

DISCUSSIONS

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USES AND RESULTS OF CHURCH HISTORY.¹

IN attempting to perform the duty required of me by the directors of the Seminary to-day, I do not propose to enter into any discussion of the general principles of theological education. The numerous discourses on occasions similar to this have accumulated a mass of traditionary remarks on this wide topic, to which I could hope to add nothing new or impressive. It will be sufficient to announce, in connection with the pledge which I give to-day, the great cardinal truths which shall ever guide my action as an instructor in this Seminary: that the first great requisite for the Christian minister is fervent piety; and that to cultivate this should be the chief aim of his training; that there is no royal road to mental improvement, but the faculties are only improved by honest and diligent labor; that the doctrines, government and mode of worship of the Presbyterian Church in the United States compose the wisest and most scriptural set of religious institutions known to us; that the sacred Scriptures possess plenary inspiration, and are infallible truth in every word; that to the dictates of these Scriptures, interpreted according to the fair and customary sense of human language, all philosophy, all speculations, and all inferences must implicitly bend; and that the Holy Spirit, to be obtained by constant prayer and holy living, is the only sufficient interpreter of God's word.

It would seem that the practical intention of the authorities of this institution, in requiring such a discourse as the present from their new professors, is this: that the Church may have some indication and warrant of the manner in which the instructors to whom she entrusts her interest intend to discharge their duties. She has called me, through the electors of this Seminary, to the task of training her candidates for the ministry in Eccle-

¹A discourse delivered at Dr. Dabney's Induction into the Professorship of Ecclesiastical History and Polity in Union Theological Seminary, Hampden-Sidney, Virginia, May 8, 1854.

siastical History and Polity. I propose to discuss, therefore, *the proper uses and results of the study of church history.*

The full attainment of those results require certain previous qualifications, in both teacher and pupils. The student must possess a competent knowledge of the outlines of secular history, geography, chronology, and political institutions, in all past ages; for these furnish the frame which encloses and sustains the picture of ecclesiastical history. And this knowledge should be acquired beforehand; otherwise he will make an imperfect progress. It is obvious that the instructor must possess this knowledge in a still higher degree. And it may be safely affirmed that there is no department of human study requiring wider or more profound knowledge, and a rarer union of varied talents, than are requisite for him who would be master of the science of history. The study of this science is no dull treadmill of names, dates, and events, as some seem still to imagine. It is based, indeed, on a multitude of *facts*; but it is concerned with all their causes and relations. For the mere verifying of these facts there must be a combination of extensive and accurate knowledge, with patience, impartiality, sound judgment, subtlety, and perpetual watchfulness against the blinding influences of prescription, habits, great names and prejudices. All the faculties which are requisite for eminence in judicial transactions are here called into play; for the historian must sit in judgment on a multitude of competing witnesses, and hold the balance of truth with an acute eye and steady hand. Nor can he seek his witnesses only among compilers and professed historians. He must ascend to the contemporary sources of information; he must know the literature and the spirit of the age he studies; he must gather notices of the true nature of events from every side, because statements or hints which are collateral or accidental are often, for that very reason, most impartial. The more rigidly he questions the original witnesses for himself, the more will he be convinced that those writers who have proposed to compile and digest the materials to his hand have discolored or misrepresented the true, living picture of events. De Quincey has said, "Two strong angels stand by the side of History as heraldic supporters: the angel of Research on the left hand, that must read millions of dusty parchments and of pages blotted with lies: the angel of Meditation on the right hand, that

must cleanse these lying records with fire, even as of old the draperies of Asbestos were cleansed, and must quicken them into regenerated life."

The teacher of church history will also have occasion for an ample knowledge of all the theories of philosophy which have influenced the world; for human speculations have ever had an intimate connection with doctrine, and a potent influence upon it for good or evil. The speculations of Plato and the dialectics of Aristotle infused elements into Christian theology which have affected every age, and are felt to this day in our modes of thought and the errors which beset us. But the Greek philosophies were but the progeny of earlier speculations, which were indulged in the remote antiquity of Persia and Egypt; and to know the daughters, we must know the parents. So that we are at once compelled to journey backward to meet the very earliest dawn of human science in that orient realm from which the human race first spread; and the expanding subject, at its successive steps, gathers into itself every addition which man has made to his philosophy, down to the present day. Indeed, the accomplished historian must use the audacious and yet sublime words of Bacon when he was preparing himself for revolutionizing science: "I have taken all knowledge to be my province."

And when the facts are thus verified and correctly comprehended by laborious research and cautious judgment, the materials are only prepared. While some of the deductions from them lie on the surface, and offer themselves necessarily to the most shallow investigation, the complete use of these materials demands the highest exertions of the faculties. The facts to be generalized are the most diverse and varied presented by any science. The problems offer the most numerous and complicated premises. Nothing short of the widest knowledge of human nature and the soundest political sagacity will protect from erroneous classifications and unsafe deductions.

