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**François Guizot, *The History of Civilization in Europe*  
Liberty Fund Inc., 2013.**

Reviewed by Mariana Tepfenhart

In this book, the author examines the development of European civilization from the fall of Rome to the nineteenth century.

François Guizot was a brilliant historian of the nineteenth century. He was born in France, in 1787 in a Protestant family. He was a witness of the French Revolution, which claimed his father as a victim of the Great Terror in 1794. His mother decided to move to Geneva where she could get support from other Protestants. There he received a very good education in history and philosophy. Learning Greek and Latin, as well as other European languages, enabled him to be in contact with many new ideas of the time.

He returned to Paris and encountered the intelligentsia of the post-revolutionary France. He frequented the salon of Maine de Biran, the center of one of the best-known philosophical circles. The most important appointments in his career were to the position of Chair of Modern History at the prestigious University of Sorbonne and later, to the position of Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice, which gave him the opportunity to understand how the French Government worked.

The book is divided in 14 lectures, each one with a subheading that allows the reader to follow the main ideas easily. Lecture 1 covers the definition of civilization. For Guizot, civilization does not include only social relations, the power of the state, production, and labor relations but also the development of man, of his faculties. He argues that there is a strong correlation between society and the internal development of the man. There is a mutual influence as he clearly states: "... all of the great developments of the internal man have turned to the profit of society; all the great developments of the social states to the profit of individual man." (p.22)

In the Lecture 2, Guizot compared the homogenous societies of the ancient world with the diversity of modern civilizations. He argued that in each of the ancient civilizations there is one dominant principle that permeates all aspects of life.

Guizot identified the three major components of European civilization: Roman, Christian, and Germanic. From the Romans, the Europeans inherited the idea of state with uniform legislation and the institution of municipality with local government. From Christianity, the Europeans added the idea that there is a moral law above the human legislation and the idea of separation of spiritual and secular power. The Germans introduced the bond between warriors, loyalty towards their leader, and love of independence, of personal liberty as a citizen.

Lecture 3 covers the period between the fifth and the ninth century. It is a period where three systems, monarchical, aristocratic, and popular, attempted to establish dominance. These existed in a state of constant combat and compromise. The church also, by its divine mission, tried to establish a theocratic system. These systems proclaimed the principle of political legitimacy, but they did not admit that force was at the base of any power. Once the political power was established, they disavowed force and turned to legitimacy of justice and right.

This “barbaric epoch” (p. 58), as Guizot named it, is characterized by universal turmoil, and the infancy of all systems. Society was changing. People transitioned from migratory to sedentary life. The instability of the period impacted the individuals who were predominantly concerned about their own interests and passions. A special bond, as well as a certain hierarchy of rights and services, was established relating to individuals, the land they settled on, and their lords. The invasion of the Muslims in the south and the continuous wars of the Frankish kings in the north kept Europe in disorder. Although he admired the human individuality of the Germans, Guizot said that in a time of “barbarism and ignorance, this sentiment becomes selfishness.” (p. 63) However, it was the power of the church and the desire of the Frankish king, Charlemagne, that introduced order and the spirit of civilization and unity among the people. Between the fifth and the ninth century, the Germanic element prevailed.

The author goes on in Lecture 4 to analyze the elements of feudalism. There was no central or independent government, therefore “no individual was in a condition to impose his will on others.” (p. 83) He presented the importance of the fief, which came with duties and rights. It came also with the hereditary spirit that resulted from the nature of property. The possessor of the fief had all the rights on his estates. The only thing that guaranteed these rights was force. The author argued that feudalism contributed to the fine development of the character of the individual on one hand and the right of individual resistance on the other. Although it involves force, it should never be abolished because, as Guizot said, “it means acceptance to servitude.” (p. 87) Guizot equates the feudal system with a federation. He stated: “It aimed at leaving in the hands of each lord all that portion of government and sovereignty which could remain there and to carry to the suzerain, or to the general assembly of the barons, only the least possible portion of power.” (p. 86)

Lecture 5 examines the relation of the church with the people and with the princes, the representatives of the temporal power. In the fifth century, the church was an independent society that connected the people with their sovereigns. It was recruiting people from all levels of society. It was accessible and open to all who wanted to join. However, the author criticized the church for not respecting the liberties of the individuals, by imposing certain creeds, and thus, forcing the human spirit to revolt.

Initially, the church proclaimed the separation of spiritual from temporal power and by this, it prepared the way for independence of thought. Later, the church attempted to establish dominance over the temporal power, resulting in conflict.

Lecture 6 continues the investigation of the role of the church in European civilization. Guizot recognized the good influence of the church upon the social and moral order, but he points out an unfortunate influence on the political order. He mentioned that the church always attached itself to and defended the temporal power. After the death of Charlemagne, the institution of the church went into a decline. Pope Gregory VII tried to reform the monasteries and take over the governments of the world. By the end of the eleventh century, and the beginning of the twelfth century, a group of free thinkers challenged the authority of the church.

