"Twilight of the Royals"

September 22, 2009

- Introduce Ann
- Mention Spain Tour
- Class decorum

This course is about one of the most fascinating moments in the human experience—the period between 1850 and 1914. Its focus is on Europe but in reality it's a global history because mankind at last had created a global community. The ancient Stoics had dreamed of it; the Spanish missionary Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) had proclaimed it in his 1555 volume, All Mankind is One; and during the long reign of Britain's Queen Victoria (1837-1901) it happened. The human community became the *oikoumene* (the global community) that had once inspired the imperial ambitions of Alexander the Great.

This slice of time, I would maintain, ranks in importance equal to that moment perhaps 10,000 years ago when humans discovered that they could survive as a species by farming, by deliberately planting crops and harvesting them. The result of that discovery was the origin of civilization itself in or around 3000 B. C. What happened in Europe during the nineteenth century was of equal consequence for mankind. It created an entirely new form of civilization, an industrial one, which is as different from its predecessor as agrarian society was different from the hunter-gatherer period of our existence on this planet. It gives me pause to reflect that this transformation is only about two centuries old and it may prove to be a disaster for our species and lots of others on the planet. Stay tuned.

How did it happen? There are lots of theories about the origins of industrial society. Some have to do with a change that came over the human mind regarding the natural environment—a change that began to see our surroundings

not as a divinely-created abode for humans but as a commodity that could be bought and sold in the same manner that some made gloves and armor or traded precious metals. Thus were the common lands enclosed by fences and turned to profit; and peasants driven away from their hovels since agriculture had become a source of wealth and not merely survival.

Others speculate that it was sheer numbers that drove the transformation. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe had witnessed wave after wave of deadly plagues that wiped out whole towns and cost Europe perhaps as much as one-third of its population. Still, although the plagues persisted right into the eighteenth century, the population of the Latin West showed signs of revival during the Renaissance and even more so as the exotic foods of the Americas became available to Europeans on a grand scale after 1492. The potato, for example, became a staple of the European diet and in time nourished millions.

Humble people, driven from their farms, had little alternative but to move into the filthy, crowded towns for their survival. There they supplied the labor force needed to support a developing commercial economy should they be able to survive in unsanitary conditions we can scarcely imagine: open sewers, contaminated water, hogs wandering the streets, rooms crowded with sleepers by the scores. But it was better than starving whether you were in England, France, the Netherlands, or anywhere else.

'One interesting sidebar to this tale of misery. The Venetian traveler, Marco Polo, reported that the Chinese had found a way to produce heat from rocks; black ones that they mined from the ground and burned in their homes to protect against winter's chill. At first, few believed him. It took a while for word of this thirteenth-century discovery to reach distant England but it turned out that the island kingdom had an abundant supply of these black rocks which the English called "coal." They began mining for it and as the towns grew the demand for this energy source compounded. The problem was that it was frequently found deep in the ground and the pits that dug it out too often filled with water.

Thomas Newcomen (1664-1729) solved that problem by designing a steam-driven engine which could pump out the water from the mines. In doing so, he freed

mankind from its ancient dependence on human muscle and animal power (or wind and flowing water) as a source of energy. James Watt (1736-1819) improved Newcomen's design so that suddenly humanity had "horsepower" to extend its dominance of the planet. The Greeks and Romans had known of steam power as an energy source, but since their societies used slave labor they confined their use of steam in one instance to dispense holy water from a vending machine.

It did not take long for this new source of energy to find other, more revolutionary uses than water pumps. Richard Arkwright (1733-1792) harnessed these engines to the cloth manufacturing industry in the 1780's and thus added tremendous horsepower to that global enterprise. As early as 1825 steam powered the world's first railway system, the Stockton-Darlington Line, in Great Britain. Earlier still, steam machines had been employed to power boats, beginning with the James Rumsey (1743-1792) vessel launched on the Potomac River at Shepherdstown, Virginia in 1786. Robert Fulton, often credited as the inventor of the steamboat, met Rumsey in Paris several years later and built upon his design.

The results of this amazing combination of a revolution in agriculture, the factory system, urbanization, and steam power were spectacular. The population of Great Britain (including Ireland) tripled from 1750 to 1850, rising from 10 million to 30 million in the span of two generations. There had been only four cities in the British Isles with populations greater than 50,000 in 1785. By 1850, there were 31.

Britain was leading the planet into a new era: urban, industrial, and crowded. It was Queen Victoria's husband, Albert of Saxe-Coburg (1819-1861) who embraced the idea that there should be an international celebration of the emerging new world. That was to be the Great Exhibition to be held in London in 1851. The moving spirit behind this international event was Henry Cole (1808-1882), a civil servant in the Public Records Office and also, by the way, the inventor of the Christmas card. Cole convinced the prince to convene an Exhibition Commission on January 3, 1850, and it was that body that commissioned Joseph Paxton (1803-

1865) to design an exhibition hall at Hyde Park. The spectacular structure of 990,000 square feet opened on May 1, 1851. Some 500,000 people that morning watched a balloon assent by aeronaut Charles Spencer as the gates opened. The "crystal palace" exhibition hall contained 14,000 exhibits from across the globe and ultimately attracted more than 6 million people to its glasshouse interior. The *London Times* proclaimed that this "was the first morning since the creation of the world that all peoples have assembled from all parts of the world and done a common act."

