THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE
1607–1774

by
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Prologue

Why the Study of History?

It has sometimes occurred to me to ask for a show of hands by those in a beginning class in history of those who have heard the old saying, "Experience is the best teacher." Usually, most of those in a class will raise their hands. It was a trick question, for I had led them to acquiesce in a way of putting it that is probably a garbled version of a saying. What Benjamin Franklin had said, I then told them was, "Experience keeps a dear [that is, costly, expensive] school. The fool will learn in no other." Far from being the best teacher, as Franklin would have it, experience is a teacher whom the wise will consult as rarely as possible.

There is a sense, of course, in which experience may be the best teacher. There may even be a saying to that effect. If so, it means something like this: Personal experience is the most effective teacher. That is, firsthand experiences are often more vivid, leave a deeper and longer-lasting impression. So it is that we say, "The burnt dog dreads the fire." On the other hand, personal experience is hardly the recommended approach to learning much that we need to know. The dog may not survive his first contact with the fire. It is better not to learn about the dangers of a moving car by being run over by one. It would undoubtedly leave a strong impression, but, alas, it might be the last impression. Then, too, life is much too short for us to gain more than a smattering of knowledge by personal experience.

It follows, then, that Franklin's is much the wiser, broader, and deeper of the sayings. It follows, too, that one of the reasons for studying history is to broaden our knowledge much beyond what we could acquire from personal experience. The study of history is a way to learn in a much less expensive school. We can buttress our limited experience with the experience of the race, so to speak. Not that we ever achieve such an exalted goal, of course, but it is one of the purposes underlying the study of history.

Some distinctions may be helpful at this point. It is possible to distinguish between formal history, such as may be found in history books or be studied in the classroom, and informal history, such as is the possession of every person who has any sort of developed memory. To put it another way, we can distinguish between history that has been recorded, organized, polished, and stated, on the one hand, and that

which exists in the hodge-podge of private recollections that each of us has. In like manner, we can distinguish between folk sayings, such as those quoted above, and the conclusions which may flow from formal historical studies.

Let me emphasize, though, that all these things are history, or the results of history. Those who say that they do not like history probably mean that they do not like what they have encountered in the classroom or textbooks that goes by the name of history. They could hardly mean that they do not like history. Every story with some basis in fact is history. Every bit of gossip either purports to be or is history. All that has ever happened to a person is history. All our recollections of things past is history. Virtually every joke, every anecdote, every cartoon, every witty saying, and every clever portrayal of something is either history or draws its vitality from history. Even works of the imagination have some sort of grounding in history, else we would find it difficult to find any common ground for comprehending them. In short, anyone who truly did not like history would be hard put to find much, if anything, that he did like.

But why study history? Granted, that each of us is in one way or another full of history, that most, or all, that we encounter is in some sense historical, that is, has a history, why study it formally? One reason is to become aware of how much of what we are and do is history related. Another, as already noted, is to expand our own limited experience. Yet another is to bring our experience and that of others to consciousness so that we can use it more effectively. Even our own raw experience, gossip, and folk tales need organization and critical examination, such as can be learned in formal history, before we can make the best use of them. History brings us not only much additional information, but also sheds new light continually on what we already knew.

These and other reasons for studying history may be brought into focus by an aspect of a single historical question. When settlers came to the New World from Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, they came in contact with people already living here. Although the European settlers were greatly outnumbered at first, they usually either conquered or drove or moved them out shortly. One of the questions this raises is why the Europeans won so generally in the conflicts which took place between them and the Indians. Several reasons can be advanced, but at this point I want to offer only one—one, it might be noted, that is not often listed. This particular explanation will apply most directly to the Indians which inhabited what is now the eastern coast of the United States.

