A GENERATION OF MATERIALISM

1871-1900

THE RISE OF MODERN EUROPE
Edited by WILLIAM L. LANGER

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INTRODUCTION

Our age of specialization produces an almost incredible amount of monographic research in all fields of human knowledge. So great is the mass of this material that even the professional scholar cannot keep abreast of the contributions in anything but a restricted part of his general subject. In all branches of learning the need for intelligent synthesis is now more urgent than ever before, and this need is felt by the layman even more acutely than by the scholar. He cannot hope to read the products of microscopic research or to keep up with the changing interpretations of experts, unless new knowledge and new viewpoints are made accessible to him by those who make it their business to be informed and who are competent to speak with authority.

These volumes, published under the general title of THE RISE OF MODERN EUROPE, are designed primarily to give the general reader and student a reliable survey of European history written by experts in various branches of that vast subject. In consonance with the current broad conception of the scope of history, they attempt to go beyond a merely political-military narrative, and to lay stress upon social, economic, religious, scientific and artistic developments. The minutely detailed, chronological approach is to some extent sacrificed in the effort to emphasize the dominant factors and to set forth their interrelationships. At the same time the division of European history into national histories has been abandoned and wherever possible attention has been focussed upon larger forces common to the whole of European civilization. These are the broad lines on which this history as a whole has been laid out. The individual volumes are integral parts of the larger scheme, but they are intended also to stand as independent units, each the work of a scholar well qualified to treat the period covered by his book. Each volume contains about fifty illustrations selected from the mass of contemporary pictorial material. All noncontemporary illustrations

have been excluded on principle. The bibliographical note appended to each volume is designed to facilitate further study of special aspects touched upon in the text. In general every effort has been made to give the reader a clear idea of the main movements in European history, to embody the monographic contributions of research workers, and to present the material in a forceful and vivid manner.

To a generation that has experienced two great World Wars, the closing quarter of the Nineteenth Century is bound, in retrospect, to appear in the light of a golden age. It was an era of peace in Europe, an age of great technological advance, a period of progress, of growing tolerance, of spreading liberalism. Or so at least it seemed at the time and so it appears to many even now. And yet, when viewed historically, when examined critically, the late nineteenth century emerges rather as an age of materialism, of smug self-confidence, of uncritical assurance. It was, as Professor Hayes sets forth, in many senses the seed-time of disaster, the prelude to an era of conflict and disillusionment. To essay a thorough revaluation is no easy task, for it requires a fine sensitivity, a keen insight and real critical honesty. Professor Hayes has gotten down to fundamentals. He has stripped away many of the easy misconceptions and has reexamined some of the basic assumptions and tenets of the modern world. If history is indeed but the prologue, no intelligent person can afford, amid the storm and stress of the contemporary world, to overlook this fascinating and stimulating reappraisal of the generation that bore our own.

WILLIAM L. LANGER

PREFACE

This volume, as it is, I could hardly have written before now. Born and prepared for college in the age which it attempts to recall, I saw those last three decades of the nineteenth century then—and for almost thirty years afterwards—as a stage, indeed a glorious stage, in the progress of Europe and our Western civilization toward ever greater liberty, democracy, social betterment, and scientific control of nature. I still see those decades thus, but I also now see them, even more clearly, as a fertile seedtime for the present and quite different harvest of personal dictatorship, social degradation, and mechanized destruction. It is, in my opinion, this dual character of the age—at once climax of enlightenment and source of disillusionment—which gives it peculiar interest and pregnant significance. It is this, certainly, which dominates the interpretations hereinafter set forth.

It has been a difficult volume to put together, not just because of the necessity of making new appraisal of the events of the age, but much more because of the multitude and complexity of the events themselves and of the all but universal practice hitherto of segregating them in national compartments—British, French, German, Russian, etc.—or else in such categories as "diplomatic," "political," "economic," "intellectual," etc. I have tried hard, though with what success or lack of success it is for others to say, to produce a history of Europe during the period, rather than a history of any particular country, and to make the history as many-sided and as richly variegated as was the period.

To add to the difficulties, the period is not an entity. It has two parts: first, the decade of the 1870's, which might more convincingly have been described in conjunction with the '60's; and second, the decades of the 1880's and 1890's, whose main currents flowed on uninterruptedly through the decade immediately antecedent to the World War of 1914. Perhaps, nevertheless, the joining of the two has advantage, in that it admits of connected treatment of the inter-

mediate transition. For though it was then scarcely perceived, something of a revolution occurred at the end of the '70's and the beginning of the '80's.

I hope no one will question me too closely about my use of the word "materialism" in the following pages. I seldom use it in the strictly philosophical sense. Generally I use it in what I conceive to be the popular, common-sense way, as denoting a marked interest in, and devotion to, material concerns and material things. Nor let anyone be perplexed by my repeated reference to "dollars" as indicative of the value of commodities. They are all good prewar, gold-backed dollars, as reported in statistics of the time. I appreciate, of course, that there were fluctuations in money between 1871 and 1914, but they were slight relative to those we are now familiar with, and they do not seem sufficient to defeat the purposes of comparison for which "dollars" are cited.

My obligations are legion. As I think of the mountain of books and documents I have read, or at least looked at, and of the innumerable ideas and bits of information I have quarried from them, I know I should claim only the "synthesis" of this volume as mine and should publicly thank a myriad of persons for all the rest. Space forbids, however. I must content myself with a comprehensive bow, and with mentioning by name only those persons who have directly counseled me on what I should put in or leave out. It doubtless would be a better book if I could have followed all their wise counsels. But they sometimes disagreed among themselves, and anyway the final choice has had to be mine, not theirs.

Specifically, I gratefully acknowledge helpful advice on the whole manuscript by the patient Editor of the Series, Professor William L. Langer of Harvard, and by two of my colleagues at Columbia, Professors Jacques Barzun and Charles W. Cole; on the chapter relating to liberalism, by Mrs. Shepard Morgan and Madame Charlotte Muret; and on particular sections, by graduate students of mine—Messrs. Thomas F. Power, William O. Shanahan, Daniel Thorner, and Richard W. Tims.

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