／TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

THE STUDY OF HISTORY.

By Professor De Vericour.

The paramount usefulness of history, with all its ramifications, as a branch of education has not yet met with a full recognition. The real position and dignity of history remains still a subject of controversy. The point at issue is—whether history may be considered and studied as a science or not. In France and Germany the question has long been decided. In both countries distinguished writers have invested history with a scientific importance—with a preeminence in general education not readily accepted by the practical Anglo-Saxon. In Great Britain, several eminent historians do believe that there are necessary laws regulating the moral as well as the physical world; they believe that the same powers prevail in the moral movement of nations as in the physical world, and that the human as well as the physical world is subjected to invariable rules in its progressive, harmonious, irresistible movement and growth. But a much greater number of English thinkers, and, we believe, the public generally, maintain that humanity advances by a free effort and free will,—that the progress of nations does not advance subjected to invariable laws, and that consequently history cannot be considered as a science until these laws are discovered, proved, and established. They insist on the fact that physical science alone is possible, as material objects are inanimate, whilst a science relating to human actions is impossible, because a man is free, rational, and responsible agent.

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A French philosopher, Buchez, in his "Introduction à la Science de l'Histoire," has elaborately demonstrated that the same providential law of gradual progress is manifest in the formation of our globe, as in the progressive advancement of nations; and he has traced the successive phases of the creation of the natural world, corresponding to the progressive phases of human societies, especially since the Christian revelation. However it may be, with such a precise parallelism and extension of the providential laws, a belief in the regularity of most social and moral movements appears perfectly justifiable; and the word "law," so well known when applied to physical science, can be readily admitted to denominate those movements, although in a modified and limited sense. In reality, the sense of the word "law," in science, is merely intended to express the certainty that evidence has been collected on specified subjects, and that such evidence is sufficiently decisive to remove all doubts as to the conclusions and results of those subjects. Therefore, if, in the events which concern history, we believe that in numberless instances, in which, if we are acquainted with all the facts, as well as the moral and material details of the case, we may be quite certain as to the line of conduct which a man admitted to be free would take, we undoubtedly attain a scientific certainty as to the cause of human action. We must, on the other hand, repudiate the inference that man is not free in his actions, because their consequences can be anticipated, as well as the principles of those sociologists who reduce the actions of man to a mere mechanical, fatal necessity, in which man, no longer a moral, conscientious being, is a mere tool of external events. Man is free; but there is a power which gives an impulse and a movement to all the actions of human liberty, which makes them tend towards an object. The observers of human actions find that men are generally disposed to regulate their own actions by the free exertion of a power which is an ultimate fact in our nature, and further, that men do generally exert that free power in a regular manner, and that consequently the direction of human actions can be fairly foretold, along with their good or bad tendencies, according to the character of the exercise of that free power.

And again, the observers of human actions find that a regular succession of cause and effect prevails in regard to human conduct; a mass of indisputable testimonies have been collected on the subject.

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There is a uniformity in human feeling engendering a similarity of conduct, which reveals to a great extent the relation between human actions and their consequences. Certainly man is free with regard to his actions; but in reality he is not so with regard to the consequences of those actions. If it were permitted to seek a physical comparison, it might be said that a man is free as to whichever side he may throw the stone he holds in his hand; but that, when he has thrown it, no human power can prevent its obeying the laws of gravitation. A pre-eminent function of history is to discover those relations between actions and their consequences. Their discovery forms an essential part of the culture of Christian morals, and becomes the principle conducing to the research of the details, illustrations, and applications of historical facts.

The historian who considers history as a science bestows his attention on the mass more than on the individual, the latter being but a secondary object of his study. In his contemplation of the movements of nations he finds evidence of the necessity which governs human life exhibited by large averages, and becomes convinced that the motives and actions of mankind in the aggregate can be subjected to average classifications and estimates. On the other hand, the opponents of the science of history appeal, it has been stated, to human consciousness and to the approbation and blame which are bestowed on good or bad actions respectively, as testimonies of free will. Among them some insist with great emphasis and exaggeration on the intimate dependence of national life upon the phenomena of nature. Others assert with equal emphasis and exaggeration the dependence of national life upon the men of genius which a nation can boast of, and have engendered the abuse of hero-worship, which has been one of the historical fallacies of our time. Undoubtedly climate and great men may exercise an influence on national life. Both may be said to have a relative function with reference to it; but the influence of climate may be extremely modified, and great men are often the mere representatives of the masses. History, in studying the crisis and revolutions of the great societies of the human race, eliminates from each its accidental and peculiar circumstances; it probes its vicissitudes, and discovers the great principles and laws which have swayed the conduct of nations; and thus it may, to some extent, forecast the destinies which lie hid in the future. The historical researches in every country tend to prove that whatever per-

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turbation may arise from the waywardness of human will, it is on the whole too slight to divert the uniform progress of nations.

History is an account of the progressive phases of some one or more of the great national societies of the human race. It branches out into a variety of sections; it relates the existence of states and governments, and also the influence of the individuals who constitute them, with their passions, their actions, their abuses in the name of the state, for selfish purposes; it records the vicissitudes of the past; it narrates the wars of the human race, so carefully preserved, when everything else has perished, a section of history that has justly been denominated material history; but its two pre-eminent ramifications, which form the inward life of a nation and determine its external life and material history, are the moral duties and the political organization. History, thus understood and taught, becomes a field for study that claims a prominent distinction among those sciences and acquirements that tend to benefit humanity. It becomes the seed-field of all human experiences, and offers a real plea in favour of a belief in the moral government of the world; it is the great protest subscribed by all the chief events of time against the drifting theory of chance; it makes all feel that it is a God who judgeth the earth, and it becomes one of the most potent testimonies of the designs of the Almighty. The most striking feature in the records of the past is the continued spectacle of whole populations beguiled by the selfish treacheries of individuals or of a class; and the study and testimony of past ages offer great consolations. The authority of the whole human race proves the progressive amelioration of all; it engenders resignation in bitter days, courage in the struggles, confidence in futurity, and in others a greater degree of sympathy for their fellow creatures. Historical studies, rightly understood, must lead to the conviction that what we need most is a wise, restricted activity, love, benevolence, and beneficence, which shall show itself in the most useful way by exciting those around us to the activity suitable to their several characters. They teach love and virtue; they give to man a loftier idea of his mission on earth; they instil into him a greater devotion to liberty and to his fellow-men, as well as a greater faith in the final reign of Christian justice.