The reason I want to suggest is that the Europeans were vastly superior to the Indians in their sense and knowledge of history. For example, William Bradford, who was a leader in the Plymouth settlement in

Massachusetts, conceived and wrote a book called, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 1620-1647. No Indian at the time could have written such a book. In the first place, none could have done so, because the Indians had no written language. (The hieroglyphics of Central American Indians might have resembled writing, but evidence that anything like an alphabet had been devised is lacking.) In the second place, Bradford's vision of the importance of the events would have been missing. And, third, the practice of preserving records did not exist among the East Coast Indians.

The matter goes much deeper than that, however. The Indians had only a shallow, provincial, and vague sense of history, at best. The alterations in the moon, the recurrence of the seasons, and such like, were familiar, of course. But their dating of things was imprecise, and their memories largely confined to that of living persons. By contrast, the European settlers had written records, history books, calendars, and the means for preserving precise information. Europeans with any formal training or learning, and many did, had a sense of history going back for thousands of years. They had the Bible and knew of the Hebrew prophets who spoke and wrote of people and events that went back to a time when there was a thriving civilization in Egypt, well before Greece and Rome emerged. They knew of Greece and Rome, and some could read Latin and Greek. They had in their minds such momentous religious events as the Creation, the Egyptian Bondage, the Diaspora, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and looked forward in time to the Final Judgment. Men of learning knew of other religions such as Islam, and might even be acquainted with its history. Of modern history, they were most apt to be acquainted with the leaders, ideas, and events surrounding the Protestant Reformation. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth William Shakespeare had written his great tragedies based on historical characters from Roman times to the Middle Ages, to what were for them, recent times. A good case can be made that the sense of history was especially strong at the time that Englishmen made the first settlements in America.

Their sense and knowledge of history provided the European settlers with an edge over the Indians. It endued them with an awareness of their place in the scheme of things. It gave vitality to their belief that they had a special purpose, a mission, and even a destiny. The fullness of their awareness of the past gave vitality to their vision for the future. When they could, Englishmen built houses of stone or brick. These contrasted dramatically with the scant dwellings of the Indians. The first were built to withstand many of the ravages of time; the second could survive, at most, a few seasons. The Indians were no match over any extended period of time for Europeans who brought so much of history to their undertaking.

It is not my point, of course, that the study of history will make us invincible in battle or will enable us to overcome those who have not studied deeply in history. Rather, my point is that the study of history adds an important dimension to our lives. It fortifies us for life itself with the knowledge of the path others have taken. If it falls to our lot to be soldiers, we may indeed be better soldiers if our experience is buttressed by a knowledge of the courage that others have shown in similar situations, by some acquaintance with what has failed or succeeded in the past, by the familiarity we have gained with what moves men to behave in certain ways. But whether we are soldiers, statesmen, businessmen, farmers, employers, employees, butchers, bakers, or candlestick makers, the study of history will enrich us for the undertaking.

One of the ways that history enriches is that it is the story of actual people, actual events, and some sort of actuality in the past. History is concrete, not abstract. There was a man by the name of Herodotus who lived in Greece (Athens) in the fifth century before Christ. He wrote history, and some of his work still survives. The Punic Wars did actually occur in the third century B.C. There was a Roman ruler called Augustus Caesar who was head of the vast Roman Empire at the time that Jesus of Nazareth was born. There was a man called Abelard, a monk who taught at Paris in the 12th century A.D., who was a popular teacher, drew many students to that center of learning, wrote a book titled *Yes and No*, and who fell in love with a nun, whose name was Heloise. William of Normandy did indeed complete his conquest of England at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. A kind of census (the *Domesday Books*) was taken shortly after the conquest, and much of the information about the England of those times comes from it. Hundreds and thousands of additional examples could be given, but perhaps the point has been made, at least tentatively. History is an account of things that actually happened.