But none can feel more strongly than myself that, in enforcing the high qualifications which church history requires for its study, I have been only illustrating my own deficiencies. If I should permit these remarks to be interpreted into a claim of these qualifications on my own part, it would be only a display of arrogance and conceit. "I count not myself to have apprehended." This model of the complete historian is not the start-

ing point, but the goal, to which the industrious labors of a lifetime will perhaps only approximate.

Much is said in these latter days of the dignity and importance of the science of history. We often hear the phrase, "philosophy of history," and perhaps not seldom in the mouths of men who do not know what they mean by it. Many splendid things are prophesied of the fruitfulness and interest which history will attain when scientifically cultivated. And many scornful and contemptuous things are said as to the past results of this study. It would seem that the usual impression of educated men of this day is, that history is a mine, teeming with most numerous and precious gems, into which the mattock of the discoverer has but just penetrated; a field waving with rich fruits, which are yet to fill the bosom of the hardy reaper who shall enter it with the sheaves of fame and wisdom. Permit me formally to disavow all this boasting vaticination. It is as delusive as to the future, as it is unfair and depreciating towards the past. We will not be held responsible for the production of fruits from our historical studies, so much richer than all that has been gathered hitherto, as to justify these prognostications. To assert that historical knowledge has been hitherto comparatively barren and unfruitful betrays an unreflecting ignorance as to the true source of many of the most valuable principles now in the possession of the world, and even of those who complain. And the expectation of a speedy harvest, comparatively more abundant and valuable, betrays an equal amount of mistiness in their conceptions of the method by which that harvest is to be reaped. Far be it from us to intimate that there is to be no more progress and no new fruit. But we are only to expect it as the gradual result of pains-taking and long-continued labor. Nor do we deny that there is propriety in the idea of arranging history under the forms of an inductive science. The countless and diversified *facts* of history, like the phenomena of nature, may gradually be correctly classified, according to their resemblances and agreements. The general truths, indicated by a multitude of agreeing particulars, may be deduced. The sequence of classes of events on other classes may guide us to the relation of cause and effect between them. And these general truths and relations may become the grounds of a multitude of instructive and profitable inferences. What we assert is, that much of this has al-

ready been done, if not in technical form, in actual result, by the reflection of mankind and the labors of previous writers. We hope that much more of this will be done in future by the gradual labors of many hands. But we believe that the complete digesting of history into the shape of an inductive science, and the realizations of all these splendid anticipations of its professed admirers, will be beset with peculiar difficulties.

One of these difficulties is obvious in this remark : that among the *facts* of our science we shall find many things intangible and invisible to our inspection, if we take the phrase "facts of history" in that comprehensive sense which is necessary when we profess to make a safe and complete generalization from them. History is the record of the doings of the human race. But, in human affairs, passions, purposes, impulses, are acts, and secret motives are their causes. Many of the data necessary for complete deductions, therefore, are invisible to every eye, except that eye which can search the human heart. The secret operations of men's hearts are among the most important elements of human events, and our synthesis of those events cannot be complete, because our analysis cannot be complete, unless the annalist of the events could exercise the attribute of the Searcher of hearts.

Another difficulty will be found in the fact that the conditions of events which are externally similar are almost infinitely diverse, as they occur in the shifting pantomime of human life. A thousand influences, more or less direct, coöperate in ever varying strength and combination to produce results. There is perpetual risk of overlooking or mistaking some of the circumstances which attend the events we seek to arrange.

Nor are we certain that facts are correctly delivered to us, even so far as they were external and visible to those who profess to record them. Observation shows us that it is no small exploit of integrity and good sense, in the affairs of social life, to tell a thing just as it happened. And we know that, to have written many and large books, and to have much learning, is no warrant whatever for the possession of either integrity or good sense. A thousand misconceptions, prejudices, habits of thought, prevent the apprehension, and therefore the record, of events.

We never know that we see the true color and proportions of the past transactions reported to us ; we only know that we see

them as they appeared to the annalist through the medium of his own mind and heart. And at every stage in the stream of tradition we must expect to find additional misconceptions and errors infused. How can there be an accurate and reliable induction from facts which cannot all be accurately verified?