The economical and political organization of a nation forms, we have stated, its vital element; the other elements that influence the progress of a nation, such as arts, science, literature, are more or less

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secondary and subjected to it. It is the economical and political organization which developes the internal life of a nation ; it is also the expression of the moral duties and moral condition of a society. It comprises the questions of paramount importance to a nation, such as those that refer to the laws and to political economy ; the former, destined to protect the people, and mould them, as it were, since good laws, from their continuous and universal influence, form the character of the people ; the latter, a new science, whose pre-eminent object being to seek and explain the means of procuring the greatest well-being and happiness to the greatest number, has acquired a high moral importance in history. Many of the questions of political economy often decide the moral and political condition of a nation, its welfare or its misery. To them must be traced the close resemblance between the popular discontents of different times, which have so often broken out in frantic despair. In almost all revolutions there have always been two parties in fierce and mutual opposition. On one side we behold those who wish to live on their own labours, who demand a competent retribution, the abolition of privileges, or claim a legitimate share in the products of their labour, because they consider that labour has its rights as well as capital, in opposition to the all-absorbing monopoly of capital; on the other side is found the class of those who wish to live on the labours of others, or who believe that capital alone has the right to dispose arbitrarily of the profits of labour, which leaves the latter in an iniquitous degrading thraldom. Such has been the source of most disputes, of most of the sanguinary civil wars. The parties have only changed their names in different ages and countries. The means also differ, but the grievances and usurpations have long been the same. Political economy has demonstrated that their extinction can only be obtained by an active propagation of the principles of association and co-operation, along with the extension of the principles of Christian justice and of morality in practical life.

If the student of history is not thoroughly imbued with the conviction that the wickedness of past ages cannot return, he will experience a deep gloom in perusing, in the succession of historical events, the long calamities and sanguinary struggles—the long, painful trials to which men willingly submit themselves,—and all proving barren, or contributing slightly to the promotion of human happiness. History is not a cold dust, wantonly stirred up in order

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to discover cold, impassible images and figures; it is a sad, solemn compound, made up of human flesh and blood, but combining also whatever may rouse in the human heart noble emotions, deep and lofty passions; it appears as a perpetual field of battle, on which we behold incessant contentions, the causes of which often change in their denomination as well as external form; they commenced ages and ages ago, and our generation will not see their close. The same political questions have also a thousand times agitated the world. The drama of the life of nations is a repetition of the same explosions on the subject of national independence and religious liberty. A double tradition is recorded by history: on one side, the ideas of freedom, always extending and manifesting their claims in torrents of blood; and on the other side, the spirit of usurpation and conquest, which defends itself with an implacable energy. What becomes of justice in those terrible conflicts? It is often subjected to deplorable outrages, and trampled under foot; but it is never, and never will be, annihilated by brutal force; it only slumbers, often to rouse afterwards more ardent than ever. The moralization of nations, through liberty and the education of the feelings as well as of the intellect, cannot fail to conduce to the ultimate triumph of justice, and it justifies the forebodings as to their future fraternity, for nations are hostile to each other merely through their prejudices and their vanity.

No department of intellectual culture presents perhaps so many varied forms as history. Independently of the philosophies of history, whose object is to lead the reader to some arbitrary conclusion, we have chronicles, memoirs, narratives of battles, and the lives of sovereigns, in all of which the personality of the narrator is more or less apparent. Then comes the numerous class of the historians of nationalities, whose long practical knowledge of men and of human affairs induces them irresistibly to refer the effects to the causes, in connecting human events with the motives which explain them, along with the consequences that have ensued. Those historians, therefore, become the judges of the events which they relate; and although they place themselves, as it were, in presence of the public and of posterity, they inevitably invest their productions with a portion of their own convictions—of their sympathies and antipathies,—often of their passions. Such being the drift of human nature, it apparently justifies the incredulity sometimes professed about the reality and moral efficiency of history. We conceive this incredulity to be

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partially justifiable with reference to the details, which in the eyes of the superficial student are the whole of history, and we shall see that even in the details of secondary events, truth may be attained. But, as stated before, the pre-eminent, vital traits in the history of nations, namely, the laws, literature, institutions, the economical state of societies, or those changes which affect the augmentation and distribution of wealth and property, all are potent, indisputable facts, which baffle the arguments of sceptics and of opponents.

The details of history are mere historical skeletons. Facts are not history; they are to it, at most, what the marble is to the statue; they are part of the materials with which the historian must create a moral form, or rather a moral life. The insight and judgment of men being so often obstructed or limited, each only brings his share of light in the darkness of ages and of men's doings. The details of history must be accepted with great caution,—seldom, if ever, credited, if received from one channel only, besides which the legendary clouds must be dispelled. Accuracy, however, may be obtained by the honest investigator, whose diligent researches will enable him to discern truth in the midst of the sectarian, political, and egotistical influences by which it has been distorted, and remove every false light of passionate spirits. The authors of chronicles, of memoirs, of biographies and histories, are generally more or less misled by their own principles, their passions, often by their ignorance of a part of the great picture of human events. The most honestly intentioned among them cannot avoid it. It behoves especially the teacher of history, who stands aloof from all those influences, bent on his mission, to extract pure moral truth from such a confusion. Undoubtedly a wise man may perceive those blinding influences, and, making due allowance for them, he may succeed in discovering the truth; but wise men, whose minds are formed by the action of their own thoughts, are very rare. The generality of readers and students seek more especially to adorn their intellect and overwhelm their memory with secondary facts and events. They require competent guides.*

As to the chronicles, let us take, for instance, the most celebrated among them—that of Froissard, whose *naïveté* is proverbial, and who

* Because the historian has in his possession several different versions of the same fact—because popular credulity has introduced fabulous circumstances in all those versions, he ought not to conclude that the fact is false; he must be reserved, careful; he must discuss the texts and proceed by induction.