It has been said that "History is philosophy teaching by example." No, that will not do, for we are dealing with the factuality of history, and a vague statement about its origin will not do. Lord Henry St. John Bolingbroke (1678-1751), an English statesman and writer, said, "History is philosophy teaching by example." I have it on the authority of Professor Henry Steele Commager, from the little book, *The Study of History*, that Bolingbroke was the coiner of the statement. If I had any reason to doubt this, I could trace it to other sources, including the writings of Bolingbroke. This little excursion was appropriate, because students sometimes wonder how we know all that we assert to have happened in history. My point is that a great deal of trouble has been taken to prove the correctness of many alleged facts, and, in many instances, the evidence is still available for any who would make the effort to verify their accuracy. That is not to say that every statement which appears

in a history book is indeed factual. There are errors, well-known ones in some instances, that have been repeated from one book to another. They are corrected from time to time. But the very fact that we can identify errors is testimony to the factual character of history.

Now back to the matter of history being philosophy teaching by example. It might be more precise to say that history is general truth teaching by particular instances. But however the thought should be worded, it certainly is an aspect of history. For example, Lord Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." If the statement is correct, it is a general truth. Does history provide examples of the truth of this axiom? Unhappily, it does, and many times over. History provides numerous examples of people who became vicious, cruel, avaricious, bloodthirsty, and so on, and it can be shown all too often that they possessed power over others. Infamous examples of absolute power corrupting absolutely are Caligula in Ancient Rome, Ivan the Terrible in Russia, Henry VIII of England, and, in the 20th century, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. A good example of the tendency of power to corrupt occurs in the account of David and Bathsheba in the *Bible*. King David saw Bathsheba and desired her. Bathsheba was married, but David sent her husband into battle where he was killed. Then, David seduced Bathsheba.

Its factuality is essential to this philosophical use of history. The evil rulers mentioned above are not fiction, are not inventions of the imagination, not simply the tales of moralists. They actually lived and did many, most, or all of the deeds reported of them. Thus, history brings to life the truth of axioms, of principles, and of great enduring truths. In short, there are great lessons to be learned from the study of history. History provides continuous examples for the good and bad consequences of acts. Careful students of history discover pitfalls to avoid as well as courses of action which promise good and desirable results. Above all, history reinforces with live examples what we may have learned first from other sources.

There are many other ways than by learning or having examplary lessons reinforced by the study of history to be enriched. It is mainly by the study of history that we learn how things in the past were different from or similar to the way they are today. An historian of the Middle Ages, Frederick B. Artz, once observed in a lecture that historians ought to teach classes about changes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and about what does not change on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. An attitude, particularly among the young, that cropped up in the 1960s illustrated well the need for this. It was the notion that those over 30 were not worth listening to because they could not be trusted. Although it was hardly the first time in history that youth has defied age, it was one of the more dramatic episodes of it.

History provides invaluable information both about the changing and the enduring. One of the pleasures that may come from the study of history, of course, is to learn how peoples at other times and places differ from us. We may be amused by the quaintness of their expressions, the strangeness of their dress, the odd (to us) notions they had about how to do things, the peculiarity of their customs, and so on. Yet, if we look closer, we will discover that in many fundamental ways they were hardly different from us at all. They laughed and cried, married and gave in marriage, loved and hated, bled when cut, resented slights, had preferences and fears, and much else besides. Power corrupted in ancient Egypt as it does in contemporary Russia. Even the young may have had pretensions to being wiser than their elders, for all we know. On reflection, we may conclude that in the most obvious ways that we differ from people at other times it is only a matter of fads, fashions, matters of no great consequence. There are differences that matter, of course, changes that have great importance, but to discern those from fads and follies, history can be quite helpful.

There is much else to history, of course. There is the pleasure of reading a good story. Some accounts of certain happenings in history can be told as the unraveling of a mystery. It may be possible to do biography as character development or disintegration, as in a novel. There are daring deeds, tense encounters, dastardly skullduggery, and stirring romances in the pages of history. There can be, too, the pleasures of visiting quaint and exotic places. Hundreds and thousands of places have the potential charm in history that we encounter when we visit the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.

