Henry C. Lea
Scientific Historian

Early eighty years have elapsed since Henry Charles Lea began his great history of the Inquisition. Although a few corrections have been made from time to time, it is in no immediate danger of being superseded. Historians are in general agreement that it is still "the most extensive, the most profound, and the most thorough history of the Inquisition which we possess."¹

Lea was sixty-three when he startled the academic world in 1887 with his first three volumes on the institution which for centuries had been a topic of controversy. Prior to this he had enjoyed a full life as publisher, writer, and student of public affairs. Yet he was virtually unknown outside his home town of Philadelphia. The publication of the History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages made Lea a celebrity among European scholars. It was not long before Lord Bryce persuaded him to contribute the materials for a chapter in the American Commonwealth.² The Roman Catholic scholar Lord Acton besought Lea to write a chapter on "The Eve of the Reformation" for the Cambridge Modern History.³ Bishop Creighton requested his aid with the English Historical Review and set a critical correspondent straight by informing him that "no one knows more [than Lea] about the institutes of the medieval church." F. W. Maitland, the English authority on the history of law, praised Lea's grasp of the law and legal documents of Europe. Lecky, too, joined the chorus of English praise, and Oxford University agreed to dispatch for Lea's use at

² This is the chapter on the Philadelphia Gas Ring, which appears in Vol. II, Pt. V.
³ Lea to Lord Acton, Jan. 7, 1897, Lea Manuscripts, Lea Library, University of Pennsylvania, hereafter cited as Lea MSS. Nine years earlier Lea had carried on an extensive controversy with Lord Acton stemming from imputations of Lord Acton regarding the return of borrowed manuscripts. See the Acton Folder in Lea MSS.
Philadelphia any manuscript he might desire from the Bodleian Library.\textsuperscript{4}

Continental scholars hurried to climb on the Lea bandwagon. Charles Molinier, who had earlier branded the idea of writing a comprehensive history of the Inquisition as "chimerical," was profoundly impressed. So was the Belgian Catholic scholar Paul Fredericq. Fredericq was later to write the introductory essay to a projected French translation of Lea's work.\textsuperscript{6} In 1905 Joseph Hansen, the leading German authority on the Inquisition, began publishing a German translation of the history. Five years later an Italian abridged edition appeared in print.

Although Lea's most admiring audience was in Europe, recognition was not lacking at home. Honorary degrees were granted him by Princeton, Pennsylvania, and Harvard, and at the age of seventy-eight he was elected president of the American Historical Association. The fact that he was an amateur historian detracted little from the general esteem in which he was held by academicians both in the United States and abroad. Professor Edward P. Cheyney lauded Lea as "the first and greatest of American scientific historians." Professor G. G. Coulton has acknowledged that Lea's volumes are "at the base of all that has been since written on the subject [of the Inquisition] even by those who differ most from Lea's point of view."\textsuperscript{6}

Although there is adequate testimony that Lea never sought (and, indeed, avoided) recognition, honorary degrees from Europe and membership in more than thirty learned societies came to him in his

\textsuperscript{4} See Mrs. Louise Creighton, \textit{Life and Letters of Bishop Creighton} (London, 1904), I, 409-410; \textit{English Historical Review}, VIII (1893), 755; Edward Potts Cheyney, "On the Life and Works of Henry Charles Lea" [memorial addresses on Lea at the American Philosophical Society], American Philosophical Society \textit{Proceedings}, L (1911), xviii; hereafter cited as APS \textit{Proceedings}. The \textit{Jewish Quarterly Review} noted the peregrinations of a Harvard professor traveling in Europe. "Wherever he went," reported the journal, "he was deluged with inquiries as to Lea, the historian of the Inquisition, and when he came to Spain he was assured that the one American whom the Spaniards wished to welcome was Dr. Lea." Cited in [Arthur H. Lea], \textit{Henry Charles Lea, 1825-1909} (Philadelphia, 1910), 9; this unsigned biographical sketch will be cited hereafter as Lea, \textit{Family Memoir}.


