

A HUNDRED YEARS OF THE TEACHING OF HISTORY AT CAMBRIDGE, 1873-1973 *

By G. KITSON CLARK
Trinity College, Cambridge

BEFORE I start I would like to express my gratitude to the Faculty Board of History who have entrusted me with the very interesting task of delivering this lecture and to Mrs Lindsay for handing me a copy of her article on the 'Origin and Early Development of the Cambridge Historical Tripos', which appeared in volume IX of the *Cambridge Historical Journal*. This article surely must remain the authoritative account of the early development of the Tripos. I owe much to it, as also to an anonymous set of notes on the changes in the Tripos up to 1932, which was discovered in the offices of the History Faculty. This I suspect to have been compiled by Ronald Balfour, a Fellow of King's and close friend of mine, who was killed in the last war. I need not say that neither Mrs Lindsay, nor the author of these notes is responsible for what follows.

On 27 February 1873 a Grace accepted the report of a syndicate which had been appointed to consider what changes should be made in the teaching of history and law. This report recommended the establishment of an Historical Tripos. Before this, modern history had not been of much account in Cambridge. In 1724 George I had established a Regius Professorship of History at Cambridge. To judge by its address of thanks the University at that time seems mainly to have valued the Chair as a means by which the privilege, and profit, of educating the nobility and gentry might be withdrawn from foreign tutors and placed in English hands. The men who held the Chair in the eighteenth century, may have done that; it is difficult to see what else they did. In the nineteenth century things were better. We are told that William Smyth, Regius Professor from 1809, delivered 'eloquent and thoughtful disquisitions' on modern history. These were subsequently published, and were well attended, at least until the institution of the Previous Examination made more insistent demands on the time of undergraduates. Sir James Stephen who succeeded him, and was Professor from 1849 to 1859, was a man of force and intelligence and delivered well prepared lectures, but apparently the attendance was negligible. Charles Kingsley, Professor from 1860 to 1869, fared better and drew large audiences. But the value of his lectures seems to have been rather homiletic than scholarly, for

* This is the text of a lecture delivered in the Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, Cambridge, on 27 February 1973, the centenary of the approval by the University of the Grace establishing a separate Historical Tripos.

they were grounded upon sincerely held moral principles rather than upon historical research, or wide, or even accurate, reading.

Apart from the Regius Professorship historical studies did not lead to any Fellowship, Prize or College or University Office. In 1873 the only two University or College officers formally charged with the teaching of modern history were the Regius Professor and one College lecturer, Basil Hammond of Trinity. Moreover, a large number of the senior members of the University, self-assured of the exclusive value of the mathematical and classical studies in which they had been brought up, tended to believe with Dr Johnson that the work of an historian did not demand any very remarkable qualities of mind, while all that a candidate in an examination on an historical subject would be likely to require would be the capacity to memorize large masses of facts, and, possibly, the ability to report blindly other men's sophistries.

In such circumstances it is not surprising that modern history did not play any important part in university studies. From 1851 it had a despised place in the Moral Sciences Tripos; and from 1858 a very little history was taught in the Law Tripos. In 1867, however, it was, with jurisprudence, ejected from the Moral Sciences Tripos, and in 1870 history was joined with law in a common Tripos, a marriage that proved so distasteful to both parties that it only lasted two years. It was this divorce that led in 1873 to the grant to modern history of a house of its own.

The beginnings were small. The first Tripos list, in 1875, only contained nine names – four in the first class, four in the second and one in the third. Indeed before 1883 the names in the Tripos never numbered more than 13. It is, however, to be remembered that the Tripos had only one part taken in the third year, and that work for it seems to have started as soon as the Previous Examination had been disposed of; therefore, to gain an overall figure, to those in the final list should be added others in their second and possibly in their first year. In any case the times were propitious. About this date English scholars, inspired by German examples, were not content to abandon history to amateurs and romantics. They believed that historical studies should become professional and an appropriate staple for a University degree course. Probably the turning point came in 1866 when William Stubbs, already a great mediaeval historian, became Regius Professor at Oxford. In 1867 he announced in his inaugural lecture that he hoped that he might assist in founding an historical school in England. He was as good as his word. Between 1872 and 1878 he published his *Constitutional History* which, with his *Charters*, provided a firm foundation for historical studies, both at Oxford and at Cambridge.

To a greater extent than it deserved Cambridge was able to take advantage of this favouring wind. In 1873 the Regius Professor was no longer Kingsley but J. R. Seeley, afterwards Sir John Seeley, a much more serious scholar. A. W. Ward, afterwards Sir Adolphus Ward, was a Fellow of Peterhouse, if a non-resident Fellow. Each had advocated the initiation of an Historical Tripos, each

played his part in developing it, though as will be seen they were anxious to develop it in contrary directions. G. W. Prothero, who became an historical scholar of considerable standing, was a Fellow of King's; there in 1876 he was joined by Oscar Browning, commonly known as the O.B., a refugee from Eton, where he had been a master. The Moral Sciences Tripos produced three men who were going to play important parts in developing the school of history at Cambridge. In 1867 that uncouth but powerful character, H. M. Gwatkin, was third in it, and in 1872 two close friends, W. Cunningham and F. W. Maitland, were bracketed at the top of the list. For a time it was uncertain whether either of them would have a future in Cambridge. In 1875 they both competed for a Trinity Fellowship, and neither was selected. There were apparently no other fellowships available for them, but each found his way back into the Cambridge system by his own route. Cunningham was ordained and took a curacy near Cambridge. He also took up lecturing for University extension classes. This took him to Liverpool, but his proven ability as an organizer led to his transfer back to Cambridge. When the Historical Tripos got under way he was drafted into teaching the smattering of economic history that was required for the paper on *Political Economy and Economic History*. He did not want to do this work, but his own financial needs were compulsive, and he had in fact found his vocation. Maitland became a lawyer, and deeply interested in legal history. In 1884 he returned to Cambridge as Reader in English Law, and in 1888 he became Downing Professor of the Laws of England. He was, therefore, throughout his career a member of the Faculty of Law rather than that of History, but his influence on the development of history at Cambridge was profound.