Nor is this obstacle all. Unfortunately, the records of the most essential facts no longer remain. Those things which are the most operative elements of social, national and religious welfare are just the things which historians have been least careful to record. The knowledge of them has, in many cases, perished away for ever from our search. In secular history, battles, sieges, coronations, conquests, treaties; and in ecclesiastical history, councils and their canons, controversies and anathemas, have been the favorite themes of the story. But the food which nations ate, the clothing they wore, their domestic life, the state of domestic discipline, their arts, agriculture and amusements, the method of their devotions, their superstitions, the hymns they sang, the preaching to which they listened, the books they most read, the color of the national and social passions, the peculiarities of the national spirit; all these every-day and homely influences are the causes which potentially form the character and compose that mighty current of the age on which kings, battles, conquests and conquerors are but the floating bubbles which indicate its motion. But all this historians have usually left to die with the passing time, as if it was unworthy of the dignity of their drama. And such is the perversity of this misconception, even to the present day, that there are not a few readers of Mr. Macaulay's *History of England* who pronounce his invaluable chapter on "The State of England," the third of his first volume, the great blemish of his work. But now, all that remains for the enlightened student of the past is, with bitter regrets for this blind neglect, to glean those scanty fragments of the precious materials which have floated down to us as the waifs of the stream of literature. What would be the hope of useful additions to medical science from the analysis of cases where the record, instead of carefully reciting the temperament and habits of the patient, the symptoms of the disease, the remedies applied and the issue, should occupy itself with an ambitious account of the alarm and excitement of the household, the messages which passed between them and the physician, the hour

at which the hurried messenger was dispatched, and the speed at which he rode? It is nearly thus that the true causes, indications and remedies of the diseases of nations have been passed by, to record the external incidents of their catastrophe.

And at last, when all the facts which can be verified have been collected and arranged, the deducing of our conclusions is beset with difficulties. All the disturbing causes which can attend moral and political questions cluster around our deductions. The problems of history are just those which arouse all the prejudices of mankind, and relate to all their contested interests. The controversialist meets here the same *odium theologicum*, which would excite him in the polemic field, and the politician the same prejudices which would make him a partisan on the floor of a parliament. Unless we make ourselves almost more than human, we shall, each one, deduce those historical conclusions to which our interests and prejudices incline us, from the same set of premises.

And yet, no branch of history has been a fruitless study. There are broad and established facts which have been made the sources of most valuable deductions. The study has borne abundant fruits; and some of them are all-important to human happiness and progress. And while I would by no means convey the impression that it has reached its greatest cultivation and yielded all the results which are to be expected from it, I profess that, if I shall succeed in imparting to my pupils only those old and known lessons which church history has taught all along, I shall consider the course by no means useless.

In attempting to point out some specimens of the practicable results which have been derived from church history, or may be expected from it hereafter, permit me to suggest that we overlook the source of much of our most important knowledge derived from history, because of its very certainty and obviousness. These valuable lessons lie so upon the surface of past events, and when seen, are so evident, that all men pick them up, and they use them so habitually that they forget whence they came. And the educated man could not, perhaps, be made to apprehend how much of the furniture of his mind, and how many of his principles of action, were obtained from this source, unless the whole knowledge of past events were struck from his memory. Whence, for instance, does the statesman learn that power

must have definite limitations, to prevent its becoming despotic; that its tendency is to absorb other powers to its own centre? From the history of states. How do we know that republicanism is better than despotism? From history. How do we know that presbyterianism is more favorable to true Christianity than prelacy? How do we know that prelacy tends to beget arrogance in the higher and obsequiousness in the lower clergy? How do we learn that prelacy inclines to popery? How that heresy begets moral corruption, and moral corruption social ruin? All these are the obvious lessons of church history, not perhaps of history written in learned folios, but of the record of past events, written in the experience, the traditions or the books of the age. If we extend the definition of history a little, so as to embrace, not only those past events of which we learn from the testimony of others, but those also which have happened under our own limited observation, then the statement will be literally true, that to the lessons of history we owe all our experimental knowledge of human affairs.

And except that limited knowledge which our own observation conveys to us, we are indebted to the same source for all our acquaintance with human nature. There are two remarks to be made, which show the importance of that part of our knowledge of human nature and affairs which we receive from the past. If we knew nothing of the transactions of past ages, we should only know those phases of man's nature, and should only have an experimental acquaintance with those affairs which fall under our own limited observation. What a mere patch is this in the great field of life! He who knows but this, must be a man of most narrow mind. And again: that experience which comes from our own observation is only obtained in any completeness after the observation is finished; that is, after our race is run, and experience is too late to help us. It is the knowledge of the past which gives to the young man the experience of age. While yet he retains the energy and enterprise of youth, and it is not too late for action, history guides his activity with the prudence and wisdom of venerable infirmity. It is hers to unite the attributes of both seasons in one person. In private and personal affairs, the force of these observations may not be so distinctly illustrated, because the field is limited, the results of steps taken are near at hand, and the agent himself is the