\textsuperscript{6} G. G. Coulton, \textit{Inquisition and Liberty} (London, 1938), xxi.
creative old age. He was rivaled only by Ranke, Bancroft, and Goldwin Smith in the productivity of his later years. His near-definitive nine volumes on the Inquisition were all produced after he had passed middle life. "Surely not even the generation which has witnessed the sustained energy of a Ranke and a Mommsen, and which still beholds a Goldwin Smith writing with all the verve of his youth at eighty-three, has seen a courage and an industry so defiant of age," wrote Professor George Lincoln Burr in 1906. Lea failed in only one great undertaking: he did not live to write his long-projected history of witchcraft.

Henry Charles Lea was born in Philadelphia in 1825. He was the son of Isaac Lea, a distinguished publisher and zoologist, and the grandson of Mathew Carey, the Irish-American patriot and political economist who founded the publishing house that carries on the Lea name. The frequent presence of Henry's uncle, the celebrated American political economist Henry Carey, added to the intellectual atmosphere about the boyhood home of the future historian of the Inquisition. Lea's father, it is important to know, was of Quaker extraction, while his mother was a Roman Catholic. The situation does not appear to have introduced any discord into the household. Mrs. Lea was a frail woman, and late in life Henry recalled having sat at the age of six at her bedside learning the Greek alphabet.

Lea had little formal academic training. Except for a short period in a Paris school in 1832, his education was all guided by tutors. He had received a thorough grounding in classical languages which was to serve him in good stead in his later career. At the same time, his father helped to stimulate in him an interest in malacology, that branch of zoology which deals with mollusks. While in his early teens he published several papers on the subject in Silliman's Journal. Altogether, young Lea published more than thirty scientific papers, literary reviews, and poems before his twenty-fifth birthday.

In 1843 Lea joined his grandfather's publishing house, now managed by his father and his uncle, Henry Carey. He worked at busi-

7 American Historical Review, XI (1905-1906), 889.
8 Professor Dana C. Munro sees in heredity and environment a possible explanation for Lea's "love of truth, interest in science, impatience of injustice or cruelty, intense patriotism, belief in the power of the pen to influence his countrymen." Dana C. Munro, "Henry Charles Lea," Dictionary of American Biography.
ness in the daytime and devoted his evenings to study. Between 1843
and 1847 he published more than twenty articles. An examination of
the titles of some of them reveals an interest sharply divided between
the physical sciences and literature. The latter appears to have won
him over after 1843. As a direct result of his rigorous schedule, Lea
suffered a nervous breakdown in 1847. He was then twenty-two. On
the advice of his physician, he dropped all writing for ten years and
confined himself to learning the publishing business. He married, and
in 1851 became a partner in Lea Brothers, publishers. His business
talents brought substantial profits to the company between 1847 and
1859.

Meanwhile, Lea had begun to take an active interest in civic
affairs. One of the organizations for which he worked tirelessly during
the Civil War was the Union League. He broke with that organiza-
tion in 1883 when it failed to support his proposals for a reform of the
municipal government of Philadelphia.\(^9\) Throughout his lifetime, Lea
continued to exert his influence toward more efficient administration
in government. His home city was always the chief focus of his
attention, but questions of national concern such as civil service
reform and international arbitration treaties also claimed his inter-
est. Both as a writer and a publisher, Lea's overriding concern was
with the passage of international copyright laws, toward which he
expended much effort and correspondence.\(^10\)

The versatility of Lea's interests becomes apparent when one scans
the titles of some of the dozens of letters and articles that appeared,
many of them anonymously, in major American newspapers and
periodicals between 1860 and 1900.\(^11\) The bibliography of his writings
on politics and public affairs alone extends to nearly two hundred

\(^9\) Lea to Samuel Huey, Apr. 4, 1883, Lea MSS.