Of course, the Crystal Palace did not exhibit the misery upon which that great industrial economy was based. No space was given over to the urban blight that was the life environment of the working class nor was there any idea of the germs that decimated that population on an annual basis with cholera and typhus. Further afield was the institution of slavery in the United States that produced the cotton that supplied the mills in England with ever-growing abundant raw materials that Great Britain sold to the world. Manchester and Liverpool were marvels of productivity but the capital that created them was produced by black slaves in the American south and their brothers and sisters in the sugar islands of the Caribbean.

There had been recent stirrings of unrest about the existing social system. Europe had been racked by revolutionary movements that culminated in the massive uprisings of 1848. Here's a map of the Continent as it appeared that year. In France, yet another monarchy had been overthrown by popular rebellion. In central Europe both the Hapsburg and Hohenzollern rulers had been forced to make concessions to the revolutionaries and in Italy even the Pope had been obliged to flee Rome by those who wished to establish the first Italian republic since Julius Caesar. Only Britain and Russia had escaped the violence, but ultimately little changed on the European landscape after the rebels were defeated, jailed, or sent to the galleys.

Why did Britain and Russia escape the violence so brilliantly described in Victor Hugo's Les Miserables? Some claim that the British ruling class had adopted reform as early as 1832 and allowed capitalists and merchants into the seats of

power, thus avoiding the class conflict so much a part of the 1848 revolutions on the Continent. Others note that despite the misery that the Industrial Revolution was inflicting on so many Britons, the standard of living was steadily rising as production and profits increased. For Russia, the picture was totally different. That state was ruled by the autocrat Nicolas I (1825-1855) who viewed the West and its values much the same manner as the Iranians now mistrust us and attempted to isolate his vast empire from the perilous notions of popular government that had once produced the French Revolution. In fact, he had actually sent Russian troops into Hungary in 1849 to help the Hapsburgs put down a nationalist uprising there.

So at the beginning of our period (1850) we are confronted with an island kingdom, presided over by a woman, Victoria (1819-1901) who was officially the granddaughter of King George III (d. 1820) but whose ancestry might have included her mother's lover, Sir John Conroy. She was married to a German prince, Albert of Saxe-Coburg (1819-1861) who in the course of their time together joined her in producing nine children who populated many European thrones for the balance of the century.

In 1850 there were still lots of royals. Actually, monarchy in one form or another was the rule in Europe and not the exception. In addition to Great Britain and Russia, there were:

- The Hapsburgs of Austria who had ruled much of central Europe since the 14th century.
- The Hohenzollerns of Prussia whose lands extended to the Rhine after the defeat of Bonaparte.
- The Wittelsbachs of Bavaria whose King Ludwig's mad exploits with Spanish dancer Lola Montez had helped touch off the Revolutions of 1848.
- The Bourbons, once the dazzling dynasty in France, but now confined to ruling over Spain and the Italian kingdom of Naples and Sicily.
- The House of Savoy which had played a pivotal role in the continental wars of the eighteenth century was firmly ensconced in Italy's Piedmont and the island the Sardinia. Still, its king (Victor Emmanuel II, 1849-1878) was

obliged to rule through a parliament that had accepted by his father during the turbulent days of 1848.

- The Ottoman sultans of the Turkish Empire that on paper at least stretched from the Atlantic deep into central Asia.
- And, of course, the oldest monarchy of all in the West—the papacy which in 1850 still had sovereign rights over much of central Italy.

Notice what's missing in this enumeration. The Bourbon monarchy had been restored to the French throne by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. One branch of the family had been overthrown by revolutionary action in 1830. Still another, the Orlean faction, had been overthrown in 1848. In 1850 France was once again a republic and its ruler by popular election was its president, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873), nephew of the late emperor.

President of the Republic was not a sufficiently impressive title for this latest Bonaparte. In December 1852 he pulled off a *coup d'Etat,* proclaimed himself Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, and in a plebiscite that gained the overwhelming support of the French electorate for his seizure of power. Thus, the Second French Republic died, and Europe had yet another crowned head of state; this time an Emperor.

There were many more royals than those I've mentioned. Holland had a royal family; Sweden another; Portugal, too; even the Grand Duchy of Baden displayed royal pretensions. Monarchy, often moderated by elected assemblies representing the nobility and upper bourgeoisie, were the rule of the day in 1850 and there was little reason to believe that the royals would be obliged to share their power any further.

The showcase of royalty after 1848 was the German Confederacy, an enclave of 30 independent states created in central Europe in 1815 by the Congress of Vienna. Almost all of these sovereignties were ruled by one family or another and they met together annually to discuss matters of mutual concern. They accomplished little but that's just the way that the major German power, Hapsburg Austria, wanted it. The Confederation was, in fact, a vast improvement

over its predecessor, the Holy Roman Empire (ruled by the Hapsburgs), an arcane assembly of 300 states, principalities, bishoprics, and cities that Napoleon had abolished in 1806.

