A history of politics

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A HISTORY OF POLITICS

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A HISTORY OF POLITICS

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PREFACE

Some ten years ago, Sir Frederick Pollock published a valuable and interesting little book on the history of political speculation. But the author is not aware that any one has yet attempted to summarize, in a brief, popular form, the record of political action. It has occurred, therefore, to the promoters of this Series, that such a summary might prove interesting, if only by way of comparison.

These pages profess to give, then, a brief account of what men have done, not of what they have thought, in that important branch of human activity which we call Politics, or the Art of Government. But if it should be objected, that what men do is really always the outcome, more or less perfect, of what they think; the answer is, that we recognize, for practical purposes, a distinction between what the world, in theory at least, believes to be best, and that which it actually succeeds in achieving. And a comparison of the two objects can hardly fail to be instructive.

1 An Introduction to the History of the Science of Politics. By (Sir) Frederick Pollock. London, 1890. A new edition has recently been published.
To the other, and inevitable objection, that it is impossible, within the narrow limits of a popular sketch, to deal with such a subject as the History of Politics, the author will reply with the doctrine which, paradoxical as it may sound, is yet maintained by very able writers, that the greater the topic, the smaller the space in which it can be treated. Readers who care to see parts of the subject worked out in greater detail, may be referred to the author's *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages* (Murray, 1898).

*Oxford, January 1900.*

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**PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION**

In this edition, a few verbal errors have been corrected, and short additions made to Chapters VII and IX.

*November, 1900.*
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A SHORT HISTORY OF POLITICS

INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

Types of Society

Politics. By Politics we mean the business of Government, that is to say, the control and management of people living together in a society. A society, again, is a group or mass of people, bound together by a certain common principle or object. A mere chance crowd is not a society; it has no definite object, it collects and disperses at the whim of the moment, its members recognize no duties towards one another. It has no history, no organization.

Society. Societies are of many kinds. They may exist for purposes of religion, commercial profit, amusement, education, or a host of other objects. A good specimen of a religious society is, of course, an ordinary church congregation, or a missionary society; of a commercial society, an ordinary trading company; of an amusement society, a West-end club; of an educational society, an university or a college. And the management and organization of any such society may in strictness be considered a branch of Politics. But it is convenient to reserve the term politics for matters concerning one particular and very important class of societies, those communities, namely, which are not formed for any special or limited objects, but which have grown up, almost spontaneously, as part of the general history of mankind, and which are concerned with its general interests. Men as a rule, live in these
communities, not because they choose to do so, but because they are born into them; and, until quite recently, they were not allowed to change them at their pleasure. In their most advanced forms, we call these communities States; Great Britain, France, Holland, Germany, Spain, Russia, etc., are undoubtedly States. And these States are the proper subject matter of Politics, in the modern sense of the term. But, as we study their history, we become aware that these communities have gradually developed out of societies of quite another type, organized on different principles.

Modern social groups. Now-a-days, the principle which binds together these communities of the modern type, is the tie of military allegiance. In the States which practise conscription, or universal military service, this is very obvious. The most heinous political offence which a Frenchman or a German can commit, is attempting to evade military service; or, possibly worse, taking part in military service against his own country. But even in Great Britain, where conscription is not practised, the tie is really the same. It is unquestionable that the Queen, through her Ministers, has the right, in case of necessity, to call upon every one of her male subjects to render personal military service; and any British subject captured fighting against his country, would be liable to suffer death as a traitor. In the older conditions of society, however, to which allusion has been made, the tie was not that of military allegiance, but kinship, which was at first, no doubt, based on actual blood relationship, but was afterwards extended by fictitious methods. To men living in such a community, the inclusion of strangers in blood would have appeared a monstrosity. The mere facts that these strangers were settled in the same neighbourhood, or carried on trade with the community in question, or even were willing to fight its battles, would have seemed to such a community no arguments at all for admitting them to membership. The most conspicuous example in the world of a community organized on such principles is, of course, the Jews, who, in spite of their world-wide dispersal, still maintain intact their tribal