person most concerned. Here the narrow but increasing experience of the young man, united with caution, may protect him from all ruinous errors. But public institutions or influences, whose operations are far-reaching, whose right conduct involves the welfare of many passive persons subject to them, should never be committed to any man who has not gained a wide experimental knowledge of similar institutions in all former times. The man who undertakes to teach, to legislate, or to govern, either in church or state, without historical wisdom, is a reckless tyro. His wicked folly is like that of the quack who should venture upon the responsibilities of the physician without having either seen or read practice. For, a series of human generations constitute but one lifetime of a political or ecclesiastical institution. The incidents of one human lifetime, or one era, constitute but a single "case," a single turn of the diseases of society. And no man has experience of those diseases who has not studied the symptoms and results through many generations.

In this connection no more is needed than to point briefly to the fact that the best arguments against bad institutions are drawn from their history. The readiest way to explode unreasonable pretensions is to display their origin. Such an auditory as this need only be reminded that the battle against popery in the Reformation was fought on scriptural and historical grounds. Many of the most mortal stabs which Luther gave to mischievous popish institutions were by simply telling the ignorant world where and when they arose. And when the two hosts were regularly marshalled for controversy, there speedily came forth that great work, the parent of Protestant church history, the *Magdeburg Centuries*. This work, which was little more than a digest of the annals of ecclesiastical events, proved a grand historical argument against popery, and its effects were so deeply felt that Rome put forth her utmost strength in opposition to it, in the annals of Cæsar Baronius. And now there is no better argument against popery than a simple history of its growth. There is no better confutation of the exclusive pretensions of episcopacy than a history of the English Reformation. Often there is no way so practical and so efficacious to disarm a modern heretic as to prove that his pretended improvements are substantially the same with the errors of some schismatic who

has been stamped with the reprobation of Christendom in ages long past. To affix just reprobation to a wicked thing is often its most effectual punishment.

In accordance with this, it will be found that there is no readier, and, we assert, no juster, mode to silence that shallow and arrogant theology which professes to enlighten the Calvinism of New England, than simply to expose, without debate as to its merits, its detested origin, as it may be found, even in its minutest lineaments, in the fragments of *Pelagius*, preserved among the works of Jerome and Augustine. Affix to it, as it may be justly done, this name, which has met the execrations of Christendom for thirteen hundred years, and it dies in merited shame and contempt. Let us show, as it may be truly and justly shown, that the rampant Arminianism which reviles our doctrines of grace in these commonwealths is exactly the semi-Pelagianism of the Jesuit Molina, which even Rome, with all her instinctive hatred of God's grace and truth, has never had the hardihood to adopt, and it will speedily diminish its arrogant front.

These illustrations suggest another most important result of historical studies. The most instructive and profitable way to study theology is to study the history of theological opinions. It has been often remarked that he who thoroughly knows past errors is best prepared to refute the errors of his own day. There is much less that is new in human speculations than is supposed. The assertion of the royal preacher may be applied to the current of human thought with as much justice as to any other subject: "The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, see, this is new? it hath been already of old time which was before us." Indeed, we are not surprised that this should be so, since God has impressed a general sameness upon the hearts and understandings of all the generations which produce these recurring opinions. The history of theology, therefore, is a complete arsenal, which furnishes us with all the weapons of discussion. There we shall find in regular array the arguments which were found most efficient to slay the heresiarchs of their day; and when the old enemies revive, it is our wisdom to grasp those same weapons and burnish them again; their temper has been tried.

But this is a familiar remark. It is perhaps more important still to point out the value of the history of opinions, in giving a fulness, maturity and symmetry to our theological knowledge, which he who studies dogmatic systems alone can never attain. The dry system only produces a pedant. The union of historical studies with systems makes the true scholar. The former prepares for the forensic defence of our faith the mere disputant, the chopper of logic; the latter equips the controversialist with practical, flexible, moderate wisdom. We have here a fact in the great business of education which deserves more leisurely and philosophic discussion. What I am able to say in its elucidation will be no more than a hasty hint or two. The difference between these two modes of study may be illustrated by the two methods of studying natural history, in cabinets of dried specimens or in the fields and woods. The former method gives a certain sort of knowledge of plants, trees and animals; yea, it is necessary. But how imperfect is that man's knowledge of nature who stops here! He must add to his system an acquaintance with the objects of nature as she presents them in the colors, shapes and attitudes of life. So, to know any speculative science, we must not only define and classify its dogmas; we must see them as they have shaped themselves in human minds, and examine them in the relations and aspects which they possessed by their origin. Indeed, I have always found a knowledge of the origin of a dogma, and of the creed and tendencies of the man who originated it, invaluable as a guide to its logical affinities and consequences. Relations and results, which furnish a complete test of the value or hurtfulness of the dogma, are suggested at a glance by the relations which it held in the parent system. But to trace out those affinities so successfully by original and independent speculation would have been a task most difficult, and often wholly baffling, to the clearest minds. Once more; by learning how other men have thought and reasoned, we obtain, without going from our studies, much of the benefit of foreign travel, and converse with great men of different nations. The mind expands and bursts the unconscious shackles of local prejudice and sectional modes of thought.

