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Review of “Law in History and Other Essays,” By Edward P. Cheyney

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LAW IN HISTORY AND OTHER ESSAYS. By *Edward P. Cheyney*. pp. 174. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927.

This little book should be read by every student of law, history, or politics, and by every thinking layman as well. Written in a clear and entertaining style, the six essays that comprise the book provide stimulating and profitable reading for any one who is interested in the past. "They are intended," writes Professor Cheyney, "to be expressions of opinion about history, not additions to the knowledge of history." They attempt "to make the present explain the past and to bring the past to bear on the present." The titles of the essays are: *Law in History*, *The Agitator in History*, *The Tide of History*, *Historical Tests of Democracy*, *What Is History?* and *History Among the Sciences*.

The most important of these essays is the first: *Law in History*. It was Professor Cheyney's presidential address to the American Historical Association at Columbus, Ohio, December 27, 1923, and was first published in the *American Historical Review*, January, 1924. In this essay the author expresses his opinion that history has not been the result of chance or of voluntary effort on the part of individuals, but, like other sciences, has been subject to certain laws. The only way to discover these laws is to use the method of other sciences—to consider the phenomena, make a guess at some large principle, test it by a wider comparison with the facts, and then make a generalization which one can fairly call a law of history.

The author has pursued this method and presents what he calls "guesses" at some of the laws of history. His "guesses" are six in number. First there is a law of continuity. All events and institutions come from immediately preceding events and institutions. Thunderbolts do not come from a clear sky. Secondly, there is a law of permanence through change. Elasticity, adaptiveness, and the capacity to conform to change are the requisites for the survival of a race, a nation, and a type of civilization; the absence of these has brought about their fall. Thirdly, there is a law of interdependence. The human race is essentially a unit, and no part of it in history has really progressed by the injury of another. Conquest of one people by another has always demoralized the conquerors. Fourthly, there is a law of democracy, a tendency for all government to come under the control of all the people. Fifthly, there is a law of freedom of consent. Human beings are free agents and cannot permanently be compelled. It is consent, not force, that has held society together. Sixthly, there is a law of moral progress. Moral influences in human affairs have become stronger and more widely extended than material influences. These generalizations, asserts Professor Cheyney, are not ideals which we may hope to attain, but laws whose workings we cannot obviate.

LAW IN HISTORY is one of the most important contributions to historical writing in recent years. It is a keen analysis of the forces underlying human development. Embodying as it does the mature conclusions of a prominent historian, it will probably open a new era in historical interpretation.

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