\(^{10}\) Lea to Edwin L. Godkin, Nov. 18 and 19, 1885; Lea to Godkin, Dec. 4, 1885; Lea to John
Elliot Bowen, Oct. 5, 1888; Lea to Joseph Wharton, Oct. 25, 1888; Lea to unnamed corre-
spondent, Mar. 5, 1884; Lea to William Dorchester, Mar. 12, 1884; Lea to Joseph W. Harper,
Dec. 29, 1885; Lea to Jonathan Chace, Jan. 30, 1886; Lea to Edmund C. Stedman, Nov. 8,
1887; Lea to Jonathan Chace, Jan. 25, 1888; Lea to W. P. Garrison, May 30, 1888; Lea to
G. A. Putnam, Mar. 18, 1890; Lea to Henry Holt, Apr. 9, 1891; Lea to Joseph W. Harper,
Oct. 26, 1893, Lea MSS.

\(^{11}\) Lea carried on a voluminous correspondence with Edwin L. Godkin and Wendell Phillips
Garrison, editors of The Nation. See index to Lea MSS; Godkin Papers, Houghton Library,
Harvard University. For a list of his anonymous publications in The Nation, see Daniel C.
Haskell, comp., The Nation: Index of Contributors (New York, 1953).
items. A Philadelphia friend, the noted Shakespearean scholar Howard Furness, aptly characterized Lea's as a dual personality, "one striving and prominent in the heady fight of politics and reform; and the other a modest, sequestered scholar, leading a cloistered life of historical research."  

Shortly before Lea's death at the age of eighty-four, Professor Dana Carleton Munro asked him why he did not write his autobiography. Replied the old man: "As regards an autobiography, I am like Canning's knife grinder—'Story, Lord bless you Sir, I've none to tell.' I only followed my convictions and worked as they led."

Lea was forty-one when his first historical work, *Superstition and Force*, appeared in 1866. Ultimately it went through four editions and in some circles of the United States is still probably Lea's best-known work. The book was an outgrowth of several long articles in the form of book reviews published before 1866 in the *North American Review*. The first part of the work is a treatise on two forms of medieval trial, compurgation, and the wager of battle. The second part deals with judicial ordeals. An additional section is devoted to torture as a form of trial. Lea's interest in the Middle Ages had been aroused, one writer informs us, during the period of recuperation from his breakdown:

Following the bent of a naturally logical mind he had traced these writers backward in time from Commines to Monstrelet, from Froissart to the Chroniques de St. Denis and Villehardouin, till, in the Middle Ages, he had found himself in a new world, faced and surrounded by the conceptions of mediaeval law and the mediaeval church. Once having become interested in this body of institutions he was more and more impressed with its significance; he perceived the influence of mediaeval jurisprudence and the mediaeval church on modern times; and to this phase of the history of civilization he devoted the studies of the remainder of his life.

*Superstition and Force* was followed in rapid succession by *An Historical Sketch of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church* (1867) and *Studies in Church History* (1869). These works established Lea as

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12 [Memorial addresses on Lea at APS], APS Proceedings, L (1911), xxx.
13 Munro, 69.
14 Cheney, APS Proceedings, L (1911), viii.
15 With a third revision and enlargement to two volumes, the title was changed in 1907 to a *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*. 
a leading medieval scholar and enabled him to make valuable contacts with European historians. Such contacts brought him much-needed assistance in locating and gaining access to European manuscripts. In 1870 he began to work in earnest on his *magnum opus*, the history of the Inquisition. At first Lea hoped to cover the entire subject in about four volumes. But he had not yet begun to write in 1878 when overwork brought on a nervous collapse. He did not fully recover until 1885.

At last, in 1887, the three-volume *History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* was ready. Lord Acton was among the first to review it. He noted the suspense in which Lea had been keeping European scholars who were aware of the prodigious labors going on across the Atlantic. Acton predicted that they would not be disappointed, that Lea's work would "assuredly be accepted as the most important contribution of the New World to the Old." It speedily was just that—the undertaking that a few years before Molinier had pronounced "chimerical."