In 1884 Mandell Creighton became the first Dixie Professor. Meanwhile historians, who were going to play important parts, were beginning to emerge from the Tripos itself: J. P. Whitney, who was in due course to become Dixie Professor, in 1881, J. R. Tanner in 1884, Neville Figgis in 1889, G. P. Gooch and W. F. Reddaway in 1894, John Clapham in 1895, George Trevelyan in 1896, R. V. Laurence in 1898, Winstanley in 1899 and 1900, Temperley in 1900 and 1901, and so on. In 1895 Lord Acton had replaced Seeley as Regius Professor, and, initially largely under his guidance, the *Cambridge Modern History* began to raise its bulk to frown over the fields of international scholarship. And so in the early years of the twentieth century it became clear to the world, and even to large parts of the University, that there was an important school of professional historians at Cambridge.

Circumstances were to decree that, for good or ill, it was to be a school much preoccupied with the business of teaching. As the nineteenth century went forward the numbers taking the Tripos increased. For some reason there was a jump in 1884, after which there were never less than 20, men and women, in the final list, and the growth continued, with fluctuations, to the end of the century. In 1897 the Tripos was divided into two parts, not all historians took both parts, and it becomes difficult to determine what figure to choose to represent the

numbers studying history at Cambridge in any particular generation. But if my calculations are correct, there was no year after that when there were not 40 or more men and women in one part, or other, of the Tripos. After 1909 there were never less than 100, reaching the 200 mark in the late twenties and early thirties. By that time, in fact, the Historical Tripos was educating a fair proportion of the undergraduates coming to Cambridge.

I will not say that they were all the most valuable students in Cambridge. At some point in the twentieth century the centre of gravity of English education seems to have shifted in both school and university, and it became increasingly likely that men and women would study history, if they were not clear what else they wanted to do. Moreover, although when dealing with the men and women at the top of the list, examiners in the Historical Tripos were I believe accurate indeed rather severe in their judgements, when they came to the bottom they seem fairly often to have found it difficult to discriminate between honest mediocrity and ingeniously disguised ignorance. It is to be feared that this weakness may have attracted a number of men whose first interest was not in their studies; I once taught, or probably the verb here should be tried to teach, a man who rode in the Grand National while he was nominally working for the history Tripos. However, this element can be exaggerated, and here I speak as one who, as a supervisor and director of studies, had many of the most questionable men through his hands. There was normally among those taking history a handful of men who should never have been at a University at all, many of whom did not survive the first year's work; but I believe that, apart from these, most men and women gained something from the Tripos, and many men and women gained a great deal; and I do not think that those who gained most can always be identified from their place in the Tripos list.

Of course the Tripos of the second quarter of the twentieth century was not the same as the examination established in 1873. Since 1873 changes in the Tripos have been periodical, discussions about change endemic. Indeed, since the records of those discussions are continuous and the literature they produced profuse, there might be a temptation to describe the history of the Tripos entirely in terms of the discussions on Tripos Reform. That would indeed be a dismal exercise. I think anyone who has ever taken part in these discussions will agree that there are few ways of wasting one's life which are more dreary and frustrating. Stonebreaking for the roads could hardly be more wearisome and must often be more useful, for a depressing conclusion from studying these discussions is that too often the same things were repeated at intervals for more than half a century without any noticeable effect on anything that ever happened. For instance in 1885 G. W. Prothero raised the question whether the General Essay, which was required of Tripos candidates, served any useful purpose, or was indeed worthy of a place in a Tripos examination. I can remember that during my service as a member of the History Faculty, which began more than forty years afterwards, the same criticisms of the General Essay were intermittently

repeated in the reports of Tripos examiners or the speakers in faculty discussions; yet when, in 1967, I retired the General Essay still formed part of the Tripos examination. Or, to take another example, from time to time very reasonable complaints were made that the burden which the number and extent of the subjects included in the Tripos nominally placed upon candidates was too great, and from time to time attempts were made to reduce it. But if the schedule of what was required of Tripos candidates is examined over the whole period, it seems clear that the nominal requirements were never permanently reduced, in fact they seem gradually to have increased as new subjects made a claim for inclusion.

It was, in fact, in the nature of these discussions that the points of controversy were soon clarified, and on a number of matters deadlocks were soon reached, which lasted indefinitely. This result was enhanced by the fact that many of those involved continued to yearn for the impossible. They wished to correct by reforms in the regulations for examinations defects which were probably inherent in human nature, to combine in one curriculum the incompatible and to cram into the three short years of a student's life the acquisition of knowledge which would take a lifetime to assimilate. The result has too often been an unhappy struggle through a network of cross purposes to reach in the end a settlement which satisfied no one. It is easy to sympathize with Maitland, who at the end of a peculiarly long bout of discussions, which had lasted from 1894 to 1897, said that the result resembled rather 'the programme of a variety shew than the sober programme of an Historical School'.