There may be no better way, however, to become aware of the importance of studying history than to imagine ourselves without it. Here is an apt description of that condition, as imagined by an historian writing early in this century:

> *Suppose that all knowledge of the gradual steps of civilization, of the slow process of perfecting the arts of life and the natural sciences, were blotted out; suppose all memory of the efforts and struggles of earlier generations, and of the deeds of great men, were gone; all the landmarks of history; all that has distinguished each country, race, or city in past times from others; all notion of what man has done or could do; of his many failures, of his successes, of his hopes; suppose for a moment all the books, all the traditions, all the buildings of past ages to vanish off the face of the earth, and with them the institutions of society, all political forms, all principles of politics, all systems of thought, all daily customs, all familiar arts; suppose the most deep-rooted and sacred of all our institutions gone; suppose that the family and*

home, property and justice were strange ideas without meaning; that all the customs which surround each of us from birth to death were blotted out; suppose a race of men whose minds, by a paralytic stroke of fate, had suddenly been deadened to every recollection, to whom the whole world was new. Can we imagine a condition of such utter helplessness, confusion, and misery?[1]

To remedy this natural state of things is why the study of history.

Chapter 1

Introduction

There was no United States prior to July of 1776. Indeed, there is good reason to doubt that there was a United States of America that early. True, the Declaration of Independence, which was signed on July 4, 1776, does contain the phrase, "the united States of America." But that was not so much to name the union as to distinguish between the former status of colony and the new status of state, once independence had been declared. Note, too, that the "u" is not capitalized, which suggests that "united" was merely descriptive, not part of a proper noun.

The Articles of Confederation was the first document to prescribe the title formally. It says, "The Stile of this confederacy shall be 'The United States of America.' " Although the Articles were submitted to the Second Continental Congress in July of 1776, Congress did not approve them until November 15, 1777, and they were not ratified until March 1, 1781. Technically, then, there was no United States of America until 1781. It could be argued, then, that the history of the United States began in 1781, and that it would be appropriate to begin an account of it on that date.

To do so, however, would be to defy custom, ignore the general practice, and act contrary to common sense. The history of the United States no more began in 1781 than the life of a man begins, say, when he is elected as President of the United States. Just where an account of it should begin may be open to disagreement and even debate, but that it should begin before 1781 can hardly be seriously disputed. A case could even be made that the history of the United States should begin with the appearance of man on earth. However plausible this might be, it would be impossible to do so literally and impractical to tell any considerable portion of what is known. In practice, most American history books begin with the first English settlements in the New World, preceded by the background of the Europeans who came and the Indians who were here. That will be the approach here.

The importance of the European background for explaining the United States can hardly be exaggerated. The United States derives from and is an extension of Western Civilization. The center of that civilization has long been Western Europe, and it actually spread from the Mediterranean countries westward at an earlier time. The great

developments in Western Europe in the two centuries or so before the English settlements are equally important. The United States can only be understood in terms of such developments as the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation which preceded it. These things can be told only in summary fashion here, yet enough must be put into the record to make the connections clear.

It is a commonplace that the United States is a land of immigrants. So far as it goes, the statement is quite accurate. In wave after wave, the immigrants have come: English and Scots-Irish, Dutch and Scots, Irish and German, Italians and Poles, Blacks and Chinese, Jews and Czechs, Cubans and Puerto Ricans. But all waves of immigration did not come at the same time, and they have hardly been equal in influence upon shaping America. The waves of immigrants from the British Isles, and especially from England came first and in largest numbers initially, and their influence has been greatest. It is obvious in the predominance of the English language, but is there, too, in hundreds of other ways. The American Indians left their mark, too, even as they were vanquished, but, for good or ill, they played mainly an adversary role in the shaping of the United States.