Invitations and commissions of all sorts now poured in. But Lea realized that the job was only half-finished. He began work immediately on a *History of the Inquisition of Spain*. Meanwhile, his *Chapters from the Religious History of Spain* appeared in 1890. Two years later came a revised and enlarged fourth edition of *Superstition and Force*, and the same year an edited *Formulary of the Papal Penitentiary in the Thirteenth Century*. In 1896 he published a three-volume *History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*. Professor Burr remarked of the wonderment this work caused among scholars because the subject was believed to be foreign to Lea's interest. Lea's literary output in these years was little short of phenomenal. Although he was past seventy and perpetually in poor health, numerous shorter writings also continued to flow periodically from his pen.

The four-volume *History of the Inquisition of Spain* was completed and published in 1906. In nearly all respects it represents Lea's best

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16 Lea to unknown correspondent, Feb. 6, 1868; Lea to George Waring, July 13, Aug. 23, Oct. 25, and Dec. 5, 1870, Lea MSS.

17 *English Historical Review*, III (1888), 773.

18 *American Historical Review*, XI (1905-1906), 888.

19 Lea to Charles W. Eliot, Nov. 1, 1886; Lea to Charles Molinier, July 5, 1889; Lea to Edward Montet, May 15, 1895, Lea MSS.
work. His judgments had mellowed with the years, and he found the Spanish Inquisition to have been somewhat less violent than its medieval counterpart. Philip II, for example, is revealed as a child of his age with certain redeeming qualities as a man and a father. Yet Lea reached the obvious conclusion that the Inquisition was a curse to Spain. Professor Burr, in reviewing the work, wrote:

In style and treatment the books show to the full the qualities so long familiar in Mr. Lea's work—the same wealth of detail, the same direct dependence on the sources, the same avoidance of polemics and of all rhetorical amplification. It is everywhere the work of one who still believes that the history of jurisprudence is the history of civilization. And if, as usual, he seldom stops to moralize, the moral which he long ago told us no serious historical work should lack is none the less clear. . . .

Except for a volume on The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies, which he completed in 1908, Lea was finished with his great task. One year later he died while in the midst of plans to write a definitive history of witchcraft.

Although Lea, in the words of Professor Haskins, "mitigated the conventional horrors of the Spanish Inquisition" and "contrasted its enlightened treatment of the witch delusion with the witch burnings of Protestant Europe," the assumptions to be drawn from his work were obviously unfavorable to the Roman Catholic Church as a political system. "I commenced my medieval studies," Lea once declared, "without any preconception adverse to Catholicism, but I found the church as a political system adverse to the interests of humanity. Against it as a religion I have nothing to say." Almost simultaneously a British Jesuit was complaining that it would be "hard to find a writer either more prejudiced or more persistently inaccurate than Dr. H. C. Lea." The Jesuit went on vigorously to denounce the "gross carelessness and want of logic which are conspicuous in almost everything this writer touches."

It was inevitable that such criticism should come. The first critical notes sounded at random by Catholic extremists swelled into a chorus as the full significance of Lea's labors became apparent. Jesuit scholars and pseudoscholars dedicated themselves to the laborious

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20 American Historical Review, XI (1905-1906), 890.
21 Quoted in Bradley, 312; Lea to Salomon Reinach, Mar. 13, 1901, Lea MSS. For Lea's attitude toward Catholic "rewriting of history," see Lea to J. G. Rosengarten, Nov. 27, 1898, ibid.
task of backtracking on Lea's scholarship in an effort to detect the basis of his "error." To the less scholarly in their ranks the explanation was simple: Lea was putting out anti-Catholic propaganda under the guise of history. He had given "undue credit to doubtful documents because they supported his views."

But not all Catholic historians joined the attack. The favorable reception which the Inquisition of the Middle Ages received from such prominent Roman Catholic scholars as Lord Acton and Dr. Paul Fredericq has already been noted. Professor Cheyney has pointed out that few of Lea's Catholic critics were scholars of rank. But there were two or three whose opinions could not be lightly set aside. One of them, Joseph Blotzer, asserted that a history of the Inquisition "corresponding to the requirements of calm, objective historical research" had not yet been written. He lamented "how little we are to trust the vaunted impartiality of Henry Charles Lea." As an example of bias Blotzer pointed to Lea's statement that ecclesiastical influence was behind the imperial edicts making heresy punishable by death in the Middle Ages. Blotzer claimed that, on the contrary, the death penalty was opposed by the "more influential" church authorities.