Fortunately these debates only constitute a very small part of the history of the Tripos. Much more important, more hopeful and more interesting is the history of what was actually taught and learnt at the various stages of the development of the Tripos, of the historical thought it stimulated and of the distinguished men and women who lectured for it. Nevertheless I believe that the unlovely detritus of obsolete curricula, superannuated regulations and unmemorable debates can be used to reveal issues which were of permanent importance in the development of historical studies at Cambridge.

The most fundamental issue was obviously what should be the object of those studies. Two contrary views on this issue were present from the beginning, represented by Sir John Seeley and Sir Adolphus Ward respectively. It was said, so Mrs Lindsay tells us, that Seeley stood for 'thought without facts' and Ward 'facts without thought'. In reality the label given to Seeley is misleading. It was no doubt suggested by the drift of his mind towards the large scale treatment of important topics rather than towards the close examination of detail, a tendency which came out clearly in his discussion classes. In fact behind his treatment of large issues there was much laborious research into detail, as is obvious from his *Life of Stein* and from the note-books he left behind him. Indeed it was one of his primary principles that history should be based on the passionless and objective study of verifiable facts, and he repudiated those historians who con-

descended to paint scenery, tell romantic stories or excite emotion. It was this which made him tell a youthful and highly indignant George Trevelyan that the two historians whom Trevelyan most admired, Thomas Carlyle and his great uncle Macaulay, were charlatans. However Seeley's view was clear. Only an austere concentration on the establishment of fact would enable history to take its place among the sciences, and become, as Seeley believed it was destined to become, the foundation of a science of politics.

This attitude was fairly common at the end of the nineteenth century. It had its origin in a number of factors: in the prestige which the natural sciences, and what were considered to be the results of inductive thought, had achieved by the last half of the nineteenth century, in the professionalization of history and the conscious rejection of the idea that it was the primary object of history to entertain or even to inspire, and also in the belief that with the opening of the archives and the development of historic method the truths of history could be finally established. That belief was, of course, mistaken, as was the related belief in the certainty and the generality of the lessons history could teach.

But both beliefs had an important influence on Seeley's views on the purpose of historical studies and so on what should be the purpose of history teaching at Cambridge. Seeley believed with his contemporary E. A. Freeman at Oxford that 'history is past politics and politics present history'. This led to the belief that the principal function of the historian was to supply the statesman with the premises on which the statesman should make his decisions. 'History', he said, 'is the school of statesmanship'. However if it was to perform this function narrative history would not suffice; it must be expanded into, or supplemented by, certain contingent theoretical subjects. The first and most important of these he called 'political philosophy'. But in addition to political philosophy there should be a comparative study of legal institutions after the manner of Sir Henry Maine in his *Ancient Law*, there should be political economy studied from an historical point of view and therefore rather different from the political economy of the economists, and there should be a study of international law to give an insight into the relations between nations. Of these subjects, Seeley and those who agreed with him put 'Political Philosophy', which they significantly called 'Political Science', first. Therefore they had best be called 'Political Scientists'.

Ward represented a different ideal. While Seeley believed that history should be studied as the foundation of the Science of Politics, Ward believed that it should be studied for its own sake. Only so would its study yield that sense of historical perspective, that understanding of historical evidence which were its most valuable gifts. It would be best to call those who took this view 'the pure historians'.¹

¹ See Mrs Lindsay's article *passim*. The best account of Seeley's views is by J. R. Tanner in the *English Historical Review*, vol. ix (1895), but see also Seeley's inaugural lecture on 'The Teaching of Politics' in his *Lectures and Essays* (1870), his *Introduction to Political Science* (1896) and also

Each point of view has much to be said for it. Each presents difficulties and each may deviate into something objectionable. The Political Scientist gives to history a sense of purpose. But he is likely to concentrate exclusively on such history as is relevant to his purpose. This may not only exclude from the field of study much that is interesting and in its own context important; but it may also mean that what is studied is distorted because it has been abstracted from its historical background. Indeed it may be so abstracted and so distorted that what is studied is at best an *a priori* argument and at worst political propaganda salted with historical names. The pure historian is likely to be more scholarly, but his claims are founded on a contradiction. To be written at all history must be related to particular issues and a particular calculus of values, and as such it, also, will be a selection from the general mass of facts. And if the sense of purpose fades it can easily degenerate into what is called an 'outline', a long weary path leading to no ascertainable end through territory which has no available map and which no one has any time to explore.

In the Tripos as established in 1873 the views of the Political Scientists seem to have predominated. There were 9 papers, all of them apparently compulsory. The first was a general paper on English History, the second, third and fourth were papers on comparatively short special subjects, one on Ancient History, one on Mediaeval History and one on Modern History. Of the last two of these subjects one had to be an English subject. The fifth paper was on the principles of Political Philosophy and General Jurisprudence, the sixth on Constitutional Law and Constitutional History, the seventh on Political Economy and Economic History, the eighth on Public International Law with selected Treaties and the ninth proposed subjects for Essays. The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth papers roughly correspond to those which were to be enumerated in 1884 by Seeley; but, though Seeley was a member of the syndicate which recommended this selection of subjects, he was not necessarily responsible for it. History had just broken out of an examination shared with law, and it was natural that like a day-old chick it should continue to carry fragments of egg-shell about on it, which may account for the large part played by law in this curriculum; but in fact this selection may go back to an earlier date than the brief marriage with law. The syndicate which promoted the Tripos declared that it proposed a combination of pure history with what it called 'the chief theoretical subjects which find their illustration in history' in accordance with the selection of subjects in the Moral Sciences Tripos as reconstituted in 1860.² The selection of subjects, therefore, may not derive so much from Seeley's opinions as from a

the quotation cited by Oscar Browning in the *Cambridge Review* 1884-6, pp. 178-80. For the opinions of Sir Adolphus Ward the best source is Mrs Lindsay's article which cites an important pamphlet by Ward not readily available elsewhere. Ward's article on 'The Study of History at Cambridge', published in 1872, is however re-published in vol. v of *The Collected Papers of Sir Adolphus Ward* (Cambridge, 1921), pp. 248-55.