The colonial period lasted for 169 years from the first English settlement in America to the Declaration of Independence. From that last event to the present, some 205 years have passed. That is a way of saying that the colonial period lasted a long time and encompassed the lives of something like eight generations of people. It will be of particular importance to us to note how things changed over the years, how population increased and spread inland, how they grew away from England, and, above all, how they gained experience which stood them in good stead when they broke from England and set up governments for themselves. Although it is well to reflect that they lived their lives for themselves primarily, even as we do, it is nonetheless true that we view them from a perspective of how they were preparing the way for and shaping institutions and ways of living with which we are familiar. The interpretations they made of their experience and the experiences they had influenced greatly what they did.

The colonial period, too, provides much useful information about how different America was then from now, how covered with forests it was, how remote in time the settlements were from one another, how difficult it was to travel from one place to another—and how perilous—, how often women died in giving birth to children, how many families were saddened by the untimely death of children, at what costs people and goods were brought from the old world to the new, and how different their attitudes and practices were from ours about crime and punishment. The history that follows begins the story of how we got from there to here as a people.

Chapter 2

European Background

To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us. The contrast between suffering and joy, between adversity and happiness, appeared more striking....

The contrast between silence and sound, darkness and light, like that between summer and winter, was more strongly marked than it is in our lives....

One sound rose ceaselessly above the noises of busy life and lifted all things unto a sphere of order and serenity: the sound of bells. The bells were in daily life like good spirits, which...now called upon the citizens to mourn and now to rejoice, now warned them of danger, now exhorted them to piety....

—J. Huizanga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*

Chronology

1338-1453—Hundred Year's War between England and France.

1348—The Black Death in Europe.

1453—Fall of Constantinople to Ottoman Turks.

1454—Invention of the Printing Press.

1492—Columbus discovers America.

1494—Treaty of Tordesillas.

1497—John Cabot lands in North America.

1517—Martin Luther begins Protestant Reformation.

1519-1521—Magellan's ship sails around the World.

1536—Calvin publishes *Institutes of Christian Religion*.

1545-1563—Council of Trent (Catholic Reformation).

1588—Defeat of Spanish Armada.

1618-1648—Thirty-Year's War (Wars of Religion).

There are two distinct ways to look at what was happening in Europe in the century or so before Columbus discovered America. One way is

to view what was going on in terms of what we now know was going to happen. Looked at in that way, in terms of the beginning of the Renaissance, of the coming Protestant Revolt, of the age of exploration that was just around the corner, it is possible to focus upon and find evidence that Europeans were preparing themselves for these great events. They were making inventions, discovering new possibilities, developing greater curiosity about the world beyond their knowledge, and trying to recover ancient learning. With the benefit of hindsight, we can tell the story that way, and, since that is a part of the story, we will return to it shortly.

Another way to look at the 14th and 15th centuries in Europe, however, is from the angle of what went before. From that angle, a major civilization was breaking up, declining, and losing its hold on a people. There had been a Medieval civilization. It reached its peak of organization and vitality in the 12th and 13th centuries. Signs that it was waning began to appear in the 14th century, and by the late 15th century what remained were largely relics and remains of a once great civilization. Thus, it will be necessary to understand a little about the Middle Ages in order to understand what was going on in Europe at the time of the discovery of America.

Before doing so, however, there are two concepts that need clarification. One is the concept of civilization. Although civilization may be defined in different ways by different writers, and historians sometimes differ as to how they are to be classified, there is one point on which there is general agreement. Civilization is an advanced condition of human arrangements and achievements. One dictionary defines it as "An advanced state of human society, in which a high level of art, science, religion, and government have been reached." Civilization can also be thought of in terms of the conditions which make such an advanced state possible. Peace and order must be established over a considerable area. All the peoples within a civilization do not have to be under a single government, but they must have common and agreed upon means for settling disputes and interacting peacefully with one another. There must be an economic base for it, extensive trade, and some division of labor, else people will not be freed from the business of getting a living for other pursuits. Indeed, civilization, as a concept, is closely related to the city. One word, "city," derives from the Greek word, *civitas*, which is the root also of "civilization." That is no accident, for there has never been a high civilization without cities.