Yet much of Blotzer's criticism, like that of Professor Baumgarten of Munich, was purely technical. As Professor Cheyney has indicated, the top-grade Catholic historians picked almost as freely at one another's work as they did at Lea's. Few failed sooner or later to pay tribute, as Baumgarten did, to Lea's "industry... endurance and undisputed results."

Despite the touchiness of Lea's subject and the criticisms by Catholic writers of his treatment of it, it would be difficult for the

22 Joseph Blotzer, Historisches Jahrbuch, IX (1890), 322 ff.
23 Joseph Blotzer, "The Inquisition," in Catholic Encyclopaedia (New York, 1910), VIII, 27-28. In the History of the Inquisition of Spain, Lea continues to deny that the Inquisition was primarily an institution of the state rather than of the church. He brands as fallacious the assertion that it was the rise of absolutism in Spain which brought about the Inquisition. He points out that the church actually accorded indulgences to those who contributed faggots to the fires of the auto de fe. See chapter in Vol. IV dealing with the political activity of the Spanish Inquisition. On the same subject, see G. G. Coulton, The Death Penalty for Heresy from 1184 to 1921 A.D. (London, 1924).
24 P. M. Baumgarten, Henry Charles Lea's Historical Writing: A Critical Inquiry into their Method and Merit (New York, 1909), 143.
lay reader of Lea to tell whether he was a Catholic or a Protestant. In 1909 the Italian scholar, Domenico Battaini, sought his permission to translate the *Inquisition of the Middle Ages* for use as propaganda in the anticlerical fight then taking form in Italy. Lea gave his permission reluctantly and only after clarifying his views as follows: “I have never sought to influence the religious beliefs of others, but I have always been inspired with the desire to ascertain and set forth impartially the absolute facts of history and let them teach their own lessons.”

Lord Bryce’s assertion that Lea’s books “were never written with any purpose or bias save that of eliciting the facts” has yet to be disproved. It is worth pointing out in this connection that one adverse judgment by a Roman Catholic scholar on Lea closes by paying tribute to the American’s good labors “for the truth.” The Abbé Vacandard, author of the most reliable volume on the Inquisition from the distinctly Catholic point of view, denied that Lea’s work was definitive, but agreed with Reusch that it was the most profound treatment of the subject yet written. The Abbé’s reluctance categorically to condemn the findings of the Protestant scholar undoubtedly stemmed in part from the knowledge that Lea was in a position to do much worse by the Roman church than he had done. Unfettered as he was by dogma, Lea in appraising religious institutions could detect the subtle shadings of grey between what must invariably appear to Catholic scholars as either black or white. He once told Lord Bryce of his surprise at finding that the Inquisition put to death fewer persons than commonly believed. To suppress such evidence would have been foreign to Lea’s standards.

Before beginning to write, Lea read nearly all available source material pertaining to his subject. Unique among scholars of his day in the extent to which he avoided citing secondary works, he amassed a great private collection of original sources. To get these materials Lea employed searchers and copyists to comb the archives of Europe. A master of Greek and Latin as well as several modern languages, he

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26 For a criticism of Catholic historiography on the Inquisition and a defense of Lea, see G. G. Coulton, *Sectarian History* (Taunton, 1937).
studied the documents in their native tongues. He assertedly used no secretaries. But owing largely to his self-imposed isolation from academic centers, the legend has grown that his work was done chiefly by assistants. Professor Cheyney, who knew Lea, declared that "no scholar ever worked more absolutely independently than he."