² *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1872-3, p. 97.

pattern established before the value of historical knowledge was fully recognized at Cambridge, or its scope fully understood.

This may account for the serious defects of this selection as the curriculum of an Historical Tripos. One obvious defect was the small part allotted to modern European history. The only modern European history which candidates could not evade was one short special period. European history could also be introduced into some of the four abstract papers, particularly into the paper on International Law; but even there it would only be a specialist's aspect of European history, and elsewhere it would at best be marginal. It could be made the subject for an essay and since one of the subjects set in 1875 was, bleakly, 'The causes of the French Revolution', there was an opening here for the discussion of a good deal of European History. But other essay subjects might be chosen, some of them not really historical at all. English history fared better. Indeed to judge by the general paper on English history and the paper on the English Special Subject, which in 1875 was the history of England between 1042 and 1066, candidates were expected to possess a considerable knowledge of the facts of English history. It is difficult to say how considerable this would be. In those days examination papers had no rubrics, so that it is not clear how many questions a candidate was expected to answer. Moreover, in those Arcadian days historians knew less and normally thought more simply than they do now, so that the answers to a good many questions could legitimately be a good deal shorter than what would be required by a modern examiner. However, the fact remains that what is most striking about this examination is that, in a Tripos which was nominally historical, of eight subject papers only four were on undiluted history and for the others such history as was required was what could be subordinated to a specialized objective, while much could be submitted without any knowledge of history at all.

It was not likely this distribution of interest would remain unchallenged for long. As the history school developed, so apparently did discontent with the Tripos, and in January 1885 Prothero, who had become Secretary of the Faculty Board in 1879, published an important article in the *Cambridge Review*. In it he declared that the Historical Tripos lacked the singleness of purpose which its name implied, that its aim seemed to be rather practical than scientific, and he claimed that it should contain more history studied for its own sake, and more opportunities for studying historical method. He also thought that the Essay paper should be replaced by a dissertation, an idea which, as the years go by, flits in and out of Tripos discussions like a will-o'-the-wisp.³ He was not answered at once by Seeley, who took a rather Olympian view of the significance of what was studied for the Tripos, but by Oscar Browning.

Oscar Browning drew heavily on the authority of Seeley and also on the experience which had by that time been gained in teaching for the Tripos; for he

³ *Cambridge Review*, Vol. VI (1884-5), pp. 163-6.

asserted that under the Tripos, as it then existed, very good education had been given with exiguous resources to a reasonably large number of men. It is not easy nowadays to take the O.B. as seriously as he deserves. In his later years he seems to have subsided into the ridiculous figure which is partly reflected in the character of Mr Stewart in E. F. Benson's novel *The Babe B.A.*, published in 1897. He disregarded the poetical advice which had been given him and became too obese; his scholarship, always probably superficial, became flatulent; his methods as an examiner became such that men refused to examine with him, and his snobbery became a by-word. Nevertheless it seems clear that in his prime he was a stimulating and intelligent teacher and that at the beginning of things he played an important part in the development of the teaching of history at Cambridge. Certainly the 'Political Society' which he founded in King's, but which was attended by men from other Colleges, served an important purpose and was a valuable innovation. I have heard from George Trevelyan, who I think attended it, a very warm tribute to its value, and to the value of the O.B. who was not the type of man whom Trevelyan naturally tended to admire. The O.B. said that the Tripos should be, indeed had been from its conception, what he called an Historico-Political Tripos. Its object should indeed be practical, to prepare men for the world in which they were to live; but it should also be scientific and he went on in words which have modern echoes:

'Perhaps', he said, 'some future generations will study history merely as the ground work of sociology; we shall then have a really "scientific study of history". But at present the whole field of sociology is too vague for our purposes. On the other hand political science which deals with the relations between the governors and the governed is well suited for this object.'⁴

The weight of the opinion against the O.B. is impressive. He was not only opposed by Prothero, but by Gwatkin, by Creighton, by Cunningham and by Maitland who said of 'Political Science' 'either it is historical or it is humbug', and by Acton, when he arrived. When, however, the Tripos was reformed in 1885 and again in 1897 the O.B. did not do as badly as might have been expected, though he complained bitterly. 'Political Science', or 'Comparative Politics' or 'Analytical and Deductive Politics' remained in the Tripos, though they tended to be alternative subjects, and so did 'Political Economy' and 'International Law'. Indeed in the first 30 years of the twentieth century, long after the O.B. had departed to live in Rome to write the history of the world, for which he told my father he had such peculiarly suitable qualifications that it was his duty to write it, two subjects, 'Political Science A' and 'Political Science B', survived in the Tripos. 'Political Science A', which was set in the first part of the Tripos, had for its subject the comparative study of institutions and the use of political terms, and 'Political Science B', which was set in the second part of the Tripos, was concerned with the structure and end of the state and of the

⁴ *Cambridge Review*, Vol. VI (1884-5), pp. 178-80.

grounds of Political Obligation. 'Political Economy' and 'International Law' also survived as alternative subjects.