The other concept is that of the rise and fall of civilizations. That civilizations have risen and fallen is as certain as that there were once civilizations, the Minoan for example, that no longer exist. But the concept has greater significance than that may suggest. In the past couple of centuries the notion has taken hold that man makes progress

on a straight line upward. There is little place for such a belief in the fact of the rise and fall of civilizations. There is a kind of progress upward, though not in a straight line (there are bends and crooks) in technology, that is, in techniques for doing things and tools. But in the ability to maintain order, in the establishment of peace, in thought, in the arts, in economic arrangements, in most of those things associated with civilization, there is no clear line of upward progress in recorded times. No people is ever more than a generation, a generation untaught in the arts of civility, that is, away from barbarism. So far as can be told from the record of history, we are always nearer to the edge of the abyss of decay, decline, and disintegration than it is easy to imagine in peaceful and orderly times.

The Classical Heritage

The Middle Ages was largely a compound of Classical, Christian, and Germanic elements. Since the Classical was first in time, it will be taken up first. What is referred to as the Classical culture took shape in Greece (6th to 4th century B.C.), was spread around the Mediterranean and is known as Hellenistic Civilization (4th to 2nd century B.C.), and took on a Roman cast in the Roman Empire, which was at its peak from 1st century B.C. through the 4th century A.D. Not only did the Classical Age make a great impact on the Middle Ages but also upon modern Europe and, eventually, upon the United States. It is most doubtful that there would have been a United States government such as was provided for in our Constitution had there not been the example of ancient Rome. The very idea of a republic came to the Americans from Rome. Both the word "Senate," and the idea was Roman. The idea of a mixed government, such as ours, was formulated in the Classical Age. Both the idea of democracy and the distrust of it comes to us from Greece. Many of the men who were leaders in making the United States Constitution were deeply studied in ancient history. And that is only to touch the political side of the Classical heritage.

Athens was the leading city during the Golden Age of Greece. For a century or so, a remarkable civilization flourished at Athens and surrounding cities. In the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., when Rome was little more than a primitive village, when Northwestern Europe was occupied by savage tribes, when the islands separated from Europe by what we call the English Channel were not yet named Britain (and over 1,000 years before there was an England), civilization was reaching a new peak in Greece. There was an outpouring of literary and artistic invention such as had never occurred anywhere before. Plato gave definite shape to speculative philosophy. Indeed, it has been said that all of philosophy since is a series of footnotes to Plato. Aristotle, his pupil,

gave the scientific cast to philosophy. Herodotus is usually described as the "Father of History." Thucydides may well have been the first critical historian. Hippocrates, about whom little that is definite is known, can be thought of as one of the founders of scientific medicine. Sophocles and Aristophanes were great playwrights. Greek architecture, well exemplified by the Parthenon, demonstrates to the eye the classical idea of balance, proportion, and harmony. Greek statues were equally impressive examples of these ideas.

Probably, the most important contribution of the Greek Golden Age to all who participate in their heritage is the idea that there is an order underlying all things in this world. It is not an order made by man, but it is an order for man and for all things. The Greeks were not the first people to glimpse that order, of course. Men have long observed that there are regularities in nature, and they knew of many of these before the Golden Age of Greece. Those who lived near the seas perceived the regularity of the coming in and going out of the tides. All who will stare up into the heavens may glimpse the order in the regular phases of the moon. The seasons of the year follow one another in predictable fashion, and, having completed their cycle, they recur. Seeds taken from a plant reproduce that plant, other things being equal. Animals go through a cycle of life: birth, growth, maturity, death.

