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BOOK REVIEWS

Science et philosophie de l'histoire. By HENRI SÉE. Paris: Felix Alcan, 1933.
Pp. 513. Fr. 25.

The philosophy of history has long been in disrepute among historians, according to M. Sée, because it has proved to be sterile and abstract; and the more recent attempt to conceive history as science, on the model of mathematics and physics, has resulted in a priori constructions equally removed from the data of the historians. Historians of the nineteenth century, in consequence, wisely ignored philosophy and devoted themselves to scholarship; and the resultant accumulation of erudition has now made possible the re-vindication of both the philosophy and the science of history. Preparatory to such rehabilitation, M. Sée traces in successive chapters Hegel's metaphysical conception of history, which was without contact with reality; Comte's positivistic conception, which M. Sée maintains was, as a consequence of its great indebtedness to the Hegelian view, too much given to the a priori and which, since it conceived science exclusively on the model of the physical sciences, neglected the accidental and contingent; and finally Cournot's critical conception, which discriminated the permanent from the accidental in historical events and sought to explain facts rather than insert them in narrow formulas. The ingredients of M. Sée's position derive therefore from three sources: Cournot made possible the juncture of the philosophy of history and concrete history; Paul Lacombe and Charles Seignobos supplied a conception of the science of history, lacking in Cournot's analysis; Émile Meyerson constructed a conception of science as explication, suited to the problems of history which had resisted Comte's conception of science as the formulation of laws to be tested by the prevision it made possible.

The method of the science of history is comparative; and since history takes into account time and space (not merely time, as Spengler mistakenly supposes), the comparison may be either of contemporary circumstances and events or those of different epochs, the former being by far the most exact process. The method of history is comparable to that of sociology, but differs from it in that sociology studies phenomena in a more abstract fashion and takes time and space less into account. The philosophy of history is merely an extension of the science of history, less encumbered by the baggage of erudition and given to larger and bolder comparative hypotheses. In the second portion of his book, M. Sée republishes twelve essays, most of them best described as enlarged book reviews, which bear on the subjects discussed in his defense of the philosophy and science of history: the possibility of

periodization in history (apropos of Troeltsch), the relation of specialization and synthesis in history, the study of the history of capitalism and of the French Revolution, the conception of history in Michelet, Taine, Renan, Anatole France, Kropotkin.

M. Sée has written a program and a defense, but what he defends is rather less philosophy or science than the synthetic history to which French historians are so much given at present and the comparative method which they extol and profess to use. His book derives its chief values from the particularity of its illustrations and from the close approximation it makes of the problems of history to the methods of philosophy. But the conceptions of science and history which it involves are clear only in the negative terms of the conceptions that are criticized. M. Sée is opposed to "idealism" and to "materialism" in history; he is opposed to the search for strict law or narrow generalization in history, but equally opposed to the impossible attempt to construct a narrative of facts without theory. Few of the historians he criticizes are wrong, but most of them are one-sided. Michelet was not an erudite or an archivist but depended, as historian, for good and for ill on his institutions; Taine was too much of a philosopher, a rhetorician endowed with imagination but without historical discipline; France was careful to weigh his sources and did possess the imagination essential to history, but he was an "artist rather than an historian, an erudite rather than an historian" (p. 436); the importance of Renan's conception of historical method has, on the other hand, been underestimated: he saw that the literary history of a people can be explained only by examination of the whole life of that people (p. 377). M. Sée is so enamored of the comparative method in history that he defends it by a comparative selection from theories of history.

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