I may illustrate the importance of history as a school of experience by its warning and purifying effect upon the moral

judgments of men. It teaches us to beware of the estimate which the seductive brilliancy of present success might entice us to make of the doubtful acts of our cotemporaries, by pointing us to the end of similar acts and principles in others. In the tangled web of life we often see a crooked policy crowned with apparent success, specious but vicious principles of action applauded and leading to the goal of wealth or fame, and sturdy honesty branded with reproach or cold neglect for its opposition. Amidst the tumult of success and applause, the warning doubt is too often suppressed, conscience is silenced, and the unreflecting, unread multitude are seduced first into admiration, then into approval, and finally into imitation. But here, to the mind of the instructed man, history intervenes and forbids the heart to be depraved by the example of prosperous vice, or misled by the seeming success of dangerous measures. She lifts the veil of the past and unrolls similar scenes, showing not only the gaudy beginnings, but the gloomy end, to which these principles have conducted. It is hers to show us "the end from the beginning." It is hers to correct our judgments and reestablish our tottering rectitude, by setting before us the whole instead of a part, by leading us to contemplate not only the specious summer of prosperity which often shines for a time upon false principles, but also the winter of adversity, in which, in the righteous dispensation of providence, they finally issue.

There is an illustration among the essays of the popular historian already mentioned which is so apt to this remark that I must be permitted to apply it here. He is defending Sir J. Macintosh from the charge of fickleness in his judgments concerning the great Revolution in France. This philosopher, it seems, when he first beheld the splendid and liberal reforms of the early revolution, hailed it with admiration. When he saw it issue in the Reign of Terror, he repudiated the whole movement with abhorrence. But again, when he saw the firm, enlightened government of the consulate emerge from the sea of troubles, stripped of all the encumbering remnants of feudalism, securing liberty of conscience and domestic order, founding private rights on the just and liberal laws of the Napoleon Code, he returned partially to his first feeling of approval. This, says his eloquent defender, was not fickleness, but the natural and necessary consequence of what fell under his observation. He was like a

man who, travelling in some newly discovered island of the South, finds a tree loaded with productions of golden hue and seducing fragrance. He plucks and eats, and the taste is equal to the promise of its appearance. Thereupon he pronounces it a delicious fruit. But after a little he is moved with violent nausea, prostrated with weakness, and seems at the verge of death. He recovers at length, but now he retracts his judgment and pronounces the specious fruit to be a dangerous poison. But again, upon the more deliberate observation of the succeeding weeks, he discovers that his frame has an unwonted vigor, and is freed from chronic disorders which had long lurked in it. And now he again reconsiders his opinion, and comes to the final judgment that it is a potent but wholesome medicine.

Now, to this, the final and correct conclusion, history leads us. By pointing us to similar principles and actions in the past and their ultimate results, it protects us from confounding the errors and vices which are the true poison of society with its pleasant food, and the wholesome and necessary medicine with its poison. It teaches us to distrust the temporary and specious prosperity or gain which attends immorality and error, and tells us, with solemn and monitory voice, to remember, amidst all the clash of unthinking applause, that "the lip of truth shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment."

Permit me, for farther illustration, to call your attention to such a lesson of history presented by the records of the French Church. This lesson is to be found in the apostasy of Henry IV. from the Calvinistic to the popish religion. Many apologists have pleaded excuse, or even justification for this crime, by which he deliberately abjured an honored creed, received from the teachings of a sainted mother, and embraced the profession of a superstition which he secretly despised to the end of his life, in order to secure his crown. He found that the hostility of the League would be invincible as long as his protestantism afforded a pretext for it. Thus argue his advocates: "By this act he only surrendered his personal preferences for the good of his country and his posterity. Becoming a Catholic, he at once disarmed a faction otherwise implacable and invincible. He restored peace to a bleeding country, and averted the probable danger of its dismemberment. He transmitted a powerful and

glorious crown to generations of his heirs; and, above all, he secured to himself the ability to shield his former brethren, the bleeding Huguenots, from the ferocious bigotry of the papists, to whom, if he had blindly continued a Huguenot himself, they must have fallen a prey, in spite of his useless fidelity. By this compromise he enabled himself to establish the rights of conscience on the basis of the Edict of Nantes, and gave to Calvinism a long and prosperous career. Shall an act, so fruitful in immediate and extensive benefits, be branded as a crime?"

