678.³ In successive editions, later scholars have added many terms which Du Cange overlooked, but one is still often disappointed not to find words he would like to have explained.

For all matters relating to public and private documents, decrees, papal bulls, methods of dating, etc.

¹ *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie, mit Nachweis der wichtigsten Quellen und Hilfsmittel zum Studium der Geschichte*, 3d and 4th eds., Leipzig, 1903, M. 17.

² New York, Henry Holt, \$2.25. The French original, however, costs but 3 fr.

³ *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitatis*, 7 vols., Paris, 1840-1850. This edition, which may be had for about \$40, is preferable to a more recent reprint which appeared 1883-1887.

Methods of historical research; Bernheim's manual.

Du Cange's Dictionary of Mediæval Latin.

Giry's Manual of Diplomatics.

Giry's Manual of Diplomatics¹ is the most useful modern work.

Of the historical atlases the most generally used is that edited by Droysen,² but Schrader's³ is excellent and contains a number of important special maps and plans as well as an index. A truly admirable and very inexpensive collection of historical maps may be found in Putzger's cheap and unassuming Historical School Atlas.⁴ This is in many ways as useful as Droysen, and in some respects actually superior to the more elaborate work.

While but few of the aids to historical research are here given, those mentioned are of the utmost importance by reason of the range and accuracy of the information which they furnish and of the ease with which they can be consulted. No really advanced work in history can be carried on without their aid. Many other useful works of the same class may be found in the lists given by Bernheim in the manual spoken of above.

¹ *Manuel de diplomatique*, Paris, 1894, 20 fr.

² *Allgemeiner historischer Handatlas*, mit erläuterndem Text, Leipzig, M. 25.

³ *Atlas de géographie historique*, sous la direction de F. Schrader, Paris, Hachette, 35 fr.

The only really adequate atlas in English is the *Historical Atlas of Modern Europe*, edited by R. L. Poole (Clarendon Press, \$38.50), which is unfortunately far more expensive than the equally satisfactory German and French works of the same class.

⁴ Putzger's *Historischer Schul-Atlas*, edited by Baldamus and Schwabe. An American edition of this may be had, accompanied by an English translation of the German forms of the geographical names, New York, Lemcke and Büchner, \$1.00. A new school *Atlas of European History*, edited by Professor Dow, is announced by Henry Holt.

Historical atlases.