But the greatest of the Greek thinkers widened and greatly extended this idea of regularity and order. They sought to find an explanation for it. Above all, however, is that they attempted to universalize this conception, to extend into every realm. They perceived the underlying order as basically a natural order, and their approach to it was scientific, if that be understood as an attitude toward truth and not as a method. Aristotle was much closer to being what we would call a scientist than most thinkers of his time, but the cast of the thought of many others was scientific as well.

The Greek thinkers were fascinated with order, with regularity, with forms, with essences, with that which is not seen, nor felt, nor heard, but yet gives its character to all things. The great realities, Plato held, were the True, the Beautiful, the Good, and the Just. With their minds they were reaching toward things which were everywhere true. This set them apart from other peoples in their time and set the stage for political, legal, economic, and religious developments which followed in the ancient Mediterranean world.

The Greeks during the Golden Age were at heart provincial people. They were organized into city states, each separate and distinct from the other. Their religion, their commerce, their ways of life were so tied up with their particular cities that they could not conceive of, or want, a political organization that would unite all the Greeks. The nearest they could come to this were leagues or confederations, and jealousies

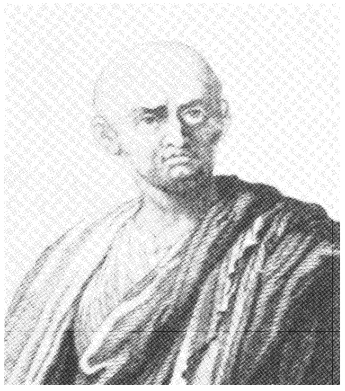
among them usually tore these apart. While their greatest thinkers were beginning to think in universal terms, their city states remained the central focus of their lives.

The failure of the Greeks to conceive or set up effective broader political organization, plus the debilitating wars between and among the city states, set the stage for their conquest in the 4th century. Philip of Macedon (an outlying barbarian state, as the other Greeks thought of it) conquered the whole peninsula. His son, Alexander (the Great), proceeded to the conquest and formation of a vast empire surrounding the eastern Mediterranean. Aristotle had taught Alexander, and it may be that he learned from that great teacher something of the meaning of the quest for universal truth. But if he did, he applied it by force rather than persuasion and conversion, for he founded an empire to be ruled by despots. Alexander died (323 B.C.) shortly after completing his conquest. Within a few years of his death, the empire he had forged fell under regional rulers.

In the wake of the imperial conquests of Alexander, Hellenistic Civilization spread around the Mediterranean. Indeed, as a result of the conquest, West and East were brought closer together, and both Greek and Oriental ideas gained sway. The civilization that flowered and that was still dominant over much of the area down to and through the time that Jesus lived (4 B.C. to 29 A.D., the dates that have been widely accepted) was Hellenistic. That is, Greek influence was prominent, if not dominant. Nor did it end with the Roman conquest of the Greeks. The superiority of Greek thought to that of the Romans made its impact upon Rome, even when the teachers were slaves and the students were conquerors.

The most important contribution of Rome to civilization, aside from the Roman Catholic Church, was law. Roman imperial organization, Roman roads, aqueducts, architecture, and the Senate were remarkable achievements, but the accomplishments in legal development outshone them. The Romans discovered a way to govern not only those who shared with them a common culture but also peoples of diverse cultures and experiences. They ruled not only Romans but also Greeks, Persians, Jews, Egyptians, Spaniards, Britons, Franks, and those of many other lands. And they did so keeping basic justice as their goal.

The law by which the Romans ruled over diverse peoples was called the "law of nations" sometimes. That is somewhat confusing, because it sounds as if it would refer to the laws in operation in particular nations. On the contrary, it was the law that applied to all nations or peoples, the natural law, as it came to be called. The Stoic philosophers developed the conception of natural law much beyond anything the earlier Greeks had conceived, and Cicero brought the conception to the peak of its clarity. This law is discovered by reasoning on the nature of



Marcus Tullius Cicero
(106-43 B.C.)