History casts her serene eye over the finished tragedy and answers unhesitatingly, "Yes; it was the crime of arraying the human against the divine wisdom, and of presuming to find some safer path to follow than the path of God's commandments."

What the destinies of France might have been, if this impious sacrifice to her peace had not been offered, we may not conjecture. What fate the righteous ruler of nations might have given them, if the Huguenots had separated themselves from every unholy alliance and odious conjunction, and had calmly drawn the sword with the resolve to conquer for themselves an honorable liberty, or else to die freemen; if they had said to each other with the sublime composure of faith, "Let us be of good courage and play the men for our people and the cities of our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth him good," we cannot tell. But we need not discuss the pleas which are urged to excuse the apostasy. We would willingly agree that no argument should be used but to pass the results of this act in grim review before the royal criminal himself, and let him decide whether those results were worth the sacrifice of his honor and his faith. It restored peace to France, but it consigned her to two centuries of despotism. It secured his throne to him for seventeen years; but they were years of toil and danger, disgraced by his licentiousness, and they conducted him only to a terrible and sudden death by the dagger of a frantic bigot. He gave the Huguenots indeed the Edict of Nantes, and with it ninety years of existence as a legalized sect; but it was an existence beset with uncertainties and alarms, harassed by perpetual encroachments, unworthy of a noble church, and degrading to its purity, and ending in banishment and remorseless persecution. He conciliated, indeed, the papal party, but conciliated them by submission, and left their rampant bigotry unwhipped of justice and untamed, to

crush out the light of freedom and truth in France, and plunge her into the gloom of priestcraft and superstition, and thereby into atheism and anarchy. He transmitted his crown to seven successors; but it was only that they might disgrace their ancestral name with every foul excess of tyranny, debauchery, and cruelty, and die by the hand of murder, or amidst the horrors of remorse and the neglect of their accomplices in crime. And one of these successors, perhaps the least guilty, closed his stormy reign upon the scaffold! And now, in the presence of that guillotine and that remorseless throng of anarchists, where the star of the house of Bourbon set in bloody night, let it be decided whether such a race, ending in such a catastrophe, was well purchased at the price of truth and right. Standing beside such retributions of ancient wrong, history lifts her voice with the severe majesty of a messenger from the throne of the Almighty Judge, to repeat the lesson, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

Whether in church or state, man's true political wisdom is only learned from experience; in other words, from history. This is the only source from which any safe light can be obtained as to the future workings of proposed opinions and institutions. The workings of the human heart and the relations of human society, are infinitely diversified. To foresee and meet, by original speculation, all the results which will be evolved by the contact of any set of institutions, or principles, with these diversified relations, would be the attribute of omniscience, and not of human wisdom. But there is much of this folly, at this day especially, among our would be wise men, who seem to think that institutions can be invented which shall run of themselves, like some improved carriage or locomotive, forgetting that their machine must meet diversities of positions and relations in its course of which they can foresee nothing. We have no respect for your constitution-makers, who, like the Abbé Sieyès, keep a warehouse full of institutions which they can furnish to customers at order. We repeat, there have been several instances shown to the world in which men of great speculative powers have undertaken to think out a body of institutions according to the pure dictates of their own wisdom. Such is the origin of Plato's republic, a system of government so absurdly impracticable that fortunately it has been impossi-

ble for any people even to attempt it. The great Locke also tried his hand at the work and made a form of government for the colony of North Carolina, which, to the cost of the people, was put in operation, and was found to be a most wretched one. We repeat the proposition with emphasis, that the only political wisdom which is worth having, is that of historical experience. And we repeat the reason, that the conditions under which any proposed new institution will have to act in the future will be endlessly diversified, and hence it is wholly beyond the province of human speculation to foresee by its own efforts all the numberless exigencies which may arise out of the workings of the institution upon these new relations. Man has no pole star and no compass, by which he may boldly break away from the track of experience and navigate the ocean of the future. The province of his wisdom is to follow the ways explored by previous voyagers, and only to venture into the uncertain storms of the untried so far as the light of the past is reflected forward upon it. All the safe and successful progress which has been made in human institutions has been from changes made under the guidance of history. The spirit of English reform has been eminently historical. Her statesmen have ever looked for the guidance of prescription; have retained all old and tried institutions with tenacity, and where they have altered have done it with strict regard to the lights of the past and the forms previously established. The same spirit marked the measures of the wise fathers of our nation. They took their lessons from the past. The liberty and the rights for which they contended were the prescriptive rights of British freemen. Even in passing from monarchy to republicanism, they removed nothing which was not incompatible, and built the new structure of their commonwealths upon the old historical foundations, which were fixed in the habits and national associations of their people. But we have an illustration of the other more ambitious wisdom and its ruinous results, in the policy of the leaders of the first revolution in France. These men discarded the lights of the past, because their past history was only hateful to them for its oppressions and disgraces, and their literary taste preferred to the sober voice of a Thucydides, Polybius, and Tacitus, a Moses and Ezra, the fantastic pictures of a Plutarch, and other speculators like him, who, though born the slaves and