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is so valuable for the histories of the times in which he lived. We find that there are two periods in his adventurous life, during each of which he wrote and copied his chronicles: those of the first period, namely, his youth, found in Paris and Breslau, often differ from those of his later life; the latter no longer evince the same impartiality, nor the same genuine freshness of thought. Froissard had then been exclusively associating with a coarse, brutal chivalry, and with the feudal aristocracy; he had imbibed all their prejudices; hence his deliberate calumnies on one of the noblest popular heroes of his age, Artevelde, the indomitable enemy of feudal despotism. As to memoirs, naturally a favourite and important source of historical authorities, if we turn to, perhaps, the most acute and influential among them, those of the Duc de St. Simon, we find that in his bitter, scathing sarcasms, in his scornful attacks, he is very often actuated by his own private, implacable antipathies and vengeances, as well as by his insane worship of the prerogatives of birth. Thus he shamefully misrepresents the legitimate claims of Brittany, and the royal perjuries and iniquities, along with the atrocities that followed them. On the whole, the memoirs of great or active men are liable to be written by two classes of individuals, to whom human events cannot often appear in their normal state: they are those of the studious spectator, whose life, confined to the closet, may unfit him for judging of the affairs of the world around him, and the productions of those individuals who have been mixed in public affairs, who, despite their honesty, can scarcely fail presenting from their own point of view those events in which they have participated, even admitting the total absence of human vanity and prejudices, which is almost impossible.

In regard to regular histories, they are mostly characterised by some special religious or political tendencies, and they would not mislead their readers, if their political and religious judgments could always be subjected to an unswerving, deep, moral sentiment. But it is not so. They but too often evince a systematic perversion of some of the aspects of human events, and often also dazzle the student by vivid, exaggerated pictures, accumulating apologies for a political or religious doctrine, ignoring the great mission of history. The historian who has so long exercised a nefarious influence on the British public, Hume, had no other object in view but to make a case in favour of absolutism; he did not shrink from giving a false interpre-

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tation to some original documents, which at that period were inaccessible to the public. In our own time, one of the most popular historians of contemporary Europe, Sir Archibald Alison, whose voluminous work on the history of Europe since the French Revolution is exclusively based on printed books, more or less accurate and honest, has yielded to one all-absorbing inspiration, namely, that of demonstrating peremptorily that divine Providence intends the world to be governed according to conservative principles; all his facts and details, however honestly collected and emphatically narrated, are intended to lead the reader to this sole conclusion. The same memorable, eventful period has been the subject of Mons. Thiers' life labour. Both, therefore, have related in the first part of their great works the history of the French Revolution of 1789, and exclusively from their own points of view, but since the publication of their works a mass of new original documents have appeared, which deprives them of a great part of the interest they inspired formerly. All the works on the French Revolution are more or less characterised by a political fanaticism, often by a total absence of principles, without excepting Mr. Carlyle's fantastical and picturesque production on the subject. In all the documents published on that great epoch, every man is generally either a hero or a brigand—a man of genius or a monster, because every judgment is the offspring of passion, each judging the greatest era in political history as if it were his own private, personal cause. However mitigated may be the political passions—at this very day we still hear and read the invectives which the descendents of the heroes of the *terreur rouge* and of the *terreur blanche* lavish upon each other. Such are the results of the excesses of aristocracy and of democracy.

But M. Thiers, in his recently terminated "History of the Consulate and of the Empire," came before the public under peculiar advantages. No history has been more extensively read in Europe. Besides the attraction of his persuasive, flowing style, which contributed to its popularity, the author was known to have had free access to the correspondence of Napoleon with his great vassals, marshals, and ministers. He states having carefully perused no less than thirty thousand of those letters and communications of every description. Although Mons. Thiers neglects the foreign documents —the German, for instance, many of which are invaluable for their intrinsic merit and honesty—although he withholds his authorities,

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and contents himself with general allusions to them, whilst they often consist of his conversations with the old surviving ministers and marshals whom he has known,—nevertheless the great work of Mons. Thiers, by its influence and magnitude, deserves to be held up as an example with reference to the great principles of history; and the more especially so, as he has most emphatically proclaimed his own principles on that important department of education. In a preface, or rather a profession of faith on the subject, annexed to one of the volumes, when the work was far advanced, he thus defines his favourite muse:—"De toutes les productions de l'esprit, la plus pure, la plus chaste, la plus sévère, la plus haute, et la plus humble à la fois, c'est l'histoire." And he had previously enounced his doctrine as to the pre-eminent qualification to become an historian, stating that, "la qualité essentielle, préférable à toutes les autres qui doit distinguer l'historien et qui constitue sa veritable supériorité . . . c'est l'intelligence." Certainly intelligence is one of the indispensable requirements expected on the part of the historian; it analyses, clears up obscure materials, makes a selection from a complex and incomprehensible mass, and educes a clear comprehensive ensemble from a bewildering confusion. From the elegant style of Mons. Thiers it appears evident that he attaches also great importance to the qualification of artist; and in truth, the art of writing is essential to the historian, provided that by its excess he does not impair the dignity of history, for truth is often veiled by an excess of style, and even disappears under it. We are therefore in possession of the object and principles of the historian of the Consulate and the Empire, as well as of all the historians of his school. Their works, however brilliant and partially instructive, do not fulfil the conditions of the science of history; they may furnish certain excellent materials for the experienced thinker, but they do not exercise a beneficial influence on the inexperienced reader. History as a science, besides aiding in the comprehension of events, besides its impartial classification of parties, has, it has been seen, a great moral object. Mons. Thiers, in the latter part of his work, indulges in a few moral reflections on his hero; but he ignores the condition of the people, literature, commerce, and industry. He revels in endless descriptions of battles, of repulsive butcheries, which ever inspire him with brilliant expressions of admiration. It is a history devoid of philosophy and of humanity.