In 1850, under pressure from German nationalists, the King of Prussia, Frederick Wilhelm IV (1840-61) publicly considered accepting the leadership of an all-German *Bund*, which would have transformed the German Confederation into a German national state. He was called to task by the Austrians in an 1850 meeting with the Hapsburgs at Olmutz and obliged to swear that Prussia would never again pretend to such a leadership role that excluded Austria from German affairs. This "humiliation of Olmutz" would figure prominently in subsequent events in central Europe. The *status quo* in Europe had been preserved in spite of all the revolutionary turmoil of 1848.

Or had it? There was, afterall, another Bonaparte in power in France and even though he styled himself "emperor" his success with the electorate had depended upon the association of his name with that of his late uncle and all the revolutionary and nationalist ideas he embodied. To reassure the French Right that he wasn't that kind of Bonaparte, Napoleon III negotiated a treaty with the Ottoman sultan in December 1852 that gave France and its Catholic priests the guardianship of the Church of the Nativity in Jerusalem. His purpose in this action was meant to be a shrewd domestic political move.

It didn't turn out that way. Czar Nicolas in Russia was already apprehensive about the appearance on the scene of another Bonaparte after the misery the first Napoleon had visited upon the Russian people. He decided to check this French incursion into Turkish affairs and by diplomatic pressure obliged the sultan to revoke his decision about the Church of the Nativity and to designate the czarist regime to be the protector of all Christians within the Ottoman Empire. The French were outraged and in time the British too. Britain had little real interest in the dispute except for their desire to uphold the Ottoman Empire against Russian incursions that might have menaced their lines of communication to India. In the fall of 1853 the Russians backed up their demands by seizing the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (latter day Romania). The Turks responded by declaring

war on the Russian Empire. France and then Britain sent fleets to the Eastern Mediterranean to support the Turks and when Nicolas I refused compromise they declared war on the Russians in January 1854. Thus began the first Great Power struggle since the downfall of the first Napoleon in 1815.

I won't trouble you with many of the details of this ludicrous combat. **[Show clip of the Charge if available]**. The Turks checked the Russian advance in the Balkans and the possibility of Austrian intervention on the Turkish side obliged the Russians to withdraw altogether from the principalities. In the absence of a Russian army to fight on foreign soil, the British and French decided to invade Russia itself by taking the Crimean Peninsula, especially the great port at Sevastopol. It didn't work out that way. What was supposed to be a quick victory (home for Christmas) turned into a prolonged siege and fighting did not end until 1856. In the end about 750,000 combatants perished in the conflict (4/5th of them from disease). Only the subsequent American civil war would rival that slaughter.

There were several important consequences of these hostilities in a distant land:

- On March 2, 1855 Czar Nicolas died of pneumonia and the Russian throne passed to his son, Alexander II (1818-1881). While he continued the prosecution of the war for nearly a year, he accepted peace negotiations in January 1856 after the fall of Sevastopol to the Allies. In the Peace of Paris which followed, the Russians were obliged to: 1) accept the demilitarization of the Black Sea; 2) foreswear their interest in the principalities and restore them to a limited form of Turkish sovereignty; withdraw their claim to the protectorship of all Christians within the Ottoman Empire. For the balance of Alexander's reign Russia's attention would be focused internally as the Czar sought to address the problems of modernizing his Empire.
- Hapsburg Austria had betrayed its Russian ally by remaining neutral throughout the conflict and thus could no longer rely on this staunch ally in dealing with problems in Italy and the German confederation.

- Great Britain, whose army had performed so ingloriously during the Crimean War, withdrew from an active role in Continental politics and concentrated on securing and expanding its overseas empire. Future Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, announced to the world that "Britain is no longer a European power."
- Just toward the end of the conflict troops from Piedmont/Sardinia showed up in the Crimea on the Allied side. That gave the Alpine country a seat at the conference table in Paris in 1856 where its prime minister, Count Camillo di Cavour (1810-1861), pleaded that something be done to remove the Hapsburgs from Italian soil.
- The proposition attracted the attention of Napoleon III, who because of the excellent performance of the French military in the Crimean conflict, now dreamed of playing an even greater role in European politics. With the Russians licking their wounds and the British concentrating on imperial matters, who else was there to block French ambitions?
- Well, there was Prussia, which had played no role whatever in the Crimean War (except covertly to ship arms to the struggling Russians). Its monarch, Frederick Wilhelm IV (ruled 1840-1861) had been frightened by massive popular uprisings in 1848 into granting his subjects a constitution. Once the revolutionaries had been quelled he proceeded to ignore the document and rule in an authoritarian manner, although he felt obliged to keep his newly-formed parliament in session. The central issue here was "ministerial responsibility" and Frederick Wilhelm insisted that his ministers were responsible to him; not the people's representatives. Thus things stood until 1858 when the King suffered a nervous breakdown and his brother, Wilhelm, became regent and then in 1861 (on his brother's death) King of Prussia. One of his earliest acts was to appoint a Prussian diplomat, Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), to be prime minister. It was a fateful decision.