living as the sycophants of despots, babbled about a liberty of which they knew nothing, and of which they were unworthy. The revolution announced its mission as one of destruction to the past, to its abuses, its principles, and even its recollections, and of new and independent creation for the future. They disdained the safe and gradual reform of institutions tried, and known because tried, but partially perverted. They swept all away; and proceeded to reconstruct on the basis of their own airy speculations. The very names of government were studiously changed. The old departments of France, whose boundaries had once marked the marches of independent kingdoms and languages, and were embalmed in the associations and very speech of the people, and in many cases defined by nature herself, were replaced by arbitrary rectangles which made France the resemblance of a chess-board. And the result was, that they found they had created a machine whose unexpected action smote down and crushed its inventors. They had unchained a maniac whom they knew no charm to tame. Their reforms only ran a career of self-destruction, and left France exhausted by anarchy, war, and new despotism, to begin again the work of renovation.

We shall be wise, therefore, if we hearken to the striking instruction of these instances, and make it our method to submit with modesty to the sober teachings of the past in all our legislation for the future.

Permit me to suggest another especial reason for giving prominence to the history of the church in our plans of education at this time. This reason is to be found in the neglect of such reading, and the ignorance of the potency of the religious element in public affairs, which prevail among our legislators. The time was when enlightened statesmen were aware of the fact that they, their measures and their institutions, were but the driftwood upon the great current of moral influences which pervade the nations, indicating its direction and power. They were aware that *religion* is the great mistress of these influences, for good or for evil. They studied religion and its institutions as the prime learning of the statesman, and counted the ability to avail themselves of religious elements the right arm of their strength. But these things are changed in this self confident generation. Men spring up into legislators and rulers from the

farm, the work-shop, the counter, or the bar, scarcely knowing that there are great religious questions of centuries' growth working in the very fibres of the hearts of nations. They put forth a rash hand to the springs of a nation's energies in ignorant unconsciousness of the tremendous powers with which they tamper. But a few years ago the legislators of this very commonwealth were on the verge of introducing into our laws, in a subtile but most mischievous form, the great principle of *mortmain*. Others of our commonwealths have already admitted it under limitations which are melting away with every generation. Did they know that this principle was the most fatal legacy of Constantine to the church of the Roman Empire; that when once admitted, it must inevitably shake off all control, and absorb every thing to itself by the very laws of the human heart: that it was this which corrupted, as it ever will corrupt, the Christian ministry, and made popery possible; that this principle had transferred one-third of the soil of France, and half of the soil of Denmark, Sweden and Scotland, at the Reformation, into the insatiable maw of ecclesiastical corporations, converting their clergy from the active ministers of a holy religion into the incubus of the state, the corrupters of public morals, and hordes of impostors, rakes and drunkards? No; they knew nothing about it. All unconscious of the inevitable mischief, they were about to do an act, as they supposed in the spirit of a commendable liberality, which would, in future ages, have marked their day as one of the blackest among the *dies nefasti* of Virginia. And now, what do we behold? Our politicians are seen "currying favor" with popish hierarchs, and bending their policy, even while sworn servants of the American constitution, to catch popish votes. Little are they aware, that in all this they are but dallying with the mighty paw of the Apocalyptic beast, which nurses a natural, a necessary, an immutable enmity to all that is distinctive in that constitution, and only "bides his time" to rend it and them in pieces. They know not that popery has been, ever since the Reformation, and must ever be, the embodiment of all the elements of hostility to human rights. They do not understand that the question between popery and Protestantism is everywhere the same with the question between despotism and civilized progress; and that, from the sixteenth century forth to the great millennial consummation, there is but the one mighty

issue to be tried on the arena of Christendom, and but the one plot which runs through all the remaining acts in the drama of European affairs, and that this issue is the one between the Bible and Rome. No. They do not know the history of the church. And hence the necessity that these great lessons of the past shall be everywhere studied, everywhere discussed. Hence the importance of expanding by them the minds of educated men in all professions.