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Mons. Thiers in France, and Mr. Thomas Carlyle in England, are the highest expression of that class of historians with whom humanity and the morality of history are a dead letter. By their indifference to human sufferings, by the disregard of ordinary humanity which they manifest, they transform an important instrument in the training of the human mind and heart into an inexhaustible source of unhealthy emotions; they appear to have cultivated an intellectual taste for bloodshed; it stimulates their reverence; whilst they evince a certain aversion for the processes by which great results are achieved in obedience to laws and constitutions. And we have often watched their readers, old and young, flushed with a febrile, thoughtless admiration, imbibing a real sympathy for despotism and an unchristian indifference to cruelty and carnage. The mission of history is, on the contrary, to foster feelings of humanity and love, to inspire a reverence for the laws of God—"who made and loveth all,"—to teach man his social destiny, and develop his sympathetic capacity. It is thus that history becomes a valuable department in a Christian education, and one whose cultivation should continue through the whole course of life. With reference to the long narratives of campaigns and battles, they may have a special object, interesting to special readers, and may be denominated military histories; but such works, however great their merit, are more particularly valuable for students of strategy, and deserve but a very secondary place in the histories of the great progressive movements of nations. The results and consequences alone of the great sanguinary conflicts between masses of men, studied and analysed by the historian, tend, we believe, to a great moral conclusion—namely, that every great war recorded in history has checked the progress of civilization for at least a century.

If history reveals the great laws of the Almighty, and the destiny of man on earth, the student will do well to avoid generally the compendious abstracts, epitomes, résumés, all abridged universal histories, which teach nothing. They are a deceitful, hollow task on the memory, and engender confusion. They can only be of use as a *mementum*, or assistant for the memory of the student, although everything important is effaced from them. They are little more than chronology, which is of course useful, or almanacks of numbers killed, of the royal families, of victims of plague, war, and plunder, all of which are not history. The student of history, severed from a

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regular methodical instruction, who also does not mean to addict himself to history as his peculiar department, will find a surpassing advantage in mastering an epoch, or a century, or a particular history. By mastering one of these, with its peculiar characteristics, with all its details in laws, economical state, and its literature, he will derive far more instruction, a greater facility of discrimination; and he will find the other epochs, centuries, or histories, of easy comprehension whenever he turns to them, and grouping themselves readily round the historical knowledge previously acquired.

We have spoken of the doubts and incredulity existing on the subject of many historical facts and details; but ere long every scepticism on that part of history will scarcely be admissible. There is a characteristic tendency in our time, daily on the ascendant, to open to the public all original correspondences and documents on all the civil, diplomatic, military, and royal transactions. Such publications will gradually become a necessity of civilised nations. They are the life-blood of historical science, whilst they leave the true sources of history open to all; they lay bare the true nature of men and of their deeds; they will dispel and check the creation and growth of those numberless legends which are a marvellous transformation of truth by the popular imagination, ever enamoured of the wonderful and of the unnatural; they will greatly facilitate the labours of the historian, and satisfy the doubts and hesitations of the public. Such publications have already revealed many truths respecting events and characters which had been hitherto wholly misappreciated. The French statesmen and historians, for instance, never believed in the sincerity of William Pitt, when that great minister was negotiating for peace with the French Republic, until his correspondence with Lord Malmesbury was given to the public. The noblest features in the character of the Duke of Wellington, along with the incredible difficulties of every description he had to encounter, are indelibly portrayed in his despatches; they bring into a greater relief than any history the man who was at the same time a great commander, a great citizen, and a slave to the point of honour. The publication of the voluminous correspondence of Napoleon I. reveals the real Napoleon, and annihilates the traditional idol of the French people. Although it is officially acknowledged that many of these letters and orders, the most damaging to the fame of the legendry hero of France, have been suppressed,

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nevertheless his heartlessness, his duplicity, his unscrupulous ferocity, his selfish, monstrous ambition, are abundantly displayed in the recently printed documents. The twenty-five volumes of this publication do not throw any new light on the greatest events in the history of the nineteenth century; but, whilst they testify the genius of a great general and of a great military administrator, they unravel all the details of the moral littleness of the hero, whose foreign policy seems at times hardly compatible with sanity, and who often appears the mere vulgar creature of imagination and impulse. Such a publication cannot fail, in due course of time, to enlighten the French people on the iniquities that called forth the implacable hostility of the whole of Europe and the two invasions of France, the remembrance of which is still rankling in many hearts; it will also facilitate and hasten their understanding of the formation of that network of administrative tyranny from which France has not recovered. If we turn to the recent publication of the original letters of another monarch of France—Henry IV.—what a contrast in a moral point of view! They reveal the originality and powers of conception of the first Bourbon, whom Napoleon contemptuously and unjustly called a captain of cavalry. They restore to the greatest of the Sovereigns of France all that had been traditionally attributed to Sully, and unravel the details of his great and noble project of a European Congress for the organization of a European peace.