Cicero was the great orator and philosopher of the Roman Republic. He was trained as a lawyer, learned in Greek philosophy, spokesman for the natural law philosophy, defender of the Roman constitution and the Republic when these were losing ground before the onslaught of despots who were busily building an empire. It is not surprising, then, that he was murdered by the despots. Cicero was, for the Founders of the American Republic, the great statesman of Rome.

things, he said. " 'For law,' " Cicero said, quoting from learned men, " 'is the highest reason implanted in nature, which prescribes those things which ought to be done, and forbids the contrary.' And when this same reason is confirmed and established in men's minds, it is then law." The Romans also conceived of constitutional law, which, for them, was found initially in the Twelve Tables of the Law. They also developed extensively their own civil law as well.

Basically, though, the Romans were conquerors. They were law givers, too, but this served more to enable them to rule than to maintain peace. There were periods, of course, during the centuries-long reign of Rome when peace generally prevailed over the vast domain. That accomplishment was never quite forgotten during the darkest of the Dark Ages, and the dream of restoring the Roman Empire in the West surfaced again and again during the Middle Ages. Indeed, a portion, at least, of the eastern empire survived throughout the Middle Ages. The Roman Emperor Constantine moved the capital to the east in the 4th century A.D., and it became known as Constantinople. The empire is known as the Byzantine Empire.

The Christian Heritage

Long before that, however, momentous events had taken place within the bounds of the Roman Empire. God had revealed himself to man through the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who is known to all Christians as the Christ. Before exploring some of the importance of this for history, however, some background to this is in order. Christianity is a religion of the book. The book, of course, is the *Bible.* Among the major religions of the world, there is only one other that is a religion of the book—Islam. The *Koran* is the book of Islam. It is

hardly an accident, however, that Islam (or Mohammedanism) came several centuries after Christ, or that it accepts Jesus and the Hebrew prophets as true prophets. That is, the *Bible* provided the example for the *Koran*. The two other cases in which there are sacred scriptures making up a book are too closely related to Christianity to be treated as separate instances. The Hebrew religion is also a religion of the book —the *Old Testament*, but that has been incorporated in the Bible. The Latter Day Saints have the *Book of the Mormon*, but they also accept the Bible and Christianity.

Since Christianity is a religion of the book, the written word assumes a special importance for Christians. Learning assumes a special importance. Careful construction of the meaning of words assumes a special importance. The original meaning, the original documents, the earliest applications, all assume a special importance. This is so especially for the scriptures, but the attitude and belief tend to be extended to more worldly books, documents, and words as well. While this attitude is true for all Christians, it is even stronger for Protestants than for others, and they set the religious tone for the United States.

The Christian heritage is often referred to as the Judeo-Christian heritage. It is appropriate that it should be. The Bible is a record not only of the beginnings of Christianity but also of the Jewish religion to that point. Much that Christians claim for their own, as well as do the Jews, is found in the *Old Testament*: The story of the Creation, the Fall, the Ten Commandments, the incomparable Psalms, the marvelous struggles of the followers of Yahweh (Jehovah, God), the reigns of David and Solomon, the Prophets, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, and so on. The Jews reached a new level of religion with their belief in monotheism, that there is but one God, and that He is the great God Jehovah. That God is Just was an equally important concept. Most peoples in the ancient world believed in gods, but they were usually capricious gods for whom man was a plaything. Not so, the God of the Hebrews; he was a just God, wanting for man only what was for his ultimate good.

Looked at in the way of the world, the simple life story of Jesus does not belong in history books. History has to do with the great and the mighty, with conquerors and conquests, with politicians with hundreds of thousands of followers, with diplomats who drew up great treaties, with people of wealth, of learning, and of a vast influence on their contemporaries.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, was none of these things. Of the things of the world, He had none of any consequence. It is written that the Son of Man had no place to lay his head. He was born in a stable, in a trough from which the animals ate. His parents were people of low estate. He must have had very little of formal education or training.