



History of Europe 1870-1919

Charles Hazen

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THE year 1870 will long remain memorable in the annals of Europe. For in that year occurred a great and decisive war whose outcome was destined to exercise a large and profound influence upon the history of the subsequent period; whose consequences were to prove pervasive, far-reaching and unhappy, just as the four terrible years through which the world has recently passed will inevitably determine the future of the world for many decades to come. There was a certain tragic unity to that intervening period between the Franco-Prussian War and the World War, the shadow of the former, the dread of the latter hovering over the minds of men, full of menace, inspiring a recurrent sense of uneasiness and alarm. All the various streams of activity, all the different movements, national and international, social and economic, intellectual and spiritual, all the complex and diverse phenomena of the life of Europe during that crowded half-century took their form and color largely from the memory of war, the fear of war, the preparation for war. A period like that is surely worth studying. Indeed only if men acquire or possess a just understanding of it, only if they retain a vivid sense of its lessons and its warnings, will they be able to avert a repetition of its horrors, only thus will they have the aid of either chart or compass on their voyage into the future.

But apart from this general feeling of insecurity and apprehension, inspired by the Franco-Prussian War, that war had several immediate and specific consequences which must inevitably render the year 1870 notable in the history of modern times and which furnish a proper starting-point for this narrative. The war of 1870 completed the unification of Germany and created the German Empire. It completed, also, the unification of Italy, by giving to the kingdom, as its capital, the incomparable city of Rome. It overthrew the Second Empire in France and produced the Third Republic. It robbed France of Alsace-Lorraine for the benefit of Germany and thus embedded militarism in the life of Europe.

Of course, adequately to understand events of such moment we would be obliged to review the period before 1870, for the founding of the German Empire, of the Italian Kingdom, and of the French Republic was not something hastily improvised in that year as a result of the war. Each of these achievements had a long history behind it; each was the product of a long process of evolution. The year 1870 was only a year of culmination and fruition, the end of one period, the beginning of another.

From such a review as would satisfactorily explain the rise of modern Italy and Germany, their achievement of nationality after centuries of disunion, we are precluded here. Yet a slight sketch of the history of this remarkable transformation may be of value and, indeed, is necessary if we would have the background essential for the proper appreciation of the later period...

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