But the pure historians won in the end. In 1929 'Political Science A' was changed into 'The History of Political Thought', and 'Political Science B' into 'The Theory of the Modern State'. In 1934 'Political Economy' disappeared. 'International Law' was kept in existence for a number of years by the idealism of Gwladys Jones and Robin Laffan, who saw in it a possible scheme for the peaceful organization of mankind. But it, too, was dropped in 1951.

The primary reason for the abolition of Political Science, as it had been understood at Cambridge, was the arrival in Cambridge in 1928 of Sir Ernest Barker as Professor, since Barker's interests were naturally in the more purely theoretical side of the subject. But it is also true that the subject had tended to stiffen into the rather arid study of the mechanical technicalities of representative government – the various forms of federalism, the referendum, the initiative, the recall – which in the second quarter of the nineteenth century were fast losing such contact as they had ever had with political realities. Nevertheless something had been sacrificed. When in 1929 the change was made the Faculty Board of History reported to the University that the direct study of political institutions fell properly within the province of other subjects, which were already included in Part I of the Tripos. For instance they asserted that the study of English institutions was included in the early and later Constitutional History, and that of European institutions (in their medieval phase) in General Medieval History.⁵ This was an example of that make-believe to which academic persons resort when they wish to conceal an inconvenient problem from their colleagues and from themselves. There was, in fact, no subject in the Tripos which gave scope for the comparative study of the working of modern institutions. It was highly unlikely that anything but the most perfunctory reference to modern English institutions would be possible in the heavily overweighted paper on later Constitutional History. In fact the most popular lecturer on that subject, D. A. Winstanley, had of recent years not got much further in his lectures than the Reform Bill of 1832 and did not mention in his lectures such nineteenth-century problems as Irish Home Rule, English local government, the development of party organization, or the various later nineteenth-century developments in Parliamentary government or in the power of the state. There was still less room for the study of the working European institutions, even 'in their medieval phase', in the outline paper on Medieval History. In fact an ideal which had been present in men's minds when the Tripos was brought into existence, and which, at least in Seeley's mind, had been compatible with complete respect for the professional standards of historical scholarship, had been abandoned. It is permissible to wonder whether if it had been allowed to develop and bear fruit something of value might have emerged, and the Tripos be in a better condition than it is to meet its critics today.

⁵ *Cambridge University Reporter* (1928–9), p. 920.

Be that as it may, it is significant that the victory of the pure historians did not lead to the uncompromising triumph of pure history. In the Tripos as reformed in 1885 English history was represented by English Constitutional History, English Economic History, a possible Special Subject on English History and a paper of subjects for Essays on English history. The last paper had replaced the general paper on English history which had not given satisfaction. However, the Essays on English history did not give satisfaction either, and in 1892 they went back to a general paper on English history to 1865, which in 1897 was in its turn abandoned. Thereafter for about 50 years, except for a brief period when an additional Special Subject on English History was introduced into Part I, English history was represented in the Tripos by the papers on Economic and Constitutional History, with the possible addition of an English special period, if an English special period was chosen. Economic and Constitutional History were in their way pure history, they did not present history as subordinated to the needs of an abstract argument, but the history they presented was only what could be orientated to particular issues, and they left much on the side of the plate, which men and women taking the Tripos might reasonably have wished to have studied, and which might have revealed something important about English history in general. However, each played an important part in the development of the Cambridge school.

Economic history as taught at Cambridge was the child of William Cunningham. For a variety of reasons Cunningham came early to the opinion that what were then generally believed to be the immutable unchallengeable laws of economics were not laws at all and did not fully explain the working and structure of society at *every* stage, indeed in his later thought he believed at *any* stage, of its economic development. This conclusion was probably endorsed for him by his contact with Trade Unionists, which began when he was at Liverpool, and probably by his interest in co-operation; it was certainly confirmed by a visit to India in 1881-2 where he studied Indian village communities, in which economic life did not seem to conform to the principles enunciated by Ricardo. He therefore believed that the way to approach economic history was not first to reassert economic principles, and then to rough-hew the facts so that they should fit the required pattern, but rather first to discover the facts and then to spell out the lessons they might teach. He based his lectures on this principle, and while Fawcett, who was an eminent politician, indeed from 1880 to 1884 Postmaster General, was Professor of Political Economy, he was able to follow his bent. When, however, in 1884 Marshall succeeded Fawcett there was trouble. Marshall wished Cunningham to devote one term's lectures to theory before he turned to history. This Cunningham, who was a pugnacious Scott, did not feel that he could conscientiously do, and there was friction, which was so serious that Cunningham resigned his University lectureship in 1888, when appointment to a College Lectureship by Trinity made this financially possible for him.

However, in spite of this opposition Cunningham was able to build up his own

subject in his own way. In 1882 he published the first version of his *Growth of English Industry and Commerce*, which, constantly extended, became required reading for Cambridge historians. In 1885 English Economic History entered the Tripos as a separate paper distinct from Political Economy and thereafter it consolidated its position. Cunningham had a worthy successor in John Clapham. Clapham with his huge mask-like face, his formidable body and his still more formidable command of his subject lecturing to crowded audiences in the lecture theatre at the Arts School was one of the most notable figures in Cambridge between the wars. His tradition was continued by John Saltmarsh, and the distinguished successor to Clapham's Chair, Professor Postan, gave it new dimensions and complicated it. English Economic History suffered in the thirties from a certain amount of rough surgery inflicted in the name of Tripos reform undertaken for objects which had nothing to do with it, and at times of late years some of its exponents seem to have yielded to a tendency to adopt a private language only intelligible to the initiated. But the subject has remained, and remains, an important and characteristic component of Cambridge historical studies, important for its own sake, and important because its presence tends to prevent Cambridge history from developing that bonelessness which normally characterizes history which is taught, or written, without reference to its economic background.