Among the recent historical revelations derived from the discovery of original documents, several of them have not only restored to truth and reality characters hitherto misrepresented, but they have even brought to light the singular fact that a memorable event—which long exercised a great inspiring influence—had never taken place, namely, the conspiracy which has always been supposed to have preceded the Sicilian Vespers. The sixteenth century is more especially affected by the publication of new documents. The correspondence of Granvelle, the letters of the French and Venetian ambassadors in the East, published by Charrière, throw a new light on the Eastern affairs during that period. In the published correspondence of Charles V., edited by Lanz; in the publications by Gachard, in the trials given by Llorente, in Granvelle's letters, and the ordinances of this Emperor, the lofty, political depth of Charles V., extolled by so many historians, totally vanishes. We

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no longer behold the prudent, profound statesman and warrior, so overrated even in our own time, but the crafty sovereign, the heartless fanatic, with transient gleams of grandeur in the misfortunes that befel him; whilst the puerile, romantic legend about the Emperor's seclusion from worldly affairs, and his witnessing his own funeral, must be abandoned. The inexhaustible Royal Archives of Simancas have furnished all the details with reference to the retirement of Charles V. in the convent of Estramadura. But this Emperor's no less celebrated grandmother, Isabella of Castile, undergoes a more sudden and perhaps greater transformation, through some of the Simancas documents very recently come to light. She has been held up as the ideal of female virtue and loveliness on the throne. Two distinguished contemporary historians—the American Prescott, in his celebrated history of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, and the French professor, Rossew St. Hilaire, in his complete and esteemed "History of Spain," the fruit of twenty-five years' labour,—both have extolled, with an enthusiasm verging on idolatry, the unparalleled magnanimity and surpassing moral beauty of the Queen of Castile; but if we turn to the documents alluded to, we find, in her own handwriting, the proofs of her duplicity in several family transactions, of her promoting the horrors of the Inquisition instead of opposing them, as it has been alleged, and of her contriving to have the richest victims sent to the faggot, as she laid her grasp on their wealth for her own benefit.

The revelations on the character and unscrupulous policy of several members of the House of Habsburg are receiving invaluable additions by the publication of the correspondence of Maria-Thérèsa, Marie-Antoinette, Joseph II., and the other members of the Imperial family, given to the public by the Chevalier von Arneth, through the liberal permission of the Emperor of Austria. And all these letters lay bare the human frailties, the foul State transactions, hitherto hidden from the public eyes. The prestige of royalty, as well as the political passions, can no longer distort their historical truth. The youthful student of history may yet be flushed with an innocent, sympathizing admiration on reading the misfortunes that assailed the beautiful Empress-Queen Maria-Thérèsa on the death of her father, the treachery of her neighbours, and the pathetic, melodramatic scene, when, with a babe in arms, she appealed to the fidelity of the brave Magyars. It was in former days a favourite

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passage in the Elementary Lectures on Modern History of Professor Smyth, of the University of Cambridge, who during thirty years read the very same lectures yearly to an audience of undergraduates, and they invariably became enthusiastic admirers of the beautiful Maria-Thérèsa. But the earnest student, who probes the whole life and political career of the Empress-Queen, while acknowledging her private domestic virtues, cannot repudiate the incontestible proofs of her duplicity, of her hypocrisy, and her vindictive cruelty. With reference to the unfortunate Marie-Antoinette, so foully hurled down from the throne of France, while her sufferings and courage will leave an eternal halo on her memory, her correspondence leaves not a shade of doubt on her fatal influence over the honest, simple Louis XVI.; it explains the instinctive hatred of the French people for the Austrian Queen. She had a boundless faith in the divine rights of royalty, and could not understand that royalty was in France the symbol of the sin and misery of thousands of years.

The original documents published on the family of the Habsburgs are not exclusively derived from Vienna or Simancas. To M. Gachard, archivist-general of Belgium, the world is indebted for perhaps the largest amount of documents recently published. His correspondence of Philip II. with the Duke of Alva and Alexander Farnese is invaluable. In his four volumes of the correspondence of William the Silent (*le taciturne*) may be contemplated that noble figure, the leader of all the friends of toleration, the king of the party of humanity in an age of reckless cruelty—an impartial hero, many traits of whose character the English student finds inherited by his descendant, William III. of England—traits so graphically delineated by Lord Macaulay, and to which he finds also the heart of a distinguished female biographer, Miss Strickland, unfemininely callous. The publication of State papers and original correspondences facilitate the attainment and appreciation of truth, as well as the labours of historians and of professors of history. The public owes a great debt of gratitude to those who devote themselves to such researches; they are the patient and indefatigable miners who derive but little popular influence and repute, if their labours are confined to such pursuits. In Paris, Florence, and several German cities, the archives and all historical documents are arranged and classified by a special organised staff, open to the public, and gradually published. The British Government has also recently ap-

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pointed able collectors of all State papers and documents relating to the history of England, and the public now receive periodically new sources of history.

We have alluded to the singularity of an historical fact which, despite its now proved non-existence, has nevertheless been very influential in the Italian Peninsula. Italy has ever been the classical land of conspirators. In its mediæval history alone we find the conspiracies of the Porcaro, of the Pazzi, Olgiati, and others. In our nineteenth century no country has been so perpetually agitated by conspiracies in every political party. It is undeniable that the traditional episode of the Sicilian Vespers, preceded by a vast, profoundly organized conspiracy, inculcated in the vivid imagination of the Italians a decided taste for conspiracy, a tendency to secret, subterranean agitation, followed by a sudden dramatic explosion; and it is evident that such remedies as partial and local conspiracies have often aggravated the odious tyrannies that have so long trampled down the fair peninsula. The Sicilian Vespers, preceded by a vast conspiracy, have been for ages a favourite theme for enthusiastic commentaries. The most conscientious historians have, more or less, dwelt on this conspiracy. It has been universally popularised, and it has also inflamed the imagination of all civilized nations through the ideal embellishments of the novelist and of the dramatist. And now, after such an extraordinary influence,—after the narratives of so many historians,—after such a fabulous prestige, it is positive that there has never been a conspiracy at all; that the Sicilian Vespers were the result of a sudden, unexpected, popular explosion. The documents recently produced by Amari, the learned Sicilian historian, leave not a shadow of doubt on the subject. John of Procida, the undaunted, persevering soul and hero of the conspiracy, according to the popular legend, vanishes altogether, and we only behold a man who, like so many others in history, comes up when all is over, and makes the best of everything. He was already in advanced age; he was not a Sicilian, and by his conduct had become an object of mistrust, if not of hatred, to the oppressed people. He had certainly been faithful to Manfred, but when the disaster was complete, his property confiscated, and himself exiled, he did not persevere in his fidelity to the vanquished. There is a letter existing, from Pope Clement IV., imploring in his behalf the clemency of the conqueror Anjou, in terms damaging the dignity of