In Lecture 7 Guizot analyzes the third element of civilization, the boroughs. He considers the third estate of 1789 to be the direct descendent of the corporations of the twelfth century. He describes the conflict between lords and burghers over rights and liberties. The town people revolted despite the inequalities of the conditions between them and the lords. Charters were set up by both parties and violated. However, by the end of the twelfth century, the enfranchisement of the burghers was accomplished. It was the birth of the bourgeois. The author points out the importance of the rising boroughs founded “upon altogether other principles of feudalism and the church, the diversity of social classes, their struggles, the first and profound characteristic of modern burgher manners, timidity of spirit, side by side with energy of soul, the demagogue spirit, side by side with the legal spirit.” (p. 153)

He goes on in Lecture 8 to present the impact of the crusades on society. Guizot stated that they produced a “greater degree of individual liberty” (p. 167) on the one hand and led to political unity and centralization, on the other hand. Maritime commerce developed, travelers encountered different civilizations and they “were struck with the riches and elegance of manners of the Muslims.” (p. 161)

Another factor that contributed to the history of Europe was royalty. In Lecture 9, Guizot examines different types of royalties. He traced the role of the royalties from the time of Imperial Rome to the Germanic invasion and to the nineteenth century. Imperial royalty during the reign of Augustus and Tiberius exercised the power of the people. In the fifth century, the Germanic kings were elected. Christianity changed the character of imperial royalty. Beginning with the reign of Constantine, the power came from above, from God. This was the religious royalty when the kings are interpreters of the divine will. Theoretically, the king has power, but practically, the feudal lords were entirely independent of royalty. By the twelfth century a new concept was introduced: the hereditary principle of succession. In the face of violence, desolation and economic hardship, people turned to the king for help.

He became the protector of public order, the moral authority. Royalty strengthened and developed itself, and the whole society was reduced to two elements: the government and the country.

François Guizot continued in Lecture 10 by focusing on the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century and explained why there was no unity, and why the attempts to create government and nations failed. He argued that it was the lack of general interests and opinions, that society was not ready for unity because it was still fragmented and local.

In Lecture 11, Guizot presented the moral and political facts that contributed to the strengthening of the state and the formation of the modern society. Thus, he claimed that the war between France and England led to unity, order and the beginning of nation building. Diplomacy started in the fifteenth century to create a system of equilibrium between countries. It was in the fifteenth century that a new school of free thinkers started—the Renaissance. The fall of Constantinople brought Greek fugitives to Italy, with their manuscripts, and knowledge of ancient civilizations. It was a period of discoveries, innovations, enterprises and the extension of European commerce.

The Reformation was the topic of the Lecture 12. Guizot defines it “as a great movement of the liberty of the human mind, a new necessity for freely thinking and judging its own account, and with its own power, of facts and ideas which hitherto Europe had received, or was held bound to receive from the hands of authority.” (p. 225) Reformation eliminated religion from politics and restored the independence of the governments, which led to centralization of power. However, there were two contradictory principles that led to conflict. The author illustrated this conflict using as an example the 1688 revolution in England. He presents the state of the country in the seventeenth century, the prosperity, the existence of free institutions like the House of Commons and the Parliament. The two national demands for political and religious freedom united against the king who held both powers.

Lecture 13 described all the phases of the English revolution in detail. It ended up with William, prince of Orange, becoming the ruler in England. He became the champion of the religious liberties and opposed the universal monarchy. The same struggle against absolute monarchy was taking place in Europe as well.

The last lecture, 14, draws a comparison between England and France and it explains why France, not England, had the greatest influence in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In England, the different elements of civilization—such as royalty, aristocracy, religious orders, local and central institutions—developed continuously. There was no element dominant at one time, and there was no element that disappeared completely. They existed simultaneously and contributed to the establishment of a strong and free government.

On the continent, in France, the same elements of civilization developed in succession but “its development was wrought upon a larger scale, and with more grandeur and brilliancy.” (254) France dominated the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, through the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV. The king became weak at the end of the reign and so was the absolute power. The government that followed Louis XIV, apathetic and inert, “labored only to hide itself in the background.” (p. 267) This was the moment when the people took control. With a great desire to reform everything, the human mind changed in the process and now considered itself a “creator.” The struggle between free inquiry and absolute monarchy in England was taking place in France. Guizot stated that the government of Louis XIV perished because it was an absolute monarchy, and the power that succeeded him had the same fate for the same reason. Although the author expressed his admiration for the progress of the eighteenth century, he also was disappointed with this epoch when the human mind “possessed absolute power, became corrupted...holding established facts and former ideas in an illegitimate disdain and aversion.” (p. 270)

François Guizot was a prominent figure in nineteenth century France. In an eloquent, witty style, Guizot examines the development of European civilization from the fall of Rome to the nineteenth century. He reveals the components of the European civilization, the competition of these principles, which allowed unlimited potential for development in Europe. The author presents the changing structure of European society that shifted from aristocracy to democracy. He insists on pluralism and diversity of the European society, clearly a discussion that resonates today. While there are many historical studies of European civilization, this one stands out through its sociological character, which is original. Students and experts alike would benefit from this impressive study.