The part played by the two papers on Constitutional History has been more controversial and equivocal. English Constitutional History had two very respectable ghostly fathers, Hallam and Stubbs. It could also claim collateral descent from some very distinguished German historians, as for that matter could Cunningham's Economic History. As it left the hands of Hallam and Stubbs English Constitutional History was the legend of an ideal, the legend of English freedom broadening down from precedent to precedent, developing the protection of the rule of law and realizing itself in Parliamentary government; an ideal I happen to think is still of the greatest importance, if the old legend was in many ways misleading. In Cambridge it drew inspiration from the work of Maitland. It was for long presented in the Tripos in two papers, one going up to the year 1485, the other after 1485. They were both served by some remarkable people; the period up to 1485 by Gaillard Lapsley and that very considerable constitutional historian Helen Cam, and the period after 1485 by J. R. Tanner, D. A. Winstanley and K. W. M. Pickthorn, not to mention exponents who are still in practice. For many years both papers supplied very valuable pabulum for men and women taking the Tripos. However they both suffered from defects, which became more serious, or more noticeable, as the years went by. They were from the beginning unavoidably selective. When in 1897 the paper on general English history was cut out of the Tripos it was asserted that the subject was fairly represented in the papers that survived.⁶ This was make-believe. There were many aspects of British history which constitutional and economic history did not touch, and

⁶ *Cambridge University Reporter* 1878-9, p. 570.

the desire to study these would increase and become more insistent as the legend of English constitutional history became less compulsive and convincing. But apart from this both papers became unmanageable. There were two reasons for this. Unfortunately time moves on and history lengthens with it, which means that each year the historian has a longer stretch of time to consider, and what is worse the lecturer may be confronted by an ever-increasing, and most unwelcome, epilogue to that period about which he has prepared his lectures. Meanwhile as the moving finger writes and having writ moves on, so the busy hands of historians also write and their work has to be taken into the syllabus; consequently, while each year there is more and more history to cover, each year it takes longer and longer to cover less and less of it.

An attempt to counter the results of the passage of time can be made by saying rather arbitrarily that what happened in the last fifty years is not part of history, and therefore should not be studied. That is however an inconclusive expedient, for as the present moment in time creeps on so does the frontier at which what is acceptable as history begins, a phenomenon which many teachers have tried to conceal from themselves and, less successfully, from their pupils. As a matter of tactics it is therefore better frankly to confess that history has in fact continued till the day of the examination, but not to encourage an inconvenient interest in the most recent parts of it, but to recommend books which students are unlikely to read, to set questions in the Tripos in the confident expectation that no one will answer them and above all not to lecture beyond that moment in history which it is convenient for the lecturer to reach.

For the ever-increasing complication of written history there is no remedy, and in this case its effect was increased by idiosyncrasies of the scholar who for many years was the most notable lecturer in Cambridge on English Constitutional History before 1485. Gaillard Lapsley was a man of the world and a Tutor of Trinity College, and he presumably knew what human nature was like; but he was determined that this irrelevant factor should not blur his account of the ideas and principles involved in constitutional development. Above all there must be no reference to the physical existence of the men who might have called into being these conceptions and institutions and have lived with them, but probably did not understand them. There was great advantage in this; we are all of us used to taking account of human nature, we are not used to taking into our consideration such subtleties as emerged from the development of the feudal contract or the application of the Coronation Oath; and the lectures which Lapsley gave in the Hall of Trinity College provided over a long period very valuable intellectual training for those who attended them. But his methods required considerable elbow-room. When you spend a whole lecture on the words *vel per legem terrae* in clause 39 of Magna Carta, and have not quite finished with them at the end of the hour, you are not going to proceed very fast down the royal road of English history. To make matters worse an increasing number of scholars wrote books or monographs on Lapsley's subject on which he found it

necessary to comment in his lectures, and this further delayed matters. As a result as the years went by Lapsley covered less and less of his subject and a large hole or void developed in the middle of English Constitutional History. There had always been a blank space in the second half of the fifteenth century when 'ignorant armies clashed by night' and most students did not understand who they were and what they were doing, but as the years went by this void increased until it engulfed the whole of the fifteenth century before the battle of Bosworth and started to encroach on the fourteenth, even before the accession of Richard II.

In the early thirties there was an attack on the problem of the failure of constitutional history to cover the ground it was supposed to cover, and in 1934 an attempt was made to solve this problem by drastic surgery. English Constitutional and Economic history, though they were to retain their identities, were to be examined in the same papers. There were to be three papers, each covering the constitutional and economic problems of a particular period. The latest period was to start at 1688 and go to the present day in the hopes that the eighteenth, nineteenth and even parts of the twentieth century would be more adequately treated, the middle period was to run from 1399 to 1688 in the frustrated hope that the fifteenth century would come to life, the first period would run up to 1399. A candidate need only take two of these papers. Thus was sacrificed the old conception of the continuity of English history, and men were able to escape the rigours, and Latin, of the early period. Meanwhile there was a retreat from the old purely constitutional ideal. In the years that followed there was a tendency for the teaching of the latest period to move away from the study of legal and constitutional machinery to the consideration of the social and economic forces which presumably activated that machinery, and after 1946 there developed a demand for a general and integrated treatment of all English history. Therefore, in 1951 it was decreed that questions on aspects of English history other than economic and constitutional should also be set in the English papers. Then there began those underground rumblings which portended the volcanic eruption of 1966, for an eruption seems to be the most accurate description of the reform of the Tripos in that year.