As a scientific historian Lea took notes systematically, listing bibliographical citations, sometimes glossing the text of copied sources with his own reflections. When he deemed his research to be complete, he gathered his notes into a systematic arrangement of provisional chapters complete with subheadings and marginal indexes. Only then did he begin to write. No part of a book was ever sent to a publisher until the work was complete and had been through a revision. Lea's thoroughness extended to every phase of the production of a book. He did his own indexing, rightly believing that a book without an index loses much of its value. Seldom did any of his books go into a new edition without revision.

Unlike other scholars who found it necessary to make use of public collections, Lea was able to do practically all his research in his own library. He carried on an extensive and friendly correspondence with other scholars and actively enlisted their aid in locating manuscripts. But he seldom asked for information. Indeed, Lea's detachment from other historians and his partial ignorance of what previous scholarship had accomplished in his field are probably his major

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28 Lea to L. Sandret, June 4, 1884; Lea to Charles Molinier, Jan. 11, 1886; Lea to T. K. Abbott, May 18, 1887; Lea to Enrico Giordani, Feb. 13, 1888; Lea to L. Sandret, Apr. 9, 1888, Lea MSS. It is said that Lea learned German at sixty and Dutch at eighty! Lea's collection of documents is all the more remarkable when one considers the extent to which modern revolutions had scattered the thousands of tracts, folio collections of legal documents, and assorted manuscripts that were so necessary to the completion of his work. The virtual completeness of his collection was attested by an incident reported in 1910 by the president of the American Philosophical Society, William W. Keen. While spending a winter in Rome, Dr. Keen wandered into an antiquarian shop. Coming upon a catalogue of rare books pertaining to witchcraft, one of Lea's major interests, he bought it, thinking the historian would have need for some of the volumes listed therein. He sent it on to Lea, who although then eighty-three, was preparing to write a history of witchcraft. Lea replied by expressing appreciation for Keen's interest, but informed him that he had "all of the titles listed already in his library." [Memorial addresses on Lea at APS], APS Proceedings, L (1911), iv.

29 Cheyney, APS Proceedings, L (1911), xx.

30 His most frequent correspondent was Charles Molinier. Others to whom he wrote rather frequently were Bishop Creighton, Pasquale Villari, and J. G. Rosengarten. See Lea MSS.
weaknesses as a scholar. He defended his isolation on the grounds that he thereby avoided contamination from controversial theories and biases. Yet he once recognized the limitations imposed upon him by his method when he complained of the difficulties in collecting historical material which his isolation created.

After Lea’s death, his son consulted Lord Bryce and Professor Cheyney of the University of Pennsylvania as to the disposition of his father’s researches toward the long projected history of witchcraft. As they represented more than a half-century of labor, both Bryce and Cheyney believed they should be made available to the public. Professor Burr of Cornell was chosen as the man best qualified to undertake the task of editing Dr. Lea’s notes for publication. Burr accepted, but eventually turned the project over to a former pupil, Professor Arthur C. Howland. The collection, in three volumes, was finally published in 1939 under the title, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*.

Lea’s library, books and furnishings, was turned over on his death to the University of Pennsylvania, of which he had been a trustee. Even the wood paneling was moved, and the library was reproduced exactly as it had been during his lifetime.

Perhaps Lea’s greatest weakness was his style. He was not a brilliant writer. G. P. Gooch, while praising him generally, admits that his work lacks “distinction of style.” Almost anyone who has read the *History of the Inquisition* will agree. Lea’s most enthusiastic admirers excuse the absence of literary craftsmanship in his work on the score that he was concerned chiefly with getting across the facts. One of his admirers, F. W. Maitland, in the course of praising the fourth edition of *Superstition and Force*, observed that “when such a book as Doctor Lea’s reaches a fourth edition, our first compliments are due rather to the public . . . than to the author.” This, seemingly, was a left-handed way of conceding that a certain amount of endurance was required of Lea’s readers.