The history of the church and of the world, regarded as a whole, is but the evolution of the eternal purpose of that God who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Deep in the secrets of his own breast is hid the united plan, from which the pattern is gradually unfolded on the tangled web of human affairs. As that decree is one, so history is a unit. And as God gives no explanation of his purpose, except by its unfolding, the great whole cannot be fully understood until it is completed. Revelation gives us the key to unlock the meaning of many parts, and it has told us what is to be the final result. Hence we may derive two truths: one is, that no man but the believer is capable of understanding the philosophy of history. He who learns from the Scriptures, and he alone, can possibly understand the meaning of events or interpret them aright. Your infidel historian must needs blunder on in Egyptian midnight. The other is, that the science of history will only attain that philosophic completeness which some have desired and prophesied for it, after the course of human events is ended. We are now in the position of soldiers in some mighty host, moving in many detachments to effect the destined evolutions of a great commander who overlooks the whole field from a separate point. Wrapped in the smoke and dust of our own conflict, we comprehend little of the great design, and are pushed on in many movements of which we cannot guess the intention. Sometimes, perhaps, we imagine that we are bearing an undue share of dangers and hardships for no adequate purpose. Sometimes we complain that we are left in useless inactivity; and sometimes the lifting up of the battle cloud, or the distant huzza of our brethren in arms, reveals to us that a partial victory is won. But it is only after the field is fought, as we review it in the leisure of our triumph, that we will understand the complicated whole and appreciate the perfection of the plan.

There are parts of the great design which we are able to read in the unfoldings of Providence, and we learn from them that the elements are gradually conspiring to the final triumph, and that, subsidiary to the main movement, God is accomplishing many beneficent effects, and chastising nation after nation for apostasy or idolatry. Already we can see why it was that God did not permit Mohammedanism to overwhelm the Christianity of the East as long as it was worthy of preservation, and why he made the infidel invincible by all the efforts of popish Europe in the Crusades. It was that the Mohammedan power might be at hand to divert Rome from the murderous design of trampling out the life of Protestantism, and might thus act as the unconscious protector of God's cause. And it was that these fair and teeming regions of the East, the centres of ancient civilization and power, might be kept from the clutches of Romanism until Protestantism should be strong and adventurous enough to possess them. We can even now understand why Wolfe conquered before Quebec, and the fair domain of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi was transferred from France to England. This event substantially transferred the continent from Rome to Protestantism. There was a youth of fiery passions and energy in Hindostan in the last century who was once on the verge of suicide; but Providence diverted the design. He entered the military service of the infant East India Company, then struggling weakly against the superior arts and arms of France. Again he was on the verge of engaging in the war of the American Revolution, but by an accident was detained in India. These two providential incidents gave to India Lord Clive, the successful opposer of the French in Hindostan, the victor of Plassey, the founder of the splendid dominion of Britain in the East. And at the same time they detained out of America a man who, by replacing sloth and incapacity with genius and burning activity, might have turned the doubtful scale of war against us. Thus, then, did God probably decide that America should be independent and republican, and that the mighty East should fall under the control of a Protestant instead of a popish power. In all these instances we see that the means are gradually prepared to install Messiah as King of kings.

And again, there are stages in the drama at which a resting point is reached, and one part of the plan is as it were completed.

From such a stage we may look back and comprehend much of the preceding events. Such a point was the Christian era, pre-eminently, when all the results of four thousand years conspired to bring in that "fulness of time" which was needful for Christ's appearance, and all the moral influences of the civilized nations seemed to arrange themselves in a solemn pomp around Judea as the centre, the *ομφαλον* of the world.

Yet, when we comprehend these things, we only catch glimpses of the divine meaning. "These are parts of his ways, but the thunder of his power who can understand?" To comprehend fully the intent of the divine dealings, to read the vast plot from its inception to its consummation, this must be one of the studies of heaven. When we look back thence upon the field fought and won, when we have before us the finished whole, and above all, when we have the tuition of him into whose hand "all power in heaven and on earth is given," to explain to us the eternal plan, then we shall know fully what is the teaching of history.

And here, fathers and brethren, you will all assent that I have bestowed upon my science the most magnificent encomium which is possible, when I have said that the history of the church is one of the studies and enjoyments of heaven. But is it not true? Here, then, let me stop, only repeating the expression of unfeigned diffidence with which I assume a department of instruction demanding for its most successful treatment universal scholarship and a mind whose imperial powers unite the sagacity of the statesman with the epic vision of the poet. I am well aware that such an undertaking cannot fail to result in a life-long sense of deficiency. Let it be mine to feel this sense as a stimulus to the greater diligence. And above all, I would seek the guidance of him whom we expect to be our teacher in heaven to unfold the divine dealings. May my historic muse be that power invoked by Milton :

"And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all shrines the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me; for thou knowest. Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread,
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss,
And madest it pregnant. What in me is dark,
Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men."