However the fissures in the ground that portended that eruption were most evident in another part of the field of studies covered by the Tripos, that part devoted to European history. The neglect of European history which had been evident in the Tripos of 1873 continued till 1897. This was in contradiction to the ways of thought of some of the greatest figures in the Cambridge school; Creighton had made his name writing about a critical period in the history of the Papacy, Maitland had set English history in a European context, Lord Acton was pre-eminently a European historian. Consequently in 1897 two new papers were introduced into the Tripos, one on the outline of Medieval European History and the other on the outline of Modern European History, the dividing line being round about the year 1500. In my opinion, and in saying this I speak as one who for a reasonably long period was forced by the luck of the draw to take

essays on it and direct the studies of men taking it, the medieval period was always unmanageable. It was served by some important scholars, G. G. Coulton, Previt  Orton and Zachary Brooke, to whom in particular Cambridge history owes much, not to mention those who are still with us; but a period which nominally starts at some point in the fourth century and goes to the end of the fifteenth defies satisfactory treatment. It was supposed to be so organized that a student could concentrate upon part of it, but in my experience the division was never decisive enough adequately to relieve the burden. The modern period was more practicable, and W. F. Reddaway did a remarkable carpentry job in organizing a set of lectures which covered a large part of it, but in due course the lengthening of time and the increasingly complex views of historians made it difficult to handle it as a whole. And in so far as they were treated as outlines, both periods tended to become, at least in some of the textbooks upon which students came to rely, the arid and meaningless succession of names and events which is too often the form assumed by outline accounts of long periods of history.

There is however another side to this matter. The attempt to teach the whole of European history contributed to one of the most valuable characteristics of the Tripos, its comprehensiveness, a characteristic enhanced by the attempt to include, for those who were not classicists, ancient history, at least as a voluntary subject. Men and women who have studied history at Cambridge have often gained, to an extent not always gained elsewhere, a realization of the content of European history as a whole, and so some conception of its general significance. The sense of perspective so given is a very valuable endowment for an educated man or woman.

But the mention of the significance of history raises another problem which has been mentioned before. To be significant history must choose from the mass of the records of what has happened those facts which relate to a particular issue or group of issues or which gain their meaning from a particular calculus of values. And there is no reason why these reference points should be the same for all individuals in all generations.

There is an example of the results of a change in the angle of vision in the history of the Tripos. One of the most interesting of the children of the Tripos as it existed at the end of the nineteenth century was Neville Figgis. At the end of his important book, *Churches in the Modern State*, Figgis said of the three historians whom he regarded as his masters: 'Creighton Maitland and Acton were in fact at work on one problem – the development of the modern Western mind and its relation to the sources from which it had proceeded.'⁷ No doubt he was right. But there was no reason why this problem, or their particular way of looking at this problem, should be the centre of gravity of history in the future. In fact the tradition as Figgis had received it cannot be said to have

⁷ Neville Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State* (1913), p. 243.

continued in Cambridge. This was partly due to two personal tragedies, or three if you count as I do R. V. Laurence as a lost leader. A variety of factors, personal and institutional, frustrated Figgis' career as a scholar and no comparable work on history followed his *Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius*.⁸ He did however have a disciple, C. N. S. Woolf a young fellow of Trinity College, whose essay on *Bartolus* still has a European reputation.⁹ Interest in this subject has been revived in Cambridge by Walter Ullmann, but Woolf was killed in action in 1917. And of more recent years the work of distinction on European History in Cambridge, the work say of Temperley and Butterfield, has not been in that tradition; for if you have men of force and originality working on a subject the orientation of that subject must be changed to suit them.

All this, however, only implied a change of emphasis within the subjects taught in the framework of the Tripos, and perhaps the disappearance of a way of thought which might with better fortune have borne more fruit in Cambridge. What was to follow was a challenge which threatened a revolution in ideas about what ought to be covered by the Historical Tripos at Cambridge. When Figgis talked about 'the modern Western mind' he meant no doubt the Western European mind. But why should the Tripos stop at the bounds of Western Europe? Towards the end of the nineteenth century it became increasingly difficult for it to do so. At first the challenge was met by make-believe. In 1897 the supplementary regulations for the Tripos contained the provision that in the paper on Modern European History questions might be set on the history of the United States, and in the regulations for 1909 there was a comparable provision that in the paper on English Constitutional History questions might be set 'on the constitutional history of the English plantations, colonies and dominions'.¹⁰ In neither case was it said that they would be set, so that anyone who had spent time working on either subject might find that, as far as the Tripos went, his labours were unrewarded. Nor in fact was there probably much expectation that if set they would be answered. Nevertheless these were signs of the shape of things to come.

Between the wars there was evidence of an interest in Cambridge which extended beyond Europe at least as far as the boundaries of the British Empire. In 1929 the first volume of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire* appeared and in 1933 the Vere Harmsworth Professorship of naval history was transformed by legerdemain into a Professorship of Naval and Imperial History. During the second world war the importance of the United States in the affairs of the world became increasingly evident, and, first, E. A. Benians, an important pioneer in all these matters, gave an exploratory course on the history of the United States, and in 1942-3 came the momentous visit to Cambridge of Henry

⁸ Oxford, 1907.

⁹ C. N. S. Woolf, *Bartolus of Sasso ferrato: his position in the history of medieval political thought* (Cambridge, 1913).

¹⁰ *Cambridge University Reporter* 1896-7, p. 574, *ibid.* 1908-9, p. 823.

Commager, to whom the debt of Cambridge University is great. In 1944, after a fruitless world-wide search for funds the Pitt Professorship of American History and Institutions was founded out of funds generously supplied by the Cambridge University Press.

These things were symptoms of a movement which led to the addition of two new papers to the *Tripes*. In 1943 the history of the United States was given a separate, voluntary, paper of its own and in 1946 another paper was instituted on the 'Expansion of Europe', that is on the results of the impact of European expansion on non-European territories, races and communities. Each of these subjects proved to be successful and fruitful, but they were symptoms of movement which added to the strains on the old *Tripes* and contributed to the forces which blew the whole *Tripes* into the air in 1966, so that it came down in what might seem to an observer to be disjointed fragments.

I am not going to discuss the results of that eruption. In 1967, after 25 years as a supervisor and lecturer followed by 13 years as a Reader, they took me out of the shafts and put me out to grass. I have, therefore, never worked under the new regulations and do not understand them. Moreover I am told that the subterranean rumblings have continued and that smoke is coming out of the fissures in the ground. So there might be another eruption at any moment, and the whole matter is controversial. Besides in describing the results of modern *Tripes* reform, achieved or projected, I might be tempted to borrow Maitland's phrase, only I suppose I would have to use a more modern analogy than a variety show and say a bingo session, or a striptease exhibition. But that would be no doubt ignorant, unjust and rude.

I would, therefore, like at this point to return to a point which I made earlier. The extent to which changes in the *Tripes*, and debates about change, which naturally tend to emphasize criticisms of the *Tripes*, predominate in its history, might suggest that the history is one of failure. It is nothing of the sort. The *Tripes* has deserved well of those who have taken it. It has also left an important tradition. What is to be done with the tradition is the affair of present and future generations; it is no longer my affair. But unless it is desired to throw that tradition away entirely, there seem to me to be three points to be kept in mind.

First the *Tripes* ought to be comprehensive. I have criticized the outline papers on European history, but only as an impracticable means to a valuable end. That end should not be forgotten. If the *Tripes* is to serve those who will take it in the future as well as it has served those who have taken it in the past, then it must give them somehow a comprehensive view of the facts of history and a general conception of its pattern.

Second: an Historical *Tripes* ought to be historical. I suggested that it was a pity that the victory of the pure historians was as complete as it was, that a paper having as a subject the study of contemporary institutions and contemporary life should not have survived. But I must add this rider. For such a subject to have developed in such a way that it was worthy of a place in an historical *Tripes* it

would have to have passed into stronger hands than those of Oscar Browning, and to have been more firmly grounded than he was prepared to ground his Political Science upon facts established according to the criteria of historical scholarship and placed in their appropriate perspective by the objective study of relevant history. The criticisms by Maitland and Cunningham both of the use of history, and of the failure to use history, by the Political Scientists were plainly justified, as for that matter were Cunningham's criticisms of the *a priori* and unhistorical methods of the economists. In a Tripos, which dares to call itself historical, historical phenomena, and after all all the phenomena upon which political science or sociology are based are in the last resort historical, must be handled according to the canons of historical scholarship, or else the subject is 'humbug' – the impolite word is Maitland's, it is not mine. It was, after all, Seeley's desire to use the methods of impartial scholarship to establish the facts on which politics must be based; it was not his wish to introduce the dogmatism, the partisan assertions, the hasty and unsubstantiated generalizations, which are too common in political discussions, into University teaching. His object was defensible, but the task was more difficult and success in it more uncertain than he conceived; it is not surprising therefore that his 'science' should have been developed by men who disregarded the scholarly standards which he believed that he honoured.¹¹

Lastly the object of the Tripos has always been educational. It has existed to give an historical education to the generality of men and women. It has not existed to produce professional historians, though it has done that, and it is hoped that it will continue to do so, in moderation. Nor does it exist to sustain historians who regard teaching as an illegitimate interruption in their lives and an objectionable interference with what they please to call 'their own work'. Active research and fresh historical thought are necessary to keep a history school and its teaching alive; but equally necessary is the realization that the teaching of history is as honourable, as useful, as arduous, a task as historical research and the writing of history books.

To realize this it is, I believe, necessary also to realize that the object of teaching is not only to impart historical knowledge, but also to impart what Adolphus Ward defined, in the controversies which took place when the Tripos was being established, as 'historical power'.

'Historical power', he said, 'as I understand it means the power of applying to the original treatment of historical questions, historical knowledge which has been accumulated by reading, which has been sifted by criticism and which has been invested in literary form by composition.'¹² He was right to value this

¹¹ See J. R. Seeley, *Address on the impartial study of political questions* given at Cardiff on 18 Oct. 1886 and reprinted in the *Contemporary Review*, July 1888.

¹² Pamphlet circulated by Ward in 1872, quoted by Mrs Lindsay, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, ix, 82–3.

power. It is of great value to the man or woman who achieves it. It can be usefully employed not only on what is recorded in history books but also on what is reported day by day in the news and is rapidly turning into history. But I do not think that this power is likely to be gained from books alone, I think it is more likely to be imparted by living teaching.

This has been given with unstinted generosity at Cambridge and the success of the hundred years of history teaching has been at least as much due to those who have served all their working lives as supervisors and directors of studies and lecturers as to those who have had the good fortune to become Readers or Professors. My final word therefore will be to honour those who have tended 'the homely slighted shepherd's trade'.