At a joint meeting of several learned societies convoked in Philadelphia to honor the memory of Dr. Lea shortly after his death, Lord

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31 Haskins, 258.
32 Lea to an unknown correspondent, Feb. 6, 1868, Lea MSS.
35 *English Historical Review*, VIII (1893), 755-756.
Bryce sought to do honor to his departed friend. He put the matter of Lea's style this way\textsuperscript{36}:

That which is called literary excellence, i.e., the charms and allurements of style, was never very much in Mr. Lea's mind and was altogether subordinated to a consideration of the matter to be dealt with. Whether it was that he did not think that his talents lay in the purely literary direction or that he did not much care for the graces of composition, reckoning merit of form as trifling compared to merits of substance, he paid comparatively little regard to the adornment of that which he had to say. In this respect he would have satisfied—as indeed he anticipated—the canons of what is now called the scientific treatment of history. But his writing had that which is the greatest merit of style, perfect clearness, both in the statement of facts and in the exposition of his views of the facts. It was always plain, direct, intelligible, and with that he was content.

Interestingly enough it was, as has been noted, the field of literature which first claimed Lea. It was literature's loss and "scientific" history's gain when he chose to leave behind the literary traditions of Prescott, Motley, Carlyle and Freeman. In his avoidance of polemics and rhetorical flourishes, Lea was in step with the trend toward scientific scholarship. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on the point of view, in so doing he ensured that his books would be "read by scholars and by thoughtful readers rather than by the general public."

Just how scientific a historian was Lea? One scholar sees him as a pioneer in the United States of the "more philosophical conception of history," one who was concerned more with the development of principles than with the reporting of mere occurrences.\textsuperscript{38} At one stage in his career Lea inclined toward absolutism with regard to morality. In his preface to the \textit{History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages}, he remarked that no serious historical work should lack a moral. He believed that it should be the historian's aim to let the events described "teach their appropriate lesson."\textsuperscript{39} Without openly moralizing he undertook to pass judgment upon institutions and men of the past with the utilitarian view of furnishing his fellow men with practical lessons. In so doing, Lea deviated from the strict principles of the scientific historical method. He came close to agreeing with Lord Acton that cruelty, perfidy, and rapacity ought not to be excused by

\textsuperscript{36} [Memorial addresses on Lea at APS], APS Proceedings, L (1911), xxv.
\textsuperscript{37} Haskins, 259.
\textsuperscript{38} Cheyney, APS Proceedings, L (1911), xiv.
\textsuperscript{39} H. C. Lea, \textit{A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages} (New York, 1922), iv.
any "differences of time or country." In his preface to his History of the Inquisition of Spain, Lea offered in advance his conclusions concerning that institution:

... the real importance [of the Inquisition] is to be sought not so much in the awful solemnities of the *auto de fe*, nor in the cases of a few celebrated victims, as in the silent influence exercised by its incessant and secret labors among the mass of the people and in the limitations which it placed on the Spanish intellect—in the resolute conservatism with which it held the nation in the medieval groove and unfitted it for the exercise of national liberty when the nineteenth century brought in the inevitable Revolution.

Yet as Lea grew older he came more and more to adopt a relativist attitude toward human behavior. In his work on Spain he definitely softened his earlier moral judgments on the medieval Inquisition. His altered state of mind was made clear in his inaugural address as president of the American Historical Association in 1903. Speaking on "Ethical Values in History," he took issue with Lord Acton's moral positivism and called for a re-examination of men and institutions in terms of the ethical setting of their own times. History, he asserted, should continue to convey a moral, but

Characters historically prominent are usually so because they are men of their time, the representatives of its beliefs and aspirations; and they should be judged accordingly. If those beliefs and aspirations lead to evil the historian should seek to trace out their origin and development, and he can, if he so chooses, point out their results; but he should not hold responsible the men who obeyed their consciences, even if this led them into what we conceive to be wrongdoing. It is otherwise with those who have sinned against the light vouchsafed to them, for to condemn them is simply to judge them by the standards of their time.

Thus simply, yet eloquently, Lea stated his faith in the scientific method.

Lord Bryce summed up the contribution of Henry Charles Lea when he declared: "He has set before us a splendid example of single-minded devotion to the enlargement of knowledge, and has given us a great mass of first rate original work, work which has stood and will stand the test of criticism."