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the so long supposed heroic author of the supposed conspiracy. On the other hand, it appears evident that Procida was, for a short period, the confidant of the ambitious views of Dom Pedro of Arragon, and that he undertook some diplomatic missions in his service, but, in the meantime, the French, or rather the Provençals, having established a reign of terror in the island, the concentrated fury of the Sicilians exploded most fortuitously on Easter Monday (30th March, 1282), on the occasion of a Provençal soldier insulting a Palermitan female; the man was struck down by the unarmed people; they fled to arms, and the massacre followed. At the very moment, by the merest chance, the Vesper bells were ringing, hence the memorable denomination of this historical episode.

Having thus expatiated on the value of State-papers, and of correspondences, as indisputable sources of history, it must be added that the latter, along with other original documents, require great discernment in their selection and appreciation. Their origin and authors require to be subjected to a careful investigation. Discrimination in the research of such materials is evidently of the highest importance. They must be in some instances controlled by others, for instance, whenever they consist of family chronicles, written by the servants of great princely houses, and exclusively in their praise. There is in our time a singular tendency to rehabilitate royal criminals, as well as many of the most odious characters in history, which can partially be effected by the publishing of one portion only of letters and documents, and keeping in the shade all unfavourable testimonies. We have also instances when the discovery that one crime of a great reprobate has either been exaggerated or disproved, or the discovery of a minor redeeming point in a repulsive character, have been sufficient grounds for a rehabilitation. There is no figure in the history of France more justly odious than that of Philip *le Bel*, the forger; yet a French historian has become his apologist, because several of his enactments and institutions were advantageous to the country. Political and religious fanaticism have produced, of late, abundant efforts at rehabilitation; apologetic memoirs of Barrère and of Lebon, two of the worst men of the worst period of the French Revolution, are an instance of the first fanaticism; as to the second, it has not shrunk from proposing to our sympathising admiration Alexander VI. and the Borgias. For instance, again, who can be so ignorant of history as not to have read something

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about the dark deeds and diabolical policy of Catherine de Medicis, the queen of Henri II. of France, and the mother of the three following kings. Nevertheless, in our time, there has appeared what has been considered as a powerful evidence, presenting this queen to the public under the most favourable colours. No one could read her life, published at Florence by Mr. Alberi, without conceiving something approaching to admiration for this Florentine importation at the court of France ;—a life, it must not be omitted, written and based on the authentic documents existing in the Tuscan archives. Nothing could be more satisfactory. But if you investigate the nature of those manuscripts referred to, you find that they are nothing more than family documents and letters, written from Paris, by servants, by menials, by admirers of Catherine, and the envoys of the Grand Duke. Fortunately, it will be readily admitted that a more satisfactory document to be consulted on Catherine de Medicis is herself, namely, her own letters, which contradict in everything the Florentine historian, and fully reveal her dark deeds and her diabolical policy. A portion of those letters, taken from the French archives and the Imperial Library, have already been published.

Historic notions and opinions are every day infusing themselves more and more in the daily bread of literature, and they are derived from the most varied sources, among which the most respectable are the special regular histories of nationalities. But they are all more or less subjected to some political, religious, and national prejudices. The histories of England, for instance, are deeply coloured by Whig or Tory principles, excepting the Constitutional histories, such as the works of Hallam and Erskine May. The histories of France had long been mere puerile skeletons ; and in our time, when France is so justly proud of her historical school, the regular histories of that country are inspired by royalist or democratical principles. The laborious Sismondi is inexorable in his anathema on kings, often forgetting that their crimes were those of their times. The brilliant work of Michelet is not a history, but a glittering, original, fanciful production on the subject, despite his valuable researches. The only great, complete history of France is the voluminous, conscientious work of Henry Martin, and his liberal tendencies have been bitterly assailed by the Feudo-Royalist party. The histories of Germany represent also two camps: there are those written in

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the north, with decided Prussian Protestant tendencies, and those of the south, based on the Austrian policy and the Church of Rome. and all of them fiercely, blindly hostile to France. The same may be said of the histories of Italy and Spain. It is needless to add that there are a few highly praiseworthy exceptions. On the whole, however, impartial, just, historical notions and opinions cannot easily be derived from them. They require to be completed by supplemental study, or a course of special instruction.

But the most ridiculous, unwholesome notions about historical events and personages have their source in historical novels. A vast multitude do not study history, but read greedily those innutritious confections, often very elegantly wrought, which inflame the imagination, to the detriment of historical truth and of its morality. Historical novels may have their usefulness if they confine themselves to pictures of the manners of an age, but it is not so. They mostly distort the most prominent characters and facts in history. It will be a long time yet before the false impressions left on the public mind by the novels of Sir Walter Scott are effaced : he, for instance, transforms Richard I., who partook of the nature of a tiger more than that of a man, whose life was a perpetual access of blood-thirsty frenzy, into a magnanimous, sentimental knight, who rivets the deepest sympathies of the reader. With the great novelist of the North, who was ever blind to all the turpitudes of Royalty, Charles II. is transformed into an amiable, estimable sovereign, despite the royal orgies and the disgraceful transactions of his reign. In our own time the mass of flatulent compositions called historical novels is very great ; many of them may be considered as devoid of influence in consequence of their triviality and coarseness. But others are conspicuous by the elegance of their style and the brilliant imagination of their authors, and they more especially mislead the public on historical events and characters, when they depict a period not generally studied and known. Let us take for instance one of the most attractive and popular novels of Lord Lytton,—" Rienzi."

The German historian, Papencordt, after researches made by him in Rome, has given a faithful picture of the mystical nature of Rienzi, which had not been understood before him. Other recent researches at Rome and Prague,—a variety of records, chronicles, speeches, and letters of the Tribune, most of which are now published, exhibit in Rienzi, during the first period of his public

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life, the mystic as well as the antiquary. He was celebrated for his knowledge of antiquarian lore. His enthusiastic imagination was deeply impressed by the marvellous ruins of pagan Rome and the wonders of Christian Rome. The eternal city was relatively deserted; it was in the hands of the coarse and profligate nobles and barons. Several among them imagined to have recourse to a literary pageantry in order to dazzle and amuse the multitude, and the poetical triumph of Petrarch took place on the 8th of April, 1341. On that day the Roman people roused from their torpor; they lived a new life; their souls awoke: the cry of "the Capitol for ever"—offspring of a momentary enthusiasm—was treasured up by Rienzi. It kindled his dreamy, mystical spirit. He began to address the people. He preached on the history of Rome, on justice and faith. The popular emotion grew deeper daily, and shed on Rienzi a new and dignified lustre. He was among the ambassadors sent to the Pontiff to pray for his return to Rome. He afterwards was appointed Apostolic Notary in the Municipal Council. He resumed his harangues to the people with the aid of theatrical representations and images. Finally, one day, Rienzi convoked the people to the Capitol. He had heard thirty masses during the preceding night, and he now proposed with majestic solemnity the new regulations of his new government—*il buono stato*, which he read aloud. The *buono stato* was proclaimed with vociferous acclamations by the multitude. The nobles fled from the city. Rienzi remained master of Rome, and the details of his government are most curious and interesting. The whole of Europe was astounded. A general belief arose in the resurrection of a new and formidable Republican Rome. The Pope acknowledged the new tribune. All the Italian cities forwarded to him the warmest felicitations with pecuniary succours. Such a triumph inflamed the imagination of Rienzi. The people shared his aberrations. Insane and mystical ceremonies, abounding in symbols, now took place daily. Finally the Pontiff sent a legate to put an end to the follies of the tribune, and excommunicated him. The nobles assembled an army, marched on Rome, and failed in a first attempt to surprise the city. The people remained faithful, and might have repelled the enemy, had not the mystic, the enthusiast, with his generous ideas, succumbed under a simple question of food. Rome was threatened with a famine. The people immediately cooled towards the excom-

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municated tribune; they remained deaf to his voice, insensible to his tears, and he disappeared. Subsequently Rienzi sojourned in a convent, where he frequently fell into ecstasies and into mystical, ambitious reveries. In 1350 he proceeded to Prague, threw himself at the feet of the Emperor of Germany, and addressed him in a mystical, incoherent harangue. Charles IV. ordered the excommunicated rebel to be delivered up to the Pontiff, and entrusted him to the Archbishop of Prague, who, in a true Christian spirit, endeavoured to soothe his ardent mind and inflamed imagination. The mass of letters and memoirs which Rienzi addressed to the good Archbishop form the strangest combination of genius with mystical aberrations. In 1351 Rienzi was a prisoner of the Pope, at Avignon. He underwent a trial and was condemned to death; but was pardoned at the somewhat menacing intercession of the people of Avignon, who could not permit a scholar and a poet to be executed in the land of the Troubadours. He remained a prisoner, receiving every testimony of a munificent interest. Meanwhile anarchy and disorder having attained a scandalous extent at Rome, he became, in the Pontifical hands, an instrument of reform. The former tribune was sent to the eternal city with the title of senator; but, on finding that he was considered as a mere instrument—a mere tool in the hands of the Pontifical legate, his vanity being ruffled and his ambitious views marred, he associated with a celebrated condottière, and forced the Pontifical agents to withdraw or yield to his authority. Now commences the second period of Rienzi's public life. After an exile of seven years, he re-entered Rome with an imperial pageantry and splendour. The Roman people received enthusiastically their tribune, whom they soon discovered to have undergone great changes, both physically and morally. The generous, mystical idealist of the former period had now grown coarse, bloated, sensual, heartless, and cruel. The treasury was drained in a few days. He then had recourse to taxation. The people murmured. Rienzi had become ridiculous or odious, drowned in luxuries and sensualities; he was finally roused, one morning, by the cries of "Death to the tribune." The furious multitude invaded his palace and set fire to it. In the meantime the trembling object of so much fury took a disguise to ensure his flight. Being recognised, he shrunk, paused, and fell, struck down by deep sword thrusts. Such is the real historical character of this episode in the history of the

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fourteenth century; and, nevertheless, the celebrated novel and its author, in a recent preface, persist in representing Rienzi as a high-minded, pure, profound statesman, who might have regenerated the Roman people had not the latter grown corrupt and utterly worthless. But in history Rienzi will remain one of those sad examples of the fatal powerlessness of imagination in human affairs, when it is devoid of practical intelligence and of determination.

The drama occupies a pre-eminent position in all the literary courses of education. In the study of the ancient and modern languages and of the literatures of antiquity, as well as of modern Europe, dramatic compositions long remain an object of study in all the phases of a philological and literary training. The object of the drama is to produce moral impressions and awake human sympathy. Action is the true enjoyment and a necessity of human life. In the drama we behold others move and act, when we cannot do so ourselves to any great purpose;—we see men measuring their powers as intellectual and moral beings,—influencing each other, and presenting to us all the varied impressions of the human soul. All good and beautiful tragedies convey some great moral truth; they represent human life ennobled and idealised. The drama has met at different periods with detractors, but their objections have been more especially directed against the abuses of the dramatic agencies, and the frequent exaggerations in the emotions depicted. In the modern drama, for instance, there are but too many instances when the passions represented attain such a degree of violence that they cease to be human; such exaggerations are pernicious, as they affect the senses more than the soul; and one of the first conditions of dramatic emotion is that it must be intellectual, and not sensuous. The best things in this world may be turned to a wicked purpose. The arts—especially the drama—may be sullied by diseased and immoral imaginations; and, whenever it has been the case, public morality has protested against the profanation. The moral utility of the drama is incontestable: many great, good men—Schiller, above all—considered the drama to be an admirable moral school in every age and in every country.

A plausible objection may be raised against the drama,—namely, that it leaves on the mind of youth and of the public false impressions of historical facts. The moderns are, perhaps, more unjustifiable on the subject than the ancients; as, among the latter, such

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historians as Livy and Xenophon, by the admixture of abundant fiction with reality, have been the originators of endless historical fallacies which have been accepted as truths through a long series of ages. But the moderns have purposely mutilated and distorted historical subjects. They sacrifice truth to dramatic effect, and it is a blot on the tragic muse.

The purest dramatic art aims at raising reality and truth to the loftiest idealisation and poetry: Shakspere is pre-eminent in that art; nevertheless his Richard III. is a glaring exception. It is now well known that Richard III. was a better man, by far a wiser man and wiser king, than all his cotemporaries; but Shakspere, imbued with the prejudices of the age of the Tudors, accepted the popular legends, and created others still more monstrous. He not only overstepped historical truth, but also the truth of nature, in order to produce a character of calculated and unmitigated atrocity. The Shakspere of Spain, Calderon, unscrupulously misrepresents the facts and manners which he introduces in his immortal dramas. It is well known that the French, plastic, classical drama, however beautiful, is a perpetual misrepresentation of historical truth as well as of human nature and of manners. No greater contrast could be met with than that existing between the Augustus in the "Cinna" of Corneille and the Augustus of history. The Germans have always given the preference to historical tragedies, and their dramatic literature presents numerous instances of the mutilation of historical truth. Goethe, in his popular drama on Egmont, has unjustly thrown a dark cloud on the moral life of a great historical character. Schiller has transformed the furious, insane Don Carlos into a pure, noble, aspiring young hero. It must be remembered, however, that in the days of Schiller, popular legends investing Don Carlos with innocence and lofty aspirations, contrasting with the cruel, stern figure of his father, were still generally credited. It may be alleged that, whenever the dramatic muse throws a veil over the wrongs and blemishes of men, she has claims to the sympathy and indulgence of the public, but such a privilege requires well-defined limits, and the student of history may feel painfully surprised when he finds her darkening that which is relatively fair. In Germany, it must be observed, historical studies being very general and popular, the misrepresentations of historical truth in the drama cannot long mislead the public and permit the duration of false impressions. It is one of the duties of

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historical tuition to restore to reality, by unassailable proofs, the ground that has been occupied, and often usurped, by the creative genius of the dramatist and the privileges of the poet.

And, to conclude by a summing up of our observations, let us add that the importance, nay, the necessity of historical studies, as a regulator of the human mind and as a teacher of Christian morality, appears indisputable. Despite the difficulties of obtaining a strict accuracy of details in the contention of parties and factions—in the motives of men—in many of the secret springs that have led to revolutions, transformations, and calamitous events—history cannot be divested of its dignity and pre-eminent utility. It is the study of the advance of principles, affections, and intellectual powers; it marks out the mode in which individuals and nations shall unfold themselves, so that they may grow up what God designs them to be. In this point of view it justifies the definition of Schiller, that "History is the tribunal of the world." It may be considered as the great earthly judge, generally and often invisibly reprobating the iniquities of the past, and regulating the movements of the human mind and of societies.

The deficiency or total absence of historical studies in British education is awakening many of the promoters of education and of enlightenment to a sense of the existence of a chasm. A well-organised system of historical instruction would also considerably modify the shallowness, presumption, and violence of an imperfect, incomplete education, with a theological tendency which characterizes a great portion of society. Goethe says, on the subject of most branches of education, that to write is often an abuse of words,—that the impression of solitary reading replaces but sadly and most imperfectly the vivid energy of spoken language—that it is by his personality that man exercises an action upon man; whilst thus, at the same time, the impressions are the strongest and the purest. And, in truth, admitting that the art of printing has been one of the greatest benefits conferred on humanity—lifeless, written words can never replace living speech in education. Nothing can be more successful for the communication of ideas than the warmth of a direct effusion. Speech is the more natural medium between the instructor and the instructed. If we might go back so far as Plato, we find that he believes that spoken, living words possess alone the power of awaking and directing the soul in search of truth. The human mind

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is often too isolated by mere reading, and grows up within a narrow circle of erroneous notions. Goethe's idea is the clearest expression of tuition rightly understood. In history especially the professorial duties and advantages cannot find an equivalent in mere reading, the latter being an auxiliary to the former, through judicious references and the exercise of thought and judgment. The experienced and conscientious professor or teacher of history, after seeking for truth in all parties and sects, soaring high above both,—after weighing testimonies, after having pondered over documents and the labours of others, the whole being subjected to a rigid method,—relates, in few hours, the *résumé* of labours of whole months; and, moreover, the personal influence mentioned by Goethe—the magnetic human sympathy, along with the vividness of the narrative—convey in a facile, impressive manner a mass of accurate knowledge which becomes an abundant source of meditations, as well as of generous and moral emotions. Such a course of instruction has a legitimate claim in education, its pre-eminent object being to reveal, illustrate, and inspire a reverence for truth, justice, humanity—immutable laws of God and of Christianity—sacred laws, which the study of past ages proves their never having been infringed with impunity, whatever may have been the motives of egotism and ambition